PROFESSIONAL CONSCIENCE AND TEACHER CHANGE:

AN INVESTIGATION INTO CHINESE TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM

By

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

February 2017

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research studies a group of sixteen Chinese high school teachers to explore Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism as well as changes in teaching. These teachers were all graduates from Master of Education (Ed.M.) programme in a Chinese university. They differed in many aspects including teaching experiences, schools they were working for, personal histories. These teachers' work and lives were analysed based on data generated from three rounds of semi-structured interviews. Themes emerging from the interviews suggested that it was Chinese teachers' professional conscience that had mostly affected their sense of professionalism, and there were changes both in teachers' perceptions and actions in teaching after their graduation from Ed.M.

This research contributes to a better understanding on Chinese teachers' professional lives by identifying professional conscience as the core of Chinese teacher professionalism. The meanings of professional conscience suggest that Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism share similarities to that of teachers' in the West. The fluctuations of professional conscience through teachers' lives has challenged stereotypes of teachers in the Chinese society.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I feel grateful for all those who have helped me throughout this difficult and long journey.

I am greatly indebted to my family. My parents, my grandmother and my husband, without whose continuing support, encouragement and care, the completion of this study is impossible.

I am extremely thankful for my supervisors Professor Qing Gu and Professor Christopher Day. They always saw the possibilities in me to do better when I had been disheartened and overwhelmed by difficulties in work. Their patience and confidence in me supported me to move through every stage in completing this research.

I would also like to thank the School of Education of University of Nottingham for the generous help provided here to facilitate my learning.

I always remember the help and support from teachers participating in this research as well as that from university staff in China who helped me to build contacts with my participants. Their kindness is of vital importance for me to successfully conduct my fieldwork.

Finally, I want to express my thanks to all my friends in Nottingham who helped me survive the difficult days with their warm hearts and selfless love.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEE: College Entrance Examination

CPD: Continuing Professional Development

Ed.M.: Master of Education

ITE: Initial Teacher Education

GTC: General Teaching Council

MoE: Ministry of Education

OECD: The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development

PISA: programme for International Student Assessment

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Prologue

In this thesis, I explore the meaning of teachers' professional conscience in the context of pressure for change brought about by national policy initiatives in China. The study focused on an investigation of the reported experiences of graduates on a two-year M.A programme at a Chinese university who were already serving as teachers. By analysing data from extended interviews, the research found that while professional conscience as part of teacher professionalism stayed relatively stable over time, for most of teachers in this research, changes in the macro and meso context challenged its original strength and had an influence on some teachers, which later affected these teachers' perceptions of professionalism in negative ways.

This chapter consists of five parts. Following the prologue, the educational and policy contexts in China, as well as their implications for teachers and teaching, will be discussed. This will be followed by a brief description of the researcher's own learning experience, which influenced the focus of this study. The purpose and significance of this thesis will then be outlined and research questions identified. Finally, the structure of the thesis will be presented. Each chapter will be summarized.

1.2 Educational and policy contexts for this study

This section starts with an introduction on the influence of the College Entrance Examination (CEE) on teachers and teaching. It is followed by explanations of both nation-wide curriculum reform and important policies aimed at bringing changes in schools. The whole section is intended to provide

the most important contextual information on which the present study has been conducted.

1.2.1 Schooling under the influence of College Entrance Examination (CEE) at Chinese high schools

To start a study that explores what has affected Chinese teacher professionalism, one of the most important aspects to be considered is the powerful influence of CEE both on students' and on teachers' working lives at Chinese high schools.

The College Entrance Examination (CEE) is an annual event held in June when senior high school graduates across the nation sit at the same time competing for universities/colleges after years of preparation and hard work. CEE is vital for Chinese students in that it still acts as *'the best, and in many cases, the only avenue to postsecondary education for most students'* (Wang & Ross, 2010, p.91). The principles of *'fairness'* and *'equality'* proposed through the exam have been shared by many people, especially for people who lack the channels to improve their economic well-being and social mobility (Wang & Ross, 2010). The limited places in universities for applicants have ever intensified the competition, especially competition for entering more prestigious universities (Davey, Lian & Higgins, 2007). The expansion of university enrollment from 1999 does not make the competition for universities less fierce. The rapid expansion of the university population, however, has to some extent further intensified students' eagerness to attend elite universities. The competition for CEE has thus gradually been transformed from one in which gaining access to higher education was the most important aim to one in

which joining one of the top universities and learning a popular major, is paramount (Zheng, 2010).

Behind the annual battlefield of CEE are heavy expectations laid on students by Chinese parents, who are prone to associate levels of education with achievement in later life and social status. Under the persisting influence of Confucius' philosophy, which places one's education literally on top of all other worldly affairs (wan ban jie xia pin, wei you du shu gao), for Chinese people, failure in school could lead to both individual, family and even to national shame (Davey, Lian & Higgins, 2007). With Chinese culture giving high regard to education, to secure a place in universities (well-known universities in particular) through the highly selective CEE, both Chinese teachers and students take learning as a *'serious undertaking that requires deep commitment and painstaking effort'* (Hu, 2002, P.97). For Chinese students, winning CEE can be understood as the utmost battle in their learning lives to date; and for Chinese teachers, the overwhelming influence of CEE has been witnessed in various aspect of teaching, including what to teach and how to teach.

The Influence of CEE on teachers and teaching

The exams in Chinese schools, with CEE at the top, determine what is to be taught in schools. Teachers, for fear of failing to adequately prepare students for exams, have felt obliged to teach what is required for what will be covered in the exams (Romanowski, 2006). Given its huge influence and significance, CEE has been claimed by some researchers as the '*centrepiece'* in Chinese education structure (Zeng, 1999, P.1, cited from Ross & Wang, 2010, P.5). CEE is widely believed to *'reduce schooling to a soulless competition'*

(Ross & Wang, 2010, P.5) for its over-emphasis on exams and profound impact on schools nationwide. School teachers have been caught in a dilemma under the influence of CEE: this dilemma has been manifested in this research in that some teachers could not balance the conflict between preparing students for exams and their hopes to help students develop in a more comprehensive manner, as is required by the curriculum reform to be discussed in a later section.

Additionally, given the student population in China, large class sizes are hard to avoid (Romanowski, 2006). Large class sizes, together with exam-oriented teaching, have greatly restricted how teachers teach in Chinese high schools. To effectively convey teaching for a big class, Chinese classroom has been dominantly organized around teachers. As the centre of class, teachers *'select points of knowledge to interpret, analyse and elaborate (by)… delivering a carefully sequenced and optimally mediated dose of knowledge for the students to memorize, repeat, and understand'* (Hu, 2002, p.98).

As a state-mandated standardised exam with life-long consequence in affecting the students' future, CEE in every sense has been one of the high stake exams applied in many parts of the world. Given the pressure of competing for limited resources in higher education, the ever-presence of CEE is like the *Sword of Damocles* hanging over the heads of both students and teachers. CEE as the *sword* constantly reminds both teachers and students of the upcoming fateful competition so that their *'entrance exam nerves'* are never relieved (Zheng, 2010, p.12).

1.2.2 National curriculum reform from 2001

Chinese examination-oriented education, which has been passed down as a legacy from the imperial exams in feudal societies (Ke ju) and has been intensified by CEE, is widely criticised both for its content, that disconnects school knowledge from real life and its teaching methods, featuring cramming and rote memorisation (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). Plagued by exams, Chinese education enslaves students and has taken pleasure out of learning by turning schools into a *'desert of culture'* (Zhong, 2006, p. 372).

With its booming economy, China is now competing in a world market driven by globalisation. To catch up with the competition, Chinese society calls for a new generation who are capable of responding to 21st-century challenges rising from various ways of life. Moulded by a heavily examination-oriented education, Chinese students have been noticed and criticised for their lack of creativity and innovation (Zhao & Zhao, 2012). At a time when *'creative talents play a key role in determining the ultimate success (of a nation) in an international setting'* (Guan & Meng, 2007.p. 580), a change in Chinese education is believed to be both urgent and critical.

By the end of the 20th century, Chinese government had already made clear its intention and determination to reform school curricula as outlined in the *Decision on the Deepening of Educational Reform and the Full Promotion of Quality Education (1999)*. The promotion of *quality education,* which puts students' overall development over academic performance, is one of the major movements that Chinese government has adopted to address issues concerning the education system. Following closely in 2001, the *Outline of Basic Education Curriculum Reform (implementation)* mandated by Chinese

Ministry of Education (MoE), marked the beginning of a nationwide curriculum reform which was designed to make profound impact on the entire education system: educational ideology, purpose, systems, teaching content and methods (Cui & Zhu, 2014).

Under this *Outline,* in 2001, heralded by primary and junior high schools (which together make up the compulsory education in China), the curriculum reform began in selected areas before expanding to the whole nation. Reforms for senior high schools took place two years later and were marked by the issue of *Curriculum Compendium of Senior Secondary Education (Experimental)* with the publication of *New Curriculum Standards for 15 Subjects of Senior Secondary School*. After an initial experimental implementation in four provinces, senior high school curriculum reform took place in 2009 in the province where teachers in this research were located.

Combining Western teaching methodologies and educational reform experiences from leading Asian countries like Japan and Singapore (Dello-Iacovo, 2007), this curriculum reform is notable for its proposed three-dimensional teaching aim: the importance placed on teaching students both knowledge and skills, on caring and shaping students' emotion and value, and on the teaching/learning process as well as methods. This three-dimensional aim could be seen as a departure from an education system which placed great emphasis on the teaching of book knowledge and on students' academic performance. This departure is expected to be realised by several changes in teaching and learning (Cui & Zhu, 2014), which include:

1. Changing the overemphasis placed on knowledge transmission in classroom teaching. More attention should be paid to developing students' learning abilities and to shaping students' values/positive attitudes;

2. Changing the curriculum to meet the diverse needs of schools and students;

3. Changing the curriculum to add content of knowledge and skills in relation to students' lifelong learning;

4. Changing from cramming teaching with rote-learning to actively involving students in teaching which will develop students' capability for problem-solving.

At a micro level, the policymakers hope this reform will help students to *'achieve broad and balanced moral, intellectual, physical and aesthetic development and a high level of character building'* which Zhu, the chief designer and organiser of this curriculum reform, believed to be the *'ultimate goal'* of education (Zhu, 2007, p. 224). At a meso level, changes are expected to be brought to schools and teaching by gradually playing down schools' obsession with scores and competition. School education has thus been provided with such an opportunity to become more concerned with the existence and values of students as human beings (Zhu, 2007). At a macro level, powered by education innovation and reforms, as exemplified by the curriculum reform, the nation is expecting a new generation to rise which will work and compete for the continuous prosperity of Chinese society.

The country's determination to reform basic education is beyond question. What is to be questioned, however, is to what extent teachers and teaching in schools have been really affected by this ambitious reform.

The Influence of curriculum reform on teachers and teaching

According to a report (a website investigation on how teachers thought about the new curriculum reform, retrieved from http://edu.people.com.cn/GB/15988943.html), which was written in 2011 based on data collected from online questionnaires responded to by nearly 4000 school teachers across the nation, 74 percent of participating teachers agreed with the ideas promoted by curriculum reform. The idea was that teaching shall help students to develop abilities of autonomous learning, cooperation and exploration. The result had been aligned with Yu's findings (2010) that so far the most obvious effects achieved by the reform had been changes in teachers' understanding and perceptions and that teachers, high school English teachers in particular, according to Yu's report, had agreed with and increasingly tried to adopt the ideas underlying the reform. Chinese high school teachers therefore, claimed to have (both) positive attitudes and behavioural intentions toward promoting the curriculum reform (Ma et al., 2009).

Also from the 2011 report, over eighty percent of teachers believed they had made changes to class teaching. Among teachers claiming change, over fifty percent referred to their changes as 'medium' with the rest rating their changes from 'relatively big' (22.5%) to 'very big' (9.8%). It had been claimed, also, that many teachers seek to improve teaching by reflecting on their classroom behaviours and tried to build a more harmonious relationship with students to assist teaching and learning (Cui & Zhu, 2014).

While the majority of teachers (87 percent in total) in the 2011 report claimed changes in teaching, the nature of Chinese schooling, especially at secondary level, was found to be difficult to change (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). As it was believed that examination and rote-learning continued to dominate Chinese classrooms (Dello-Iacovo, 2009), teachers found themselves still chained to a persistent examination culture.

Because of the powerful influence from CEE or the incompatibility of Western teaching methodology with Chinese teaching reality or the lack of support by schools and parents for the reform, some teachers found the requirements of the new curriculum difficult to carry out (Zha, 2012; Ma et al., 2009). In the 2011 report, over seventy percent of teachers believed that knowledge under the new curriculum was not systematic enough to teach. Teachers found that it was difficult to convey knowledge by merely following the curriculum. These difficulties were among the reasons that teachers returned to or clung to their old ways of teaching. The implementation of the new curriculum in schools had thus been described by some researchers as wearing new shoes to walk on the old path (Guo, 2010). In other words, change in classroom teaching, to a large extent, is superficial and it does not touch the essential parts of teaching—for instance, teacher-oriented classrooms and rote learning—which were aimed to be changed under this reform.

While some teachers were caught in the difficult situation of implementing new teaching methods, others found they experienced an increasingly heavy workload (excluding classroom teaching), as a result of the reform. Teaching by following the national curriculum was already stressful, and some teachers felt further burdened by the requirements of developing

school-based curriculum. Except for the curriculum developer and educator, teachers were expected to assume a variety of roles including learner, innovator, facilitator and researcher (Cui & Zhu, 2014; Guan & Meng, 2007).

Debates on the impact of curriculum reform on Chinese basic education are continuing. Teachers, by standing on the frontline of this reform, have nonetheless been mostly affected. Positively accepting ideas promoted by the curriculum or negatively affected by workloads resulting from the reform, teachers in this research reacted to the nationwide educational movement with different attitudes and behaviours given their own circumstances. Together with curriculum reform, there are other important policies developed specifically to shape a new generation of teachers. One policy tailored for school teachers in particular is *Professional Standards for Secondary school teachers (experimental) (2011).*

1.2.3 Professional Standards for high school teachers

In December 2012, MoE issued *Professional Standards for Secondary School Teachers (experimental)*, which is the first official document to clarify and specify requirements for teachers' professional development, ever since the founding of People's Republic of China in 1949.

Four principles are outlined in the Standards for promoting teacher development in China. These include:

1. Placing students at the centre of school education. Respecting students' interests, following students' physical as well as mental development, helping students to develop in a healthy all-around way.

2. Placing teacher morals as a priority. Teachers shall follow professional ethics in teaching, be directors and guide students' learning.
3. An emphasis on teacher ability. Teachers shall be able to connect theoretical knowledge with educational practice, to improve teaching by researching and by understanding students' development and to learn from reflection.
4. The importance of life-long learning.

Following the four principles, the Standards are divided into fourteen categories, including understanding of teaching/ on being teachers, teacher attitudes, teachers' professional knowledge/skill in class management, evaluation, reflection and much more. Each category has been further divided into sub-categories; Professional Standards for Teachers consist of sixty-one requirements for teachers in total.

Similar to curriculum reform, while good wishes and expectations from the Standards cannot be denied, it is difficult to make sweeping statements about their effect on teachers and teaching when policies meet school reality.

So far five years have passed since the publication of the Professional Standards. However, unlike the continuing discussions on how teachers have been affected by and reacted to curriculum reform, little attention has been paid to the impact of Professional Standards on teachers' working lives, given the limited research conducted in the relevant fields. A wide body of literature on the Standards has their focus either on identifying existing problems in teachers/in teaching by following the Standards; or on examining to what extent teachers have reached or not reached these standards; or on analyzing

Standards from a purely theoretical basis. Very few empirical studies could be found on exploring the influence of the Standards on teachers.

There is not much evidence to show how teachers and teaching have been affected by the Standards, if at all. Unlike curriculum reform, which has been implemented in everyday school life, researchers tend to treat the Standards mainly as a benchmark based on which teachers have been evaluated. However, even without much evidence of its influence, the importance of the Professional Standards still cannot be ignored. The Standards have been one of the most important government documents issued specifically for teacher development in China. Its impact on teachers and teaching though, cannot be clearly seen at present, it might become more obvious in the long run when its significance has aroused more attention from people working in education.

While curriculum reform and Professional Standards to a large extent are more relevant to in-service teachers in schools, teacher education programmes in universities provide teachers (student teachers and in-service teachers) with opportunities to acquire systematic knowledge/skills/attitudes required both by curriculum reform and later by the Professional Standards. A full-time Master of Education is one such programme, which allows teachers to dedicate two years to learning.

1.2.4 Full-time Master of Education programme

The full-time Master of Education programme (Ed.M.) is a professional degree. Compared to academic degrees which aim to develop talents to work in academia, a professional degree like Ed.M. aims to empower people who are equipped with both solid theoretical knowledge and a strong ability to solve

practical problems in a certain field. While it is important that academic degrees continue to serve Chinese society, the fast development of Chinese society is increasingly in need of people who can closely associate their knowledge with practical needs arising from different pathways of social life. By responding to such social needs, 2009 witnessed an increase of students enrolled for professional degrees.

Before 2009, a professional degree mainly served to meet the needs of people with certain years of working experience. In *Suggestions on the Development of Postgraduates for Full-time professional Master's degree* (2009), the Chinese Ministry of Education (MoE) made it very clear that a full-time professional degree would be mostly geared towards non-experienced university graduates. Hence, except for some degrees which require strong working experience like Master of Business Administration (MBA), students newly graduated from universities to study on a full-time basis starting enrolling for a great number of other professional degrees. Ed.M is one of these professional degrees which have experienced changes in enrollment.

Beginning in 1997, Ed.M. has long been established as an important channel to educate teachers. However, similar to other professional degrees, Ed.M. before 2009 was mainly designed for school in-service teachers or people working in education with no less than three years' experience. To produce high-quality secondary school teachers who have updated teaching knowledge and skills, Ed.M. in 2009 began its first enrollment of teachers with mixed teaching backgrounds (both experienced teachers and non-experienced

university students) who would later study together according to the same curriculum to complete their degrees on a full-time basis at universities.

As the 2009 MoE document on professional degrees is only a general requirement, there is no readily designed curriculum model for Ed.M; and except for public basic courses that students enrolled in Ed.M. take together, each department runs its master programme independently. Because all participating teachers in this study received their master's degree from Ed.M., it was therefore necessary to have a brief look at the curriculum they followed at the chosen university. As the majority of teachers interviewed for this research were based at the School of Foreign Languages, I have attached the curriculum for that department. The following curriculum could be different from that of other universities; it is therefore just an example of curriculums designed for Ed.M. study at Chinese universities. The curriculum outlined is for both students who are expected to become secondary school English teachers when they have accomplished their master's degree and for in-service teachers who seek improvement in teaching.

Table 1.1 Curriculum for Ed.M. with specialisation in English teaching

Duration of programme		Two years
Total Merits of programme		41(including 4 merits for teaching practice)
Required merits for graduation		No less than 36
Constituting parts of curriculum	Basic courses	Second foreign language; politics; Theory on education; Technology in education; …… (seven courses in total)
	Professional compulsory courses	Theory on English teaching; Theory on language learning; Curriculum design for language teaching; Research methods in teaching and thesis writing;
	Professional selective courses	English literature; Second language acquisition; English Renaissance Poetry; …… (six courses in total)
Duration of teaching practice		around six months at schools

Table 1.1 has shown that this Ed.M. curriculum consisted of four parts, including basic courses, professional compulsory courses, selective courses and teaching practice. Basic courses are mainly for the shaping of ideology (politics), the improvement of certain academic abilities (second foreign language) or to help students acquire theoretical knowledge on education in a broad sense. Professional compulsory courses are more closely related to practical English teaching. They constitute the core of this Ed.M. programme with a specific focus on students' needs as English teachers. Selective courses encompass a wide range of subjects and offer student teachers/in-service a variety of choices beside compulsory courses (which include both basic and professional courses). Finally there is teaching practice, which, according to the 2009 MoE document, shall last no less than six months.

From 2011 when the first Ed.M. graduates received their degrees until now, this M.A. programme has continued to provide Chinese basic education with teachers who are supposed to be capable of improving teaching with

up-to-date educational theories that they have acquired through their master's study. A general introduction to Ed.M. here has provided background information on reasons why there are teachers with different teaching experience working together; a quick look at the curriculum is for a better understanding of teachers' changes in later chapters. Courses taken by teachers, especially professional courses in English teaching, had found their influence in some teachers' changing perceptions and behaviors (see chapter five). Last but not least, it is this Ed.M. programme that inspires the idea in the researcher to learn more about teachers' lives in considering the various differences existing among them.

1.3 Researcher background

Having majored in English Education, I received my Bachelor's degree in 2009 and was enrolled as a candidate for a full-time *Master of Education with specialisation in English teaching* in the same year. As presented in the previous section, 2009 was the start of when students began to enrol for professional degrees, including Ed.M, without the requirement of formal working experience relevant to the degrees; I was therefore among the first group of fresh university graduates who enrolled for Ed.M., for which previously only in-service teachers were entitled to apply.

During my time at the university, I followed a similar curriculum to the one outlined above. Though both the Bachelor and Master's programme which I followed aimed to provide secondary schools with well-educated teachers, the courses required for the two degrees differed greatly. The undergraduate study provided me with general knowledge related to the English language and

education. Courses like linguistics and English literature and later some teachings on educational theories, helped me to form a deeper understanding of the subject matter (English) and to lay down the basis for my master's study.

At the university I was enrolled as a master's student, the full-time Ed.M. programme began in 2009, when three years were required for the completion of the degree. However, it has been shortened to two years from 2010 with limited changes to the curriculum. Within the three years, I had been taught specifically about teaching methodologies as well as how to conduct educational research. When the curriculum reform began to be implemented in 2009 in the province where my university was located, learning the new curriculum was an important part of the Ed.M.

My past learning experiences were closely connected with each to have an influence on me. If learning from my undergraduate study could be compared to a garden where I had a general vision formed on the beauty of English with its richness; what I had acquired from Ed.M was about how to bring the beauty to students, to make them interested and be willingly to appreciate the beauty. However, so far I have never officially assumed the role of a teacher. By the time I was studying in Ed.M., except learning from courses, it was from the experienced teachers that I learned more about teaching and teachers.

Experienced in-service teachers enrolled in the Ed.M. consisted of two groups: rural teachers and 'others'. For the first group of teachers, they were students who had graduated from *normal universities*. Before graduation, they signed contracts with local educational bureaus to teach three years at schools

located in less-developed areas. Later, they were guaranteed a place at the same universities where they had graduated and begun the pursuit of an Ed.M. degree on a full-time basis. As for the second group, they were teachers who had signed contracts with their schools which granted them enough time to study at the universities.

People enrolled in the Ed.M, therefore, were different in many regards, notably teaching experience and the schools where they had been teaching. While all students who enrolled in the same year worked together under the same curriculum, they had different responses to the Ed.M. The differences among student teachers and in-service teachers—their responses and attitudes towards this M.A. programme—inspired the thoughts which later served as part of the motivation to carry out the present research.

As one who have received a continuous seven years education in teacher preparation, I am interested in teachers as well as their working lives under constant influence from various factors. While my undergraduate learning set pre-conditions for me to be enrolled in a Master of Education, my experience as a student-teacher in the full-time Ed.M. programme was to become closely connected with my PhD research for both its purpose and the methods applied.

1.4 Purpose and significance of this study

With the first graduates of full-time Ed.M. leaving universities in 2011, an increasing number of teachers are expected to support the development of Chinese basic education with a new vision and new methods in teaching. As the number of Ed.M. graduates continues to grow, it is important to understand

to what extent Chinese teachers have or have not changed in regard to their understanding and actual practice of teaching.

The present study considers the Ed.M. programme an important, though not the only, influence, where in-service teachers and student teachers had enrolled for their professional development. I intended to find out what else influenced Chinese teachers in their professional lives and how did this influence take place; with time and effort spent in the M.A. programme, what changes had taken place in teachers two years after their graduation and how the changes were influenced by the interactions among the programme, teachers' previous experiences and school contexts. It was hoped that by examining the interwoven factors affecting teachers and teaching, this research could provide original insights into a better understanding of what influenced teachers' professionalism within the Chinese reform context.

To fulfil the purpose of this research, six research questions have been asked to probe Chinese teacher professionalism:

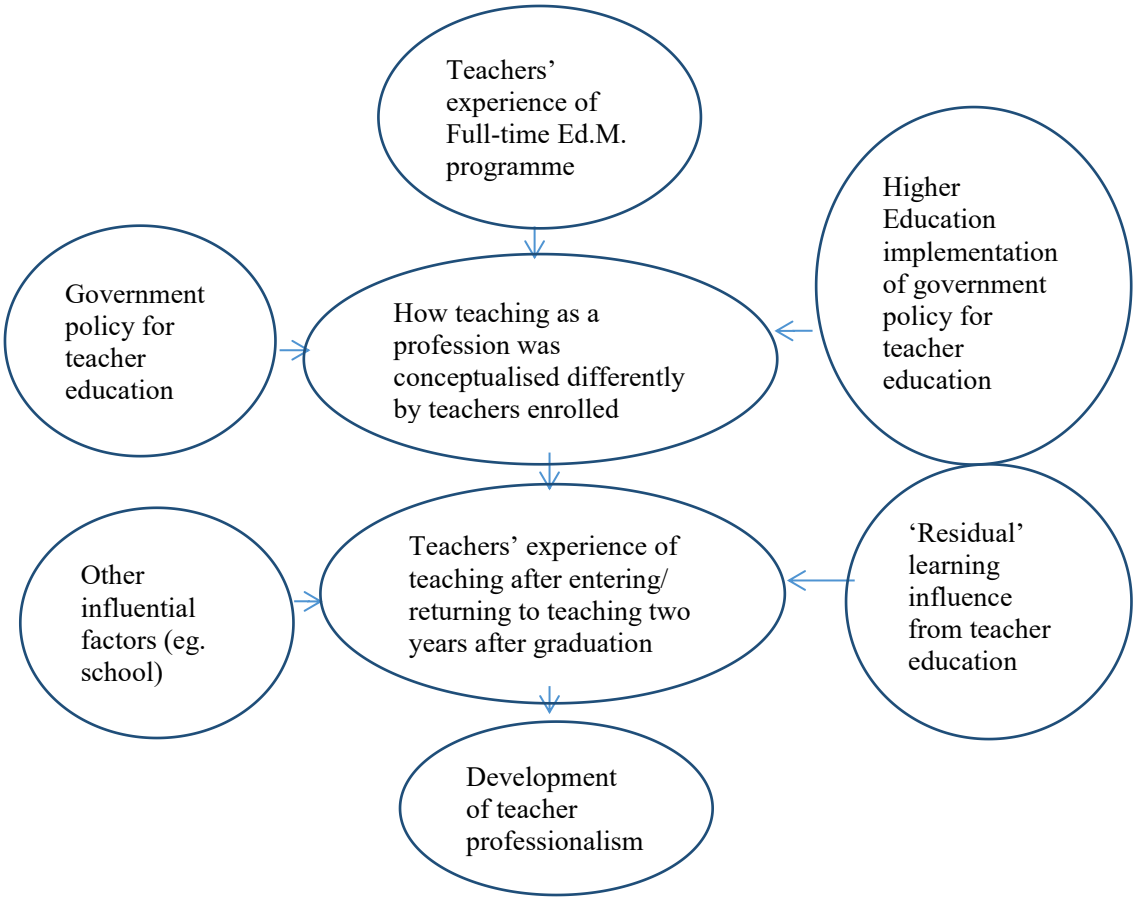
1. **What are Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism?**
2. **What are the key factors that influence Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism?**
3. **What are the similarities and differences between Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism and those in the West?**
4. **Does Chinese teacher professionalism remain the same or does it change during teachers' working lives?**
5. **If so, are there variations between teachers, what has caused them and what are the effects of the variations?**

6. What are the implications for policymakers and school leaders?

By answering these six questions, this research was expected, therefore, to provide a detailed analysis of 'what' constituted Chinese teacher professionalism, what were the key factors influencing their professionalism and how.

Below is a tentative map of factors which I hypothesised might influence the formation and development of teacher professionalism in China.

Figure 1.1 A tentative map showing influence on the formation and development of Chinese teacher professionalism



The map above helps to conceptualize the present study. It denotes the thinking underlying this research by presenting the elements which, when related, provide indications of the complex influences on teacher

professionalism. As the core concept to be studied, teacher professionalism is abstract in meaning and complicated in the process of its development as it involves various influential factors to play. Possible influential factors listed in the map, ranging from broad government policy to local school influence, provide different perspectives through which the abstractness of professionalism can be understood in more concrete ways; the different phases that participant teachers had gone through as shown on the table, from their time spent in Ed.M to their present working days, provide a relatively clear timeline to see possible changes in Chinese teachers' professional lives overtime.

1.5 Thesis structure

This thesis consists of seven chapters.

Chapter one has provided a general introduction to the educational and policy background, the purpose and significance of the present study, as well as the researcher's own relevant learning experiences. The introduction chapter also raises research questions which serve as an outline of what will be presented in later chapters.

Chapter two is a review of the literature, where research in the field of teacher education, teacher professionalism and teacher professional development will be discussed. The literature in chapter two involves work set in a Western social/educational background as well as work conducted in the Chinese context. A review of literature presents a clearer picture of the research landscape relevant to the present study. The review of previous research helps to form a conceptual framework based on which interview

questions for the present study were designed, as will be demonstrated in chapter three.

Chapter three deals with the research methodology. Starting with the researcher's philosophical position underpinning the study, this chapter moves on to deal with critical methodological issues, including the choice of the appropriate research approach and research methods for the present study. Both data collection and data analysis will be presented with clarity. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the research validity, the researcher's role and other ethical issues arising from the research.

Chapter four presents one of the findings from this research: Chinese teachers' professional conscience. The concept of professional conscience will be clarified and will be elaborated on. Factors influencing professional conscience will be analysed in relation to teachers' varied backgrounds.

Chapter five presents the other finding of this research: teacher change. Different manifestations of teacher change will be illustrated, followed by various factors leading to or affecting changes in teachers. Teacher change in this study implies both positive and negative changes, a connection will later also be drawn between these two kinds of changes.

Chapter six is the discussion chapter framed under key concepts generated from previous chapters. The focus of this chapter is on the discussion of teachers' professional conscience. It involves an examination of key factors affecting professional conscience. The discussion chapter aims to emphasise the importance of the finding and gives a hint of the contribution from this research, which will be presented in the last chapter.

Chapter seven is the conclusion chapter. This chapter brings the whole thesis together by answering the six research questions raised in chapter one. The latter parts of the chapter outline the contribution, implications as well as the limitations of the present study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

While this research has its primary focus on exploring Chinese teacher professionalism by drawing insight from teachers with different teaching experiences, a brief review of teacher education is also necessary, given the fact that teachers in this research had constantly referred to the influence they had received from their M.A. experiences. It was therefore hypothesised that Ed.M. as the shared experiences for all teachers in this study had affected teachers in their later working lives.

This chapter consists of three parts: a review of literature on teacher education, on teacher professionalism and on teachers' professional lives. The purpose of this review is to provide the researcher with a clearer understanding of the research landscape through the discussion of key issues and through the identification of the relationship between the extant literature and this research.

2.1 Teacher education

Three groups of teachers were involved in this research — teachers with no formal teaching experience before completing their Ed.M., rural teachers and other teachers with around ten years' teaching experience prior to their M.A. study. For the least experienced teachers, the completion of their Ed.M. had been part of their initial teacher education (ITE) while for the other teachers, it had been part of their continuing professional development (CPD).

Because the speciality of Ed.M. serving both as initial teacher education and as a continuing professional development programme, the researcher therefore argues that it is necessary to examine the literature on initial teacher education as well as on in-service teacher education. Before the discussion of

teacher education in China, however, it is necessary first to investigate how other countries in the world educate their teachers, as a means of contextualising the current study.

2.1.1 Initial teacher education in the world

There is no universal model for initial teacher education among countries. Teacher education programmes vary regarding their location, entry requirements, length of term, priorities and purposes of programmes and so on.

There are teacher candidates who have completed their teacher education mainly at education schools in universities and there are people who have enrolled in *alternative pathways of teacher education* where they have spent increasingly more time in local schools; there are programmes which put emphasis on the development of student teachers' pedagogical thinking and ability of argumentation, as exemplified by research-based teacher education in Finland, (Toom et al., 2008; Toom, 2010; Jyrhama et al., 2008); and programmes, *alternative pathways* in particular, which place less importance on educational theory and research but more on teacher candidates' experience of practice. Candidates from *alternative pathways* programmes follow *'a pragmatic system of professional practice based on lists of competencies'* (Gray & Whitty, 2012, p.13), and they are expected to rely on their previous education and are encouraged to 'learn by doing' (Musset, 2009; Gopinathan et al., 2008).

There is no necessity to compare different programmes and to see which one is more superior, for the differences of teacher education are rooted in different social and educational contexts with each programme model having its own specific features. The design and content of initial teacher education

programmes are largely influenced by the needs identified within a particular nation. A brief review on ITE provides the researcher with general knowledge of the complex situations that different countries are preparing their teachers. This general knowledge helps to locate Ed.M. in the field of ITE.

The full-time Master of Education programme, where all participant teachers in this research had been awarded their Master's degree, has three-quarters of its two-year course based on campus. As shown in Table 1.1, the university provided teacher candidates in this research with various courses before they left to commence teaching practice in local schools for around six months. Ed.M. is therefore university-based where prospective teachers have mainly been prepared through courses offered on campus.

Universities have become the dominating location for educating prospective teachers in many parts of the world including Ireland, Canada, Australia, Germany, France, Japan and Korea (Blomeke, 2007; Donoghue & Harford, 2010; Nuland, 2011). Even in England and America where alternative pathways into teaching (like *Teach First*) have been encouraged, teacher education programmes led by universities are still the 'most' popular route for graduates entering the teaching profession (Gray, 2013; Zeichner, 2006).

By being incorporated into a university, teacher education assumes a relatively equal status with other disciplines which have long established their legal status within higher education. Those who saw more merit in university-based teacher education argued that, because of the nature of teacher education which was more field-based and practical-oriented, when compared with traditional disciplines such as medicine and law (Hayhoe, 2002), the integration of teacher education into the territory of higher education could

prevent teaching profession from becoming too technically-oriented by keeping and preserving the emphasis on teachers' professional knowledge (Robinson, 2006). Echoing Robinson's argument, Zeichner (2011) claimed that universities had the potential to make an *'important and unique'* (p. 28) contribution in educating teachers. Higher education, he argued, provided teacher candidates with the opportunity to learn how to conduct research, to broaden their understanding of education and to acquire a more scientific way of learning through practice. With broadened views on education, teacher candidates could have a better chance to develop a clearer vision of the historical, political and institutional contexts that were related to teaching; and knowing what to learn and how to learn through practice helped teacher candidates better understand and adapt to the changing needs of students. Researchers, therefore, believed that the academic tradition of universities may help the teaching profession avoid the risk of becoming a purely technical enterprise by preserving teachers' professional knowledge and moulding teacher candidates' ways of thinking and doing.

However, the relevance of academic theory taught on campus to actual practice in local schools had been and remains under attack from both those who are working within and outside education schools (Levine, 2010). In England, Furlong (2008), for example, criticized university-based teacher education as *'overly academic'* (p.50), that it was not doing enough to prepare teacher candidates to cope with changing needs in classrooms which was the result of a changing world. Zeichner (2011) admitted that initial teacher education, especially in American universities, was inadequate to equip graduates with the skills and ability to teach in schools located in both urban

and remote areas and he therefore called for a reform in education programmes. Darling-Hammond (1999) noted that the criticism received by university education schools had been mostly about their ineffectiveness in preparing teachers to meet new demands, the chasm between theory and practice, and the inability of universities to recruit high academic achievers to join teaching profession.

The mismatch between theory and teaching practice, the inefficiency of teacher education programmes to meet social needs as well as the failure of universities to attract enough brilliant students into teaching, whilst all these problems are not new in teacher education, they continue to be the subject of research and policy debate. University-based teacher education programmes, therefore, have been trapped in a dilemma. On the one hand, teacher education programmes try to equip their students with the knowledge to meet academic requirements; on the other hand they must provide students with opportunities for school practice which are not always in line with the overall academic learning culture of a university. The imbalance between the two aspects may be understood as the deep-seated reason for the problems and criticisms received by university-based teacher education.

While the merits and criticism of university-based initial teacher education, as discussed above, has been mainly set in a Western context, they are also applicable to Chinese teacher education. Liu and Jiang (2015) argued that education schools at Chinese universities had increasingly moved towards being more academic and theoretic than they were before. This was as a result of both fierce competitions between education schools and other departments to be awarded better resources from the university and education schools'

intention to professionalise teachers with similar education models to those in place at law and medical schools. The inevitable trend to make teacher education more academic but less practical, they believed, was a shared problem which existed among universities worldwide (Liu & Jiang, 2015, 2016).

Initial teacher education in China, like in the West, though it has constantly come under attack, has never stopped trying to find better ways to prepare teachers to meet new demands and requirements emerging from an ever-changing world.

2.1.2 Initial teacher education in China: a changing landscape

The origins of Chinese initial teacher education can be traced back to more than a hundred years ago when Nanyang Public School in Shanghai was established. Since then, teacher education in China had experienced many changes along with political and social upheavals (Yang & Wu, 1999; Li, 2012). Teacher education in general, by being subject to various influences, had undergone many changes by responding to the quest for *'greater teacher quality, and…a higher quality teacher education'* (IMIG & IMIG, 2007, P. 95). Teacher education in China, by learning lessons from the West and by following social-cultural changes within Chinese society, had seen its changes in 30 years centred on changes in the needs of educating teachers for Chinese basic education (Xun, 2014).

Among all the initiatives taking place in Chinese ITE, one that is the most relevant to the present research is the movement to upgrade Chinese teacher education to Master's level.

By analysing reforms in Chinese teacher education during the past 20 years, Liu and Jiang (2016) believed the need for Chinese teacher education at undergraduate level had mostly been met. The upgrading of teacher education to Master's level had responded well to teachers' needs for improvement in teaching (Jiang, 2009). In master-level teacher education, Ning and Lai (2015) argued that, it was the full-time Master of Education programme that marked an important moment in Chinese initial teacher education. Starting from 2009, Ed.M. unveiled an era when prospective teachers can *'walk out of universities with a Master's degree'* (p. 81), while in the past only in-service teachers were entitled to pursue a Master of Education.

As shared learning experiences for all teachers in this research, full-time Master of Education was noted for its importance in affecting teachers' working lives after their graduation (see in chapter five). With the implementation of programmes like full-time Ed.M., Liu and Jiang (2016) believed Master-level teacher education for new university graduates shall be and was expected to become a trend in China.

2.1.3 In-service teacher Education and Training: a brief international perspective

In-service education and training has been defined as *'a variety of activities and practices in which teachers become involved in order to broaden their knowledge, improve their skills and assess and develop their professional approach'* (Perron, 1991, cited in Bayrakci, 2009, p. 10). There have been continuing arguments in regard to the differences between in-service training and education, with the former focusing on *'building specific teaching skills like how to sequence a lesson'* (Bayrakcı, 2009, p. 10) and the latter addressing

teachers' broader, long-term concerns to promote a more holistic development, both intellectually and technically (Bayrakcı, 2009). While Bayrakcı might have oversimplified here to claim differences between in-service training and education, these two terms/approaches both have their focuses on addressing teacher needs and on helping teachers make improvements in teaching.

Teachers' continuing professional development (CPD) is described as *'a hugely intellectual and emotional endeavor which is at the heart of raising and maintaining standards of teaching, learning and achievement in a range of schools'* (Day & Sachs, 2004, p. 3). It *'helps teachers build professional relationships, sharing and learning from each other' and it 'takes place across all the stages of a teacher's career…to meet the challenges of the stage'* (Davidson et. al, 2012, p. 4). While CPD has been emphasized for maintaining or improving standards and/or making difference in schooling, in this fast changing world, it also *'in many ways…(serves as) the link between the design and implementation of education reforms and the ultimate success of reform efforts in schools'* (DeMonte, 2013, p. 2)

With new requirements for teachers and teaching regularly emerging from policy reforms at national levels (for instance, the new curriculum reform in China), teachers are required not only to be well qualified, highly motivated, knowledgeable and skilful at the point of entry into teaching but also throughout their careers (Day & Sachs, 2004, p. 3-4). The improvement of teachers through professional development programmes can be realized in three ways: extension, renewal and growth (Grundy & Robinson, 2004). Extension is realized by the introduction of new knowledge or skills into a

teacher's repertoire (p. 148), renewal can be achieved through transformation and change of knowledge and practice, with growth achieved by the development of greater levels of expertise (Sachs, 2007, p. 10). Sachs adds a fourth approach: re-imagining. By re-imagining, she asserted that teachers shall have their say on what they needed for improvement in teaching.

Three models characterize professional development programmes: school based teacher development programmes, partnerships involving higher education institutions, and schools or other groups and networks where teachers' are trained within a teachers' community. Because school-based CPD and networks have largely excluded the involvement of university, it is the second model that best fits the discussion here. By enrolling in-service teachers, the full-time Master of Education programme in this research is designed to provide teachers with up-to-date knowledge and skills within two years. Teachers are required to undertake a teaching practice of around six month after the completion of their course on campus.

In regard to knowledge/skill delivered through professional development programmes, the recent OECD report on teacher development found that it was curriculum knowledge that was most relevant to teachers' later efforts in classrooms to make a difference (Barrera-Pedemonte, 2016). By analyzing teacher professional development from 35 countries, the 2016 OECD Education working paper claimed that it was curriculum-focused teacher professional development that was *'more related to the reported efforts of teachers for enhancing students' learning than the pedagogy and subject matter foci'* (p. 6). Besides, teachers' length of exposure to high-quality

professional development was also believed to contribute to teachers' reporting of using a greater variety of strategies to teach their students (Barrera-Pedemonte, 2016).

Interestingly, as reported by participant teachers in this research, the learning of the new curriculum had also played a very important part in their M.A. study. Chapter five will present discussions on how teachers' learning of the new curriculum had affected them both perceptually and behaviorally. As these teachers had been through their professional development in China, it is therefore necessary to present a brief review of Chinese in-service training and education.

2.1.4 In-service teacher Education and Training in China

Among all participating teachers in this research, apart from the six teachers who were enrolled as pre-service teachers, the other thirteen teachers had completed Ed.M. as part of their in-service education. A brief review is needed here to give both a general introduction and to present the latest changes in Chinese in-service teacher education and training.

Before the 1990s, the main purpose of Chinese in-service teacher training was to help teachers achieve better diploma when most of teachers did not have their initial teacher preparation completed in higher educational institutions (including Normal universities and teacher college) but mainly in secondary teacher schools. With changes in Chinese society/economy and reforms in Chinese education, increasing attention had been paid to teachers' continuing professional development, when in the past it was initial teacher education that had been more heavily stressed (Xun, 2014).

With the promotion of 'life-long learning' in Chinese society, in-service teacher training has gradually transformed from preparing teachers for diplomas to continuing education where teachers' better development is promoted (Pan, 2017). Xu (2013), by drawing lessons of CPD from western developed countries, argued that Chinese teacher professional development had already changed from being over-theoretic to being inspirational and applicable for teachers to improve teaching. Especially that, under the new curriculum, the emphasis on CPD shall be put on developing teachers' theoretical knowledge as well as practical skill, on cultivating teachers' ability to adopt changes and to learn by reflecting on the past (Ma, 2011). To achieve all these, Ma further argued that, developing teachers as professionals should be both the starting point and the final purpose of CPD.

However, in studying Chinese teacher professional development, Chinese researchers tend to have their focus either on examining inadequacies in current CPD—for instance, the lack of teachers' voice in deciding what to learn and how to learn through professional development programmes (Geng, 2017)—or/and on providing suggestions for the improvement of CPD. Little empirical research has been done in regard to what Chinese teachers need by participating in CPD and how/why these professional development programmes work or not work on teachers to help improve teaching. Furthermore, while teachers in this research had been enrolled in Ed.M on a full-time basis, so far, there is not much research on how and to what extent Chinese universities have played a part in promoting teachers' professional development, especially in developing teachers as professionals through university-based CPD. This research suggested that in-service teachers can be

benefited for their professional development from university-based CPD, which has been supported by evidence in Chapter five.

2.1.5 Changes in Chinese teacher education: to bring teachers of better quality

Because all participating teachers in this research were graduates from the same Master-level teacher education programme, it is therefore necessary to have a brief review on Chinese teacher education, which has been under change and reform to help professionalize teachers.

By the year 1986, after series of government policies to restore teaching profession which had been seriously destroyed during the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977), the problem of teacher shortage in China had largely been solved. It was from then that Chinese teacher education policy changed from previous emphasis on quantity to a higher requirement on teacher quality (Qin, 2015).

From the 1980s, China had played an increasingly important part on the world stage. The requirement on improving teacher quality had been raised by the fast and dramatic changes in Chinese society and economy, which had been resulted by the irreversible trend of globalization. More than a decade ago, Giddens (1999, cited in Furlong, 2008, p. 307) had already claimed that the twin forces of globalization and the knowledge economy would bring tremendous changes in society and reshape the landscape of the world. At the time when China stepped out to compete with other nations, globalization together with knowledge economy had already triggered an ever fierce global competition.

Global competition had called for a new generation of labour force who had new visions and skills to contribute to the continuing development of the world; since the task of shaping that new generation had undoubtedly laid on school education, as Bates (2007) argued that, the purpose of all recently enacted educational policies, all these regulations, had been '*to improve student performance through the improvement of teachers' works'* (p. 129). Urged by the powerful force of globalization, China was no exception in adjusting its teacher education policies to meet new demands from an ever-changing society. The integration of new curriculum into teachers' learning during their times in Ed.M. is one of the responses to changing needs of Chinese society. This curriculum puts new requirements on Chinese students to be creative, cooperative and autonomous in learning. Teachers enrolled in Ed.M. have thus been offered courses to help them develop these required abilities in students.

Gu (2006) and Jiang (2009) argued that, it was teachers who had solid and advanced subject-matter and pedagogical knowledge, who were able to think with more academic rigor, who were highly committed to teaching profession and who were highly aware of self-development with the notion of life-long learning, that had been called for in such an era of fast development and fierce competition. The need for teachers to be better equipped with professional teaching knowledge and skills and to lay more attention on their long-term development had raised challenges for teacher education from preparing teachers to be capable of teaching to developing teachers as professionals (Jiang, 2009; Xun, 2014).

The beliefs and necessities to develop Chinese teachers as professionals with changes in teacher education have been well discussed in Chinese literature through years (Gu, 2006; He, 2007; Jiang, 2009; Qiu, 2014; Liu & Jiang, 2015). It was argued that to prepare teachers as professionals, teacher education shall help teachers to strengthen their professional knowledge and skills. These knowledge and skill shall be systematic, up-to-date, applicable in teaching practice and helpful to teachers' professional development (Gu, 2006; He, 2007; Zhu & Li, 2014). Besides knowledge and skill, the emphasis on helping build up teacher morals with teacher education had also been re-iterated. It was argued that teacher morals and values was of highly importance, for 'teachers are role models in students' hearts (Gu, 2006, p.5) and they *'are working closely with children to affect their mind and psychological state'* (Liu & Jiang, 2015, p. 27). The importance of moral values to Chinese teachers has been well discussed in Chapter four and six on teachers' professional conscience.

The intention to develop teachers as professionals with teacher education can be partly understood through the implementation of full-time Master of Education, which all teachers in this research had went through. By up-grading teacher education to Master Level, it is hoped that after two years' education, graduates of Ed.M could develop *professional qualities* that people without such formal education could not acquire (Ning & Lai, 2015, p. 82).

In general, to fit the global competition, Chinese students have been expected to change so that later they could rise up as a new force to inject new power for continuing social development; to make changes in students, Chinese teachers have been expected to change to prepare students with needed

knowledge and skills; to make teachers change, teacher education has to change so that teachers could be prepared differently; and finally, by the change of teacher education, teachers' professionalism has been expected to be changed with new generations of teachers thinking and working differently from teachers who used to teach them. This chain reaction might not stop as long as the world is still moving and new changes keep on emerging. The changes are expected to continue to find their impacts on school education, students, teachers and teacher education.

As this research is to explore Chinese teacher professionalism through teacher graduates of Ed.M., the following sections will present detailed reviews on various issues concerning teacher professionalism, both from international and from Chinese perspectives.

2.2 Teacher professionalism

Professionalism is seen as representing *'quality and modes of conduct proper to professions'* (Pellegrino, 2002, p. 378). However, historically, it has been interpreted in different ways in different educational, cultural and policy contexts. This section will examine differences in perspectives of professionalism as a means of framing the development of the research.

2.2.1 Concepts of professionalism

When professionalism has been discussed, not only must the historical, social-political and cultural contexts which determine or influence its meanings be taken into consideration (Hilferty, 2008), but the use of other related concepts like re-professionalism, de-professionalism, professionalization make the already complicated landscape of theories of professionalism even more

complex to new researchers. Therefore, before exploring the meaning of professionalism and its possible implications on teachers and teaching, I will introduce some discussions closely related to the concept of professionalism.

First is the discussion around whether or not teaching is a profession. For an occupation to become a profession, a set of criterion should be met. Among these criterion, Holy and John (1995) identified the possession and use of expert or specialist knowledge, the exercise of autonomous thought and judgment, responsibility to clients and wider society through a set of principles had been both fit for the majority of professions and enduring the change of time. Evetts (2009) complemented and echoed Holy and John's claim by saying that education, training and experience were fundamental requirements, but once achieved (and sometimes licensed), the exercise of discretion based on competence was central and deserving of special status, which means *'(for a profession) externally imposed rules governing work are minimized and the exercise of discretion and good judgment…..are maximized'* (p. 6).

However, long before the establishment of the three dimensions (knowledge, autonomy and responsibility), in 1969, Etzioni already categorized teachers, together with social workers and nurses, as 'semi-professions' due to their relatively shorter period of pre-service preparation, a weak claim of specialist knowledge and most importantly, the lack of ability to exercise autonomy.

The debates around the status of and qualifications necessary to become a teacher have lasted for decades. Because of the lack of autonomy—either control of the curriculum or the entry of the profession—teachers are

constantly seeking to improve the status of teaching. This process of seeking higher social status is part of professionalization which Carlgren (1999) believed to be a *'process by which an occupation becomes a profession in the sociological sense (including professional autonomy, a long university education, control of the development of professional knowledge, etc.)'*(p. 43). Helsby & McCulloch (1996, p.56) demonstrated the two related concepts of professionalization and professionalism specifically in relation to teachers as,

> *Professionalization denotes issues of status that have tended to preoccupy historians and sociologists. This includes……establishing teaching as a recognized profession on the same level as .....medicine and law;…….professionalism refers to teachers' right and obligations to determine their own tasks in the classroom……the way which teachers develop, negotiate, use and control their knowledge.*

That is, professionalization is *'a sociological project, relating to the authority and status of the teaching profession', whereas professionalism is 'a pedagogical project, concerned with the internal quality of teaching as a profession'* (Englund, 1996. P. 75). As time passes, new concepts which are closely related to professionalization have come to the scene. As Hargreaves and Goodson (1996, p. 3) put it:

> *Some parts of teacher's work are becoming re-professionalized in ways that involve broader tasks, greater complexity, more sophisticated judgment, and collective decision-making among colleagues, while other parts of the work are becoming de-professionalized in terms of more pragmatic training, reduced discretion over goals and purposes, and increased dependence on detailed learning outcomes.*

In a time when the importance of teacher quality on students' school achievement has been greatly emphasized, it is not surprising that standards and criterion are made to ensure the quality of teaching. To have more control on teaching so that students may have better performance in international competitions like PISA (programme for International Student Assessment) and are better severed as future labour force for national development, *'accountability for teachers has been imposed in a number of countries by the establishment of government agencies and the introduction of professional standards for teachers'* (Goepel, 2012, p. 502), sometimes with a national curriculum. Teachers, therefore, have been left with quite limited autonomy in deciding what to teach or even how to teach, their status and esteem in which the public hold them has been challenged (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011).

In this research, teachers had followed closely the national new curriculum on both what to teach and how to teach. Among these teachers, some had been left even fewer choices for their own teaching because of increasing pressures and requirements from schools. The first section of chapter five presents evidence of how some teachers in Chinese schools had been greatly restricted in their work.

Besides arguments around de-professionalization of teachers' work, there are others who believe that teacher's work has been partly re-professionalized as suggested by Hargreaves and Goodson (1996). With the implementation of new standards, new qualities might be demanded from teachers in response to new needs of students; with greater school/ teacher accountability assigned to parents, governors and the community, it is all the more crucial for teachers to develop values such as collegiality, negotiation,

collaboration and partnership leading to agreed action (Nixon et al. 1997, cited from Goepel, 2012). Thus, teacher professionalism nowadays is not primarily about adherence to imposed standards which are concerned with classroom practice and methods of accountability, but extends beyond (Goepel, 2012). But whether changes in teachers' work have de-professionalized or re-professionalized teachers might depend on whether teachers themselves are prepared to give ownership to such changes (Thompson, 2001).

Thus, together with the discussion about teacher professionalism, the concepts of de-professionalization and re-professionalization continue to be constantly debated; and behind these debates is the changing yet ever present central school improvement agendas that seek to raise standards. The arguments around de-professionalization and re-professionalization are not the focus of this research; along with these arguments, however, discussions of imposed requirements on teachers and school reforms have largely aligned with Chinese teachers' work and lives under the ongoing curriculum reform.

2.2.2 Teacher professionalism: Western perspectives

While the previous section presents brief explanations of meanings of professionalism in regard to the difference between professionalism and professionalization; defining teacher professionalism itself is by no means a simple task. The arguments around meanings of professionalism are complex and there is hardly any consensus achieved on the definition of professionalism among researchers.

Decades ago, in England, Hoyle (1975) explained professionalism as *'strategies and rhetoric employed by members of an occupation in seeking to improve status, salary and conditions'* (p.375). This view of professionalism,

closely associated with struggles from within a profession to improve status in a clear political sense, still finds its supporters among scholars nowadays (Wang, 2012). Evans (2008), however, believed that professionalism had been increasingly explained as an *'externally imposed, articulated perception of what lies within a profession's collective remit and responsibilities'* (p. 23), she further defined professionalism as

> *…… practice that is consistent with commonly-held consensual delineations of a specific profession……(practice) that both contributes to and reflects perceptions of the profession's purpose and status and the specific nature, range and levels of service …… as well as the general ethical code underpinning this practice (Evans, 2008. P.29).*

Evans' definition of professionalism not only focused on the rights within a certain profession; she also placed emphasis on the public service and moral purposes that a profession should have.

Because the lack of a consensus on defining the nature of professionalism, the concept of professionalism and the ways in which professionalism are defined are generally believed to be prone to change according to different historical-social contexts (Evetts, 2013; Sachs, 2016). When this lack of unanimity is applied to teacher professionalism, just as Whitty (2000) stated, it may be best to see the different positions about teacher professionalism in the 21st century as competing versions rather than seeing any one as fitting an essentialist definition of professionalism. Below are different stances taken by authors who have tried to understand the meaning(s) of teacher professionalism. These different understandings of professionalism provide the researcher with an insight into the complicated research landscape

of professionalism; also these different positions in understanding professionalism help to prevent the researcher from focusing too narrowly on a certain aspect of professionalism at the very beginning of this study.

Krishnaveni and Anitha (2007) believed that it was possible to interpret professionalism as a multi-dimensional structure, including one's work behaviors and attitudes to perform the highest standards and to improve service quality. Under Krishnaveni and Anitha's interpretation, teacher professionalism thus aims at achieving the highest standards in teaching profession which is formed upon teachers' professional knowledge, skill and values and is also associated with improving the quality and standards of teachers' works and their public image.

While teacher professionalism could be interpreted as a way to achieve standards, Ozga and Law (1981) provided a different perspective in claiming that professionalism was used by employers as an ideological weapon for controlling teachers as well as a weapon of self-defence of teachers in their struggle against de-professionalization. Hilton et al. (2013) believed that teacher professionalism was built on the reflection and understanding of teachers' actual work which was guided by certain shared and internalized professional standards. This view also reflects Evans's (2008) perception of professionalism, which, she believed, had been developed internally. Individual professional growth, according to Evans, was a good way to understand the formation of professionalism.

It is not difficult to find that among all explanations, standard-achieving and using professionalism as a tool have been frequently mentioned. However, there are disputes around them. First is what kind of standards that

professionals are expected to achieve, the highest ones or the standards developed naturally from and internalized within a profession? And who are responsible for the mandating of those standards, the external stakeholders or professionals themselves? When professionalism is viewed as a tool, whose tool is it? Does it belong to the external powers to control professionals or as a tool for self-regulation or benefits-seeking within a profession, or just as Ozga and Law (1981) suggested that it shall incorporate both? All these questions are still open to discussion and it is quite possible that one might not find any standard answers.

Besides general meanings of professionalism, researchers have also tried to understand professionalism by considering its application in different contexts. As a result, different terms concerning professionalism have been invented which help to make meanings of professionalism more specific.

Evans (2011) categorized professionalism into four types, ‘demanded professionalism’ which was externally imposed on teachers, ‘prescribed professionalism’ which was recommended by academics, ‘enacted professionalism’ which reflected teachers’ real practice in a working environment and ‘deduced professionalism’ which was a speculation on the nature of professionalism. Evans (2011) argued that while ‘demanded professionalism’ could maintain relatively small change within a certain period, ‘enacted professionalism’, since it reflected the reality, was undergoing constant change and reshaping itself by its practitioners. She pointed that the mismatch between ‘demanded professionalism’ which was formed outside of an occupation and ‘enacted professionalism’ which was shaped within could never be fully resolved. In reality, however, it was usually the governments

that had the real power in defining a profession and in affecting its related professionalism (Evans, 2011).

Sachs (2001), by referring to Apple (1996), distinguished two different kinds of professionalism: 'democratic' and 'managerial professionalism'. She suggested that the former was formed from within the profession with an emphasis on collaboration and cooperation between teachers and other educational powers. The later had been *'reinforced by employing authorities through policies on teacher professional development'* (p.149) with an emphasis on accountability and effectiveness. Later, Whitty (2008) complemented Sachs's classification by adding 'collaborative professionalism' which involved teachers not only working with person within the field of education but also with *'health visitors, general practitioners, social workers……(even though) it is still unclear how the teaching profession specifically will choose to position itself within such new teams'*(p. 42). Evetts (2009) had proposed 'organizational professionalism' and 'occupational professionalism'. The former was *characterized by 'control', 'rational-legal forms of authority' and 'accountability' while the latter was mostly about 'collegial authority' 'trust, discretion' and 'professional ethics'* (P. 24).

Despite the various competing definitions and explanations of professionalism (and, for the moment, ignoring the cultural influences, which I will develop later), the terms concerning professionalism above have all captured the dichotomous features of professionalism. 'Managerial professionalism', 'demanded professionalism', and 'organizational professionalism' have their emphasis on external control/teacher accountability while 'democratic professionalism', 'collaborative professionalism' and

'occupational professionalism' have laid more focus on collegial collaboration or cooperation between teachers and other stakeholders to maintain or promote teachers' professional status.

Because of the existence of so many different terms, which could also change with time or context, it is difficult to construct a unified definition for teacher professionalism. Sachs (2001) claimed that *'there is no singular version of what constitutes professionalism or teaching as a profession that is shared by diverse groups'* (p. 150).

Different perspectives in understanding professionalism and the invention of new terms concerning professionalism could serve as evidence of how concepts of professionalism could be altered either within a changing society or among different social backgrounds. What lies behind these changes and different terms is that *'all the relevant groups, aiming to protect their own appeals, will always try to make their voices on desired teachers uttered and heard'* (Wang, 2012, p.18). The changing terms of professionalism indicate that, by aligning with requirements from government and then from schools, changes in qualities are expected from teachers (Snoek, 2010). It is the interchange of different interest groups on teaching that *'create(s)…… (the) on-going discourses on teacher professionalism and determine(s) its distinctive features'*(Wang, 2012, p.18).

Besides changing terms of professionalism, researchers have also tried to understand professionalism by examining its changes in different times.

Hargreaves (2000) analysed the development of teacher professionalism from a vertical perspective by dividing it into four historical phases which included the pre-professional age where less experienced teachers learned mainly by listening to their superiors; the age of autonomous professional where teachers assumed a high degree of autonomy. This age was characterized by teacher's classroom individualism; the age of collegial profession where strong professional cultures of collaboration had been developed to cope with changes and reforms and the post-professional age where a struggle had been formed between those who wanted to de-professionalize the work of teaching and those who intended to re-define teacher professionalism.

Writing based on Western contexts, Hargreaves believed teacher professionalism nowadays belonged to the post-professional age, where at one hand professionalism was portrayed as a social movement that protected and advanced teachers' professional status and provided them with opportunities to work effectively with other groups; on the other hand it was also portrayed as a force to de-professionalize teachers' work under multiple pressures and increasing workloads for the compliance of prescribed standards (Hargreaves, 2000). In this sense, teacher professionalism '*is regarded as a tool used for either controlling or empowering teachers'* (Wang, 2012, p.20).

Day (2002) echoed Hargreaves' analysis by defining post-professionalism as a time where success can only be achieved by teachers or by other public service workers when they met the criterion of their work prescribed by others. In Australia, Sachs (2003) drew a line between what she

called an ‘old professionalism’ and ‘new professionalism’ by examining attributes in both types of professionalism.

While there might be differences existing among teachers in different times and in varied social and cultural traditions, with the spreading of new liberalism (which is a broad concept including many themes among which the rules of market competition for addressing globalization is a distinguished feature worldwide), the emphasis on teacher accountability, however, has become a general trend both in China and in the West (Furlong, 2013; Leslie et al., 2013). For the central government in China, it is the concern for economic benefits that has outweighed its concern for teachers and children (Wang, 2012, p.27).

Globally, under new liberalism, teachers are gradually reduced to professional technicians who have to conform to the state’s requirements for the improvement of human capital, which means that in school education, skills that could make contribution to the nation’s economic development have been most valued (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). As Gao (2008) once commented, *‘teaching has increasingly been reduced to the status of marketable service and teachers to service-providers’* (p. 157). However, even if some similarities have been shared, if one looks carefully into the analysis of contemporary teachers’ working lives, the majority of them has still been debated in a Western contexts (mainly among English-speaking countries). There have been relatively few debates on Chinese Mainland. Chinese culture, with its distinguishing features, may shape an understanding of professional teachers that is not necessarily identical with that of other (mainly western) cultures; it is therefore worth exploring whether models from the west are

suitable for understanding and explaining Chinese educational reality (Wang, 2012).

2.2.3 Teacher professionalism the Chinese perspectives

Traditionally, teachers in China enjoyed high social status. Confucius, the most famous teacher in Chinese society, under whose thinking Chinese culture has developed and flourished for thousands of years, has been called as *'exemplary teachers for all ages'* and been treated as a saint. In old times, teachers had been listed only after heaven, earth, the emperor and parents as important cultural symbols; in nowadays China, the 10th day of every September has been made by law as the National Teachers' Day when the whole nation expresses their gratitude and respect for all teachers. Respect for teachers has been deeply rooted in Chinese culture.

However, Wang (2012) found that despite long tradition of teacher respect, in China, as in the West, there was *'no unanimity on declaring teachers as professionals'* in the society; that teachers' professional development largely was referred to the development of *'quantitative traits'* which government believed teachers should have and finally *'no mentioning of the professional association or a teachers' union at all'* (Wang, 2012, p.23-24). With government controlling qualities that teachers are supposed to have and without the presence of a professional teachers' union plus a national curriculum for school education, teacher autonomy, which is a vital benchmark on professionalism from western perspective, is completely missing in the dominant discourse on Chinese teacher professionalism. Professional autonomy, for Chinese teachers, is *'an alien, sometimes even irrelevant issue to their thinking'* (p.28).

Lai and Leslie (2007) further argued that whereas teacher professionalism in the West had undergone changes from professionalization to de-professionalization and then re-professionalization, there was no sign of this process in China. What can be found was that *'teachers in the Chinese mainland are urged to strictly follow the state's long existing commands. Their professionalism, therefore, could be interpreted as state-directed professionalism'* (Lai & Leslie, 2007, p. 65).With the missing of autonomy in teaching, conformity has become a quite obvious feature of Chinese teacher professionalism. And in a more recent paper, Leslie et al. (2013) claimed again that *'to Chinese teachers, knowledge, responsibility and authority are essential components of their professionalism, while autonomy is a more confining concept with limited application'* (p. 240).

With autonomy almost as a missing part of the way professionalism in China has been constituted, teachers gradually become accustomed to conformity (Lai, 2007). One study showed that compared to school teachers in Hong Kong, teachers in mainland China tended to be *'more conformist and seldom express their disagreement with State's initiatives'* (Lai & Leslie, 2007, p. 64). With the ever missing part of teacher autonomy and with some distinctive Chinese features like high requirements on teacher morals as well as ideological loyalty to the country, Wang (2012) claimed that teacher professionalism in Chinese mainland cannot be completely identified with that in Western countries and the concept of professionalism was still *'a brand new idea' in its early development which called for more localization'* (p.26). Lai's (2007) study partly supported this claim when she found that school teachers in mainland China had little knowledge about 'teacher professionalism' which

meant they had seldom heard the term ‘professionalism’ and had no clear understanding of what teacher professionalism referred to. In a later paper, Lai (2010) claimed that the top-down approach in mainland China was kind of ‘assigned professionalism’. The Ministry of Education was the highest authority in education affairs, it intended to shape teachers and teaching through laws and regulations and it also expected teachers to be conformity. Leslie et al. (2013) pointed that while *‘the dominance of the state over teachers has allowed for swift policy implementation; it has also impeded the development of a truly autonomous profession’* (p. 249).

It is this conformity that has created a dilemma for Chinese school teachers. The tension between the ever present emphasis on academic achievement and the changing policies asking a comprehensive development of students makes teachers find it is increasingly difficult to balance these two aspects in teaching. On one hand, they have to put great efforts in helping students succeed in examinations for the maintenance of schools’ reputation, on the other, they try to implement top-down educational policies in which examination score is not the sole emphasis. Teachers, therefore, have constantly found themselves been caught on the dilemma of fulfilling social expectations of getting good academic records and satisfying demands generated by educational reforms to make students develop in an all-around way.

While Chinese teachers seem to be obedient to government’s educational policy, they are also required to have qualities that are less tangible than policy-implementing. These qualities can be only found on teachers’ everyday lives and they are so powerful that they have helped shape the way

how Chinese teachers have worked. These qualities are teacher morals. In Teacher Law which has been validated by Ministry of Education in 1993, there are clear requirements stating that for teachers, not only 'good teaching skill' is needed but also 'good moral characters'.

As discussed in the first chapter in regard to the background of Chinese schooling, the principal task of teachers in contemporary Chinese schools is to equip students with enough knowledge as a backing up for the country's fast economic development. However, if looking back into the long history, imparting knowledge and resolving students' problems were not the most important things in teaching. For Chinese teachers, handing down the core values of the society (which means 'Dao' in Chinese) and fostering them in young generations are among the biggest responsibilities that teachers are asked to take. Teachers are not only required to uphold the social values that rooted in mainstream social ideology, they are also expected to become role models not only for their students but generally those who are junior to them (Wang, 2012; Gao, 2008). While upholding proper social values may be the common trait shared by teachers worldwide, since it is teachers' responsibility to nurture students' mind not only with book knowledge but also with social values to help students tell right from wrong; what might be different between Chinese teachers and their west counterparts is that teacher morals is so important for Chinese teachers that *'moral and political rectitude constitute the ethical base of teacher professionalism (in China) and is considered as the most essential qualities of the teaching force'* (Lo et al, 2014 , p. 56)

The public expectation on teacher morals is so high that one can easily find metaphors on Chinese teachers who have been consistently portrayed as 'soul engineers' with responsibility for cultivating students' intellectual as well as moral qualities; as 'silkworms', who diligently spin silk thread till death, and as 'candles', who selflessly burn themselves to light others until the end of life time yet without regression and complaining. These metaphors underscore the traditional perceptions (which have evolved for centuries) of teachers and the teaching profession as highly-devotion and self-sacrificing (Gao，2008，p. 156).

It is quite true that teachers do need take moral responsibilities and are expected to be set as role models and to make sacrifice, these might be nothing essentially different between China and the West (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). However, the expectation on teachers' morals in Chinese society has been positioned so high that sometimes its power even exceeds that of legal regulations. A story told by Qu (2008) said that a Chinese teacher had been dismissed by school only for his words that *'learning is for making money and marrying beautiful girls'* (Wu, 2001, as cited from Qu, 2008, p. 390). No exact regulation from Teacher Law mandates that a teacher shall be asked to quit teaching because of some improper words spoken in classrooms, except those to be believed of highly insulting students. This teacher, however, had to leave teaching for his words that was believed as highly improper to students. The possible explanation for this issue could be that this teacher had imparted the 'wrong' value of learning to students and thus failed to fulfil the moral expectations on him to shape students' 'right' value on knowledge. One might argue that this could only be an incidence, however, an incidence, no matter

how accidental and random it might be, may at least provide people with some insight into the concerning issues.

In general, high standard of teacher morals, high self-devotion to teaching, together with high degree of conformity to authority are believed by researchers have helped to shape a teaching force in China, which, whilst having similarities, is also somewhat different from that in the West.

2.2.4. Dimensions of teacher professionalism

Hoyle (1995) divided professionalism into three aspects: professional knowledge/skill, autonomy and responsibility. These three aspects are central to the classical and traditional concept of professionalism (Furlong, 2000). Similarly, Freidson (2001) believed professionalism required practitioners to have special knowledge and skill, which had been achieved through education, training and experience. Professionals, he further stated, shall be able to organize and control their own work without bending to external imposed rules, either from government or from other organizations. In a more recent research on the importance to reinforce teacher professionalism, Sachs (2016) believed members of a profession shall *'share a common set of values, (be) guided by ethical practice and have a knowledge base that is robust and can be defended'* (p. 422).

Because this research involved twelve early career teachers with teaching experience ranging from 2-5 years, I looked at Brock's (2006, p. 4) seven dimensions of early years' professionalism developed on the basis of analyzing and summarizing previous research. These seven dimensions include,

Knowledge: Specialist knowledge, unique expertise, experience

Education and training: Higher education, qualification, practical experience, obligation to engage in CPD

Skills: Competence and efficacy, task complexity, communication, judgment

Autonomy: Entry requirement, self-regulation and standards, voice in public policy, discretionary judgment

Values: Ideology, altruism, dedication, service to clients

Ethics: Codes of conduct, moral integrity, confidentiality, trustworthiness, responsibility

Reward: Influence, social status, power, vocation

Different aspects of professionalism identified by researchers can largely fall into four categories, which are *knowledge*, *skill*, *ethics/values* and *autonomy*. A review of teachers' professional knowledge, skill and ethics, including teacher autonomy, is of great importance. This research did not intend to evaluate full-time Master of Education by examining if its graduates had acquired the knowledge/skill/ethics as required by this programme. However, as professional knowledge/skill/ethics/autonomy have been claimed to be integral parts of professionalism, a review of the research literature can provide the researcher with better understandings on what teachers shall know and how teachers shall do as professionals. These understandings could inform me in my study of Chinese teacher professionalism. Although concepts of teacher professionalism might be under constant change and elements that constitute a professional teacher may also not remain stable and may vary

across different social-cultural contexts; the core elements of professionalism (professional knowledge/skill/ethics/autonomy) are agreed among researchers as indispensable parts of professionalism.

1.Teacher knowledge

A specific knowledge base has often been viewed as one of the defining features for professionals. Many researchers have made their own categories of teacher knowledge as listed in Table 2.1

Table 2.1 Categories of Teacher Knowledge

Elbaz (1983)	Shulman (1986)	Grossman (1990)	Darling-Hammond (2006)
subject matter knowledge	content knowledge (CK)	knowledge of content (including CK and PCK)	subject matter knowledge/skill
curriculum knowledge	curriculum knowledge	curriculum knowledge	curriculum knowledge
knowledge in managing classroom routines	general pedagogical knowledge	general pedagogical knowledge	understanding of assessment and of how to construct and manage a productive classroom
knowledge in responding student needs	pedagogical content knowledge (PCK)		student needs
			PCK
knowledge of self	knowledge of learners	Knowledge of learners	knowledge of learners
		knowledge of self	
Knowledge on social structure of the school, and the wider school environment	knowledge of educational contexts		
	knowledge of educational ends, values and purposes		social purposes of education

Among these categories, pedagogical content knowledge that refers to *"the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others"* (Shulman, 1986, p. 9) has become a key component in discussion about teacher knowledge throughout literatures (Brindley, 2013).

From table 2.1, It is not difficult to tell that there are some overlapping categories among these provided classifications, for instance they have all included subject matter knowledge (as Shulman named it as 'content knowledge') and curriculum knowledge. Brindley (2013, p.398-399) had built a category of teacher knowledge on the basis of previous studies which included:

1. subject matter content knowledge, which is the subject discipline that a teacher teaches
2. pedagogical content knowledge, which refers to the ways of representing and formulating the subject that make it comprehensible to others (cite from Shulman, 1986, p. 9)
3. curriculum knowledge, which is the understanding of how subject matter knowledge has been organized and arranged by considering students' learning ability and experiences
4. general pedagogical knowledge, which are principles of classroom management and organization unrelated to subject matter
5. knowledge of learners, which is specific understanding of the learners characteristics
6. knowledge of educational contexts, which is an understanding of the classroom…and the character of school communities

7. knowledge of educational ends, which is the knowledge on the the purposes and values of education as well as their philosophical and historical grounds
8. Knowledge of self which might include teachers' personality, educational believes and goals.

I find this category is quite useful because it is clear, comprehensive and evidence-based. I adopted this category as an important reference to examine teachers' professional knowledge in this research. It helped me to classify knowledge that teachers claimed they had learned from Ed.M and knowledge they believed as important in teaching (more discussions on teacher knowledge will be present in chapter five).

2. Teacher skills

Teacher skills could be understood as the basic competencies necessary for teachers to achieve classroom/school tasks.

Early in 1997, Latham in America identified 9 skills that school teachers were expected to have. Among them was the ability to get and keep students on task, to maintain a high rate of positive teacher-to-pupil interactions, to respond to students' inappropriate behaviors, to maintain a high rate of risk-free student response opportunities. While those requirements might seem a little general and vague when one tries to apply them in teaching, General Teaching Council for Scotland (GTC) (2012) provided a more comprehensive list on teachers' professional skills and ability, which had been classified into four big categories. Including teachers' professional skills and abilities in *Teaching and Learning*, in *Classroom Organization and Management*, in *Pupil Assessment*, in *Professional Reflection and Communication,* these skills/abilities had covered the most part of teachers'

work and had captured the majority of skills that teachers were expected to have.

Because this research involved teachers who completed their Master study as initial teacher education, a more recent report from Hussain et al. (2015) on prospective teachers' pedagogical skills will also help to provide insights in skills that teachers are expected to have in teaching. In this research, teachers' pedagogical skills are classified into four categories, including skills in instructional planning (for instance, skills of lesson planning for teaching), presentation (for instance, skills of presenting contents in an interesting manner and/or exemplifying contents through interesting evidences), classroom management (for instance, skills of seating arrangements for instruction and/or time managing for activities) and assessment (for instance, skills of self-assessment and/or use of assessment for effective instruction) (p.331-333). Pedagogical skills are only part of teacher skills, there are other skills discussed in literature, including teacher skills for socialization and for counselling (Hussain et al, 2015).

Last but not least, like a doctor needs to know the latest improvement on the treatment of certain disease, teachers, as Snoek (2010) proposed in his classifications of teacher skills, should also be able to translate outcomes of educational research to innovations in classroom/school, and they were expected to be capable of conducting research of their own. The expectations that teachers are able to do research have been most notably realized in Finland, where student teachers from research-based teacher education programmes are active and responsive to the realities of teaching in schools since the bases of their continuing inquiries are real-life pedagogical problems (Toom, 2010).

After graduation, these Finnish teachers are seemingly more efficient in ensuring high levels of students' achievement (as evidenced in PISA) which has been the admiration of the world.

In general, teacher skills classified above, including lesson planning, class management, student assessment, communication with students as well as teachers' ability to do research inform me some of the categories in teacher skills. These categories later helped me in asking teachers about their skills in teaching as well as facilitating later data analysis.

3. Teacher ethics and moral values

Carr (2006) argued that *'any enquiry concerning the values that underpin teaching as a professional occupation is tantamount to that of what sort of person we should regard as a good teacher—or, in virtue of what practical or other qualities, capacities or dispositions we should consider teachers or teaching to be good'* (p. 171). In speaking of the importance of values, he believed *'no-one could or should be considered a good doctor, lawyer or teacher—whatever his or her degree of technical efficiency and effectiveness—who conspicuously fell short of certain fundamental moral standards and aspirations'* (p. 172). Carr's understanding on the importance of moral values for those who had been considered as professionals was similar to that of Campbell. Campbell (2003) saw the increase of awareness on the ethical dimensions and responsibilities of teaching was essential for enhancing professionalism and for improved practice (Campbell, 2000). Later, she stated that teachers were those whose roles and work been filled with ethical decisions and value commitments (Campbell, 2003). Her work, like that of

Carr and others in this chapter, is reflected in discussions on Chinese teachers' ethics and moral values in this research (See Chapter six for a full discussion).

In Evans's (2011, p. 856) conceptual framework of professionalism, there were three components concerning teachers' behavioral, intellectual and attitudinal perspectives. The attitudinal aspect related to values, perceptions and beliefs, and they informed the behavioural perspective of professionalism (Goepel, 2012, p. 495). Teacher professionalism encompassed the emotional dimensions of teaching, which Goodson (2000) argued as the *'dispositions that are necessary for effective and committed caring'*(cited from Goepel, 2012, p. 496)

The ethical and moral dimensions of teaching are important for teachers as professionals. The importance of teacher ethics and values is well agreed on and discussed by many researchers. Bullough (2011), by reviewing a set of articles on ethical and moral matters concerning teachers and teaching, found that *'nearly all the authors assume that teaching is essentially and fundamentally a moral enterprise'* (p. 27) where student-teacher relations and teacher care had played a vital part. He also claimed that it was professional ethic that was believed by researchers as being *'at the heart of teachers' disciplinary knowledge'* (p. 27). For teachers, *'knowing a discipline is not merely a matter of cognitive attainment but an ethical achievement, a matter of having embraced a set of values characteristic of preferred modes of inquiry'* (p. 27). This was largely corresponded to Carr's (2006) claim that professional ethics/values was even more important than professional knowledge and skills for its distinctiveness to tell a 'good' professional from others.

Brock (2006) and Snoek' (2010) believed teacher ethics/values shall include the following items:

1. teachers' dedication to the learning of pupils
2. teachers' awareness of being confidential/ trustworthy/ responsible to students.
3. the extent that teachers were committed to the ethical/moral code of his/ her work
4. the extent that teachers were committed to the collective teaching profession

These components have covered teachers' values and beliefs on his/her own teaching as well as their attitudes towards the whole teaching profession. They help to provide the researcher with better understanding on teacher ethics/values that are related to various perspectives of teaching.

4. Teacher autonomy

Professional autonomy has always been the key point in discussions around professionalism as it is one of the defining features for classic professions like medicine and law. Wermke and Höstfält (2014), by following Ballou (1998) believed autonomy was the *'quality or state of being self-governing'* and *'is the capacity of an agent to determine its own actions through independent choice within a system of principles and laws to which the agent is dedicated'* (p. 105, cited from Wermke & Höstfält, 2014, p. 62). Autonomy, therefore, can be interpreted in ways that practitioners can have a say in their own actions when abiding by certain regulations or laws within that profession. As teachers have their work essentially rooted in class-room teaching, autonomy in teaching profession is thus represented as *'teachers' freedom to construct a personal pedagogy which entails a balance between*

personality, training, experience and the requirements of the specific educational context' (Hoyle & John, 1995, p.92).

However, while many researchers have argued that autonomy shall be included as one critical part in teacher professionalism (Parker, 2015), the tensions between teachers as professionals in deciding teaching affairs in classrooms and teachers' dependence on school and government policies put teachers in dilemma where they have to *'balance pedagogical practice with organizational constraints dictated by others'* (Wermke & Höstfält, 2014, p.62). This tension and dilemmas are behind some teachers and teacher educators' arguments that teachers have increasing lost their voice in deciding matters relate to teaching.

In countries, for instance England and China, where the requirements of entering teaching have been regulated by governments and teachers are evaluated under standards imposed by external authorities, teachers actually don't have much autonomy, at least not much autonomy of that general sense as discussed in literature. But if seen within a school context, teacher autonomy could be analysed through three aspects: teachers' decision to influence the content of curriculum, including both compulsory and optional components; teachers' free choice of teaching methods, school text books and the basis on which pupils are grouped together; and choice of criteria for internal assessment, decisions as to whether pupils should repeat a year, and decisions regarding the content of examinations for certified qualifications (if there are such certifications) (Eurydice, 2008, p. 17).

Before the embarkment of this research, however, it is hypothesized that autonomy might not be an integral part playing a critical role in Chinese teachers' working lives, as discussed by researchers in previous sections on Chinese teacher professionalism. I will therefore have my research more focused on other components of professionalism and try to seek the possible changes in Chinese teachers' professional lives. Teacher autonomy will only be discussed when necessary.

The conceptual framework to study teacher professionalism in this research is constituted mainly by teacher knowledge, skills and ethics/values, as well as a small part about teacher autonomy. It is hoped that by examining Chinese teachers' work and lives with these identified dimensions of teacher professionalism, more understandings could be achieved regarding how Chinese teachers have understood teaching as a profession and how they have behaved as professionals with their professional knowledge, skills and ethics/values.

As my study is to explore the core contents and possible changes of Chinese teacher professionalism, where teachers' M.A experience is seen as an important stage for their professional development, an examination on literature of professionalism in general and teacher professionalism in specific is of vital importance. Together with previous works on teacher education, knowledge on professionalism has been one of the conceptual foundations for this research.

2.3 Professional identity and teachers' professional lives

2.3.1 Professional identity

Together with professionalism, a key concept closely associated with studies of teachers' working lives is professional identity. Researchers differ in their ways of conceptualizing professional identity (Beijaard et al., 2004). Despite all the differences, however, researchers tend to agree on its importance as an element of professionalism and that it is both socially and individually constructed.

According to Sachs (2001), professional identity is a set of attributes and values that distinguishes the expertise of teachers from other workers. '*These attributes and values denote what it means to be a teacher and the type of teacher that teachers aspire to be'* (Sachs, 2001, p. 154). These understandings resonate with Flores and Day's (2006) claim that *'identity is an ongoing and dynamic process which entails the making sense and (re)interpretation of one's own values and experiences'* (p. 220). Professional identity, therefore, at its core, is constructed from a cluster of values which help teachers make sense of their professionalism.

Besides the importance of value, another point frequently discussed is the multiple influences that affect the development of identity. Being both socially and individually constructed, professional identity is *'viewed as the means by which teachers negotiate and reflect on the socially situated aspects of their role, where individual reflection and social communication with others is seen to be pivotal…'* (O'Connor, 2008, p. 118); it is one way to portray *'how teachers see themselves base on their interpretations of their continuing interaction with their context'* (Canrinus et al., 2011, p. 594); and *'a result of*

the interaction among aspects or elements of the teacher as a person and the teacher as a professional at a given moment' (Pillen et. al., 2013, p. 87). Both external (policy) and internal (organisational) factors, as well as teachers' personal experiences, past and present shape identities (Day et al, 2006). Professional identity, therefore, is a product of interactions among multiple possible elements including contexts, colleagues, teachers' knowledge, skills, educational attitudes, teachers' personal characteristics, learning history, prior experiences and beliefs (Pillen et. al., 2013).

However, identities may change as the political, social, institutional and personal circumstances inevitably change (Day et al, 2006). Thus *'professional identity is not a stable product, but rather a continually changing, active, and on-going process'* (Pillen et. al., 2013, p. 87). Professional identity, then, like professionalism, is not a static and fixed concept.

In this sense, teacher professionalism and professional identity are to a very large extent interrelated. For besides personal histories, teachers make sense of themselves as teachers partly through their perceptions of the extent to which they feel confident in their professional knowledge, skills, values or/and abilities to exercise controls in teaching, all of which are integral part constituting teacher professionalism as discussed earlier.

While the extent that professionalism and professional identity relates to each is not the primary focus of this research, it is important here to clarify the reason as why the current study is located in the domain of teacher professionalism rather than professional identity. Professional identity involves a set of beliefs and values and through identities teachers make sense of who they are. A read through literature made me realize that it was the concept of

teacher professionalism that best fitted for the purpose of this research. This study is primarily looking for what has been the core that making Chinese teachers as professionals and what are the possible changes in teachers in regard to their understanding in teaching/being a teacher. The focus of this research is, therefore, neither how teachers develop understandings of their roles as teachers within the community nor how their roles as teachers differ from other occupations. More detailed discussions will be presented in chapter six.

2.3.2 Teachers' professional lives

This research explored Chinese teacher professionalism by closely examining a group of sixteen Chinese teachers' working lives, and so a brief study on teachers' professional lives in general is needed here to provide a broader international perspective.

Decades ago, Huberman (1993), by drawing lessons from previous research and by conducting research of his own of more than 300 secondary school teachers in Switzerland, found that there were shared patterns. He identified 16 groups with teaching experience ranging from five to 40 years, Huberman then moved on to propose *'common itineraries'* among teachers. These were phases that teachers had experienced through their years of teaching experience. Huberman thus provided the possibilities to study teachers' careers with phases or stages associated with years of teaching.

In later research, Day and Gu (2010) extended Huberman's research with an analysis of teachers' work, lives and effectiveness. The research challenged Huberman's claim that teachers' *'professional career journeys are not…predictable or identical'* (Huberman, 1993, p. 264), and identified

'distinctive phases over the course in teachers' professional lives where groups of teachers demonstrated similar professional needs and concerns and characteristics of professional identity' (Day and Gu, 2010, p. 47). Six professional phases were identified, which have influenced participant selection in this research.

As with professionalism and professional identity, teachers' professional lives are closely related to the policy change realities of teaching (Day & Gu, 2010). By reflecting on recent fifteen years of changing policies in the US, Lasky (2012) observed serial changes in teachers' work. Among these were changes in teaching materials, emphasis of teaching (for instance, shifting from the notion of student learning to standards achieving) and the way teachers taught (tended to be more outcome focused). Similarly, arguing from a European perspective, Flores (2012) believed the changing discourse of educational reform on teacher accountability and school performativity had made significant influence on the realities of teachers' work. While social and policy changes are somewhat distant from everyday school life and it may take time for their influence to reach teachers in individual, schools as the immediate workplace that teachers reside have mattered *'enormously'* in affecting teachers' professional lives, especially to those who are in their early career stage (Day & Gu, 2010, p. 82).

In identifying teachers' professional life phases, both Huberman (1993) and Day et al (2007) highlighted the vital importance that policy, school environments and personal factors played in teachers' working lives. The support that teachers receive in schools, professional or personal; the relationship that teachers build with colleagues, close or distant; the activities

or cooperation with which teachers engage within their school context all more or less affect teachers' lives by staying in the profession. Also, different circumstances of schools, some of which may be schools in disadvantaged or challenging circumstances, also make a difference to teachers' working lives (Thomson, 2012). Thus, teachers' working lives cannot be fully understood without considering the economic, cultural and social situations in which they are played out.

Last but not least, besides external factors that influence teachers' lives—the political, social, school context, teachers' own values and aspirations also have an important place in shaping the everyday work of teaching (Flores, 2012). The understanding of teachers' professional lives, therefore, requires a close '*examination of the multiple contexts in which teachers work and live and the critical influences that affect the character and quality of their professional and personal wellbeing'* (Day & Gu, 2010, p. 63). In other words, to study teachers, one must not only consider influences that teachers receive outside and within their work places but also how *'these interact and are managed in conjunction with events and experiences in personal lives'* (p. 63). The influence that Chinese teachers experienced will be discussed in detail in later finding and discussion chapters.

Summary

While great efforts have been made to study teachers' professionalism, many of these have been set in Western contexts. Compared to research in the West, especially those conducted in English-speaking countries, research on Chinese teacher professionalism barely occupies any space in the research landscape.

Studies in the West have proposed clear dimensions of teacher professionalism, as discussed earlier, and have constantly laid their focus on, for instance, teachers' autonomy and accountability as key components; however, it is not yet clear if these discussions also fit within a Chinese context and, if so, what aspects of western views on teacher professionalism can be applied to Chinese teachers who have different social-cultural histories. One of the key issues for this research, therefore, is the necessity to frame the study of teacher professionalism in the Chinese cultural context, whilst drawing lessons from western literature.

The international literature helped to conceptualize the current research by bridging the West-East knowledge gap. However, before determining the research design and field work, there are some philosophical issues to be made clearer as they are the overarching principles to guide any research in its initial stage.

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with the philosophical and methodological issues underpinning the study. Three different philosophical paradigms, the positivist paradigm, interpretivist paradigm and critical paradigm, will be discussed from an ontological, epistemological and methodological perspective. Qualitative methodology will be elaborated on. The reasons for choosing the qualitative interview as a method of data collection are presented, as well as the criteria applied in selecting the settings and participants. The process of data analysis gives a clear illustration of how data has been extracted step by step before any pattern has been generated. After this, the researcher will deal with issues emerging from the research process, including researcher's role, validity and ethical issues.

3.2 Philosophical underpinning

To begin a study, a researcher first needs to clarify his own philosophical position, both ontologically and epistemologically. This is because methods in social research are not neutral but are closely linked to the way in which researchers find meanings among different views concerning the nature of the world. In other words, how researchers see social reality being constructed affects how a subject is studied and understood (Bryman, 2012). A philosophical study is not optional but a theme must be discovered before a researcher can move on to other work; it serves as a guiding principle and lays the foundation for researchers to choose appropriate methodologies (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

3.2.1 Ontology

Ontology starts with the question of how social reality has been perceived and understood by people (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). It involves the thinking and discussion on the form and nature of reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Blaikie (2000) provided a definition which pinpointed the very basis for many ontological discussions, that ontology is a sum of *'claims and assumptions that are made about the nature of social reality, claims about what exists, what it looks like, what units make it up and how these units interact with each other. In short, ontological assumptions are concerned with what we believe constitutes social reality'* (p. 8). Given the complexity of social entities, great divisions are expected to be found as to how to understand the world around us. The key point in ontology, therefore, concerns peoples' views on whether social reality is objective entities existing independently of social actors as an external reality or whether social reality is constructions *'built up from perceptions and actions of social actors'* (Bryman, 2012, p. 32). These two divisions, with the former termed as objectivism and the later as constructionism, can have a direct impact on the chosen research methodologies to be explained later.

With objectivism, the social phenomena which make up everyday life are believed beyond the influence of human actions and perceptions. The constructions of society, the ways that different parts of the world function and interact, have all followed standardised procedures to which people have to conform. Objectivism has made a great impact on the field of learning and teaching with various assumptions including 1) the human mind processes abstract symbols in a computer-like fashion; 2) human thought is

symbol-manipulation and is independent of the human organism; and 3) the meaning of the world exists objectively, independent of the human mind and is external to the knower (Lakoff, p.158 as cited from Vrasidas, 2000, p.340). While objectivism has asserted its significance in helping people to understand the world in general and education specifically, constructionism has provided an alternative way to conceptualise our social surroundings.

Constructionism is an ontological position that *'asserts social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision'* (Bryman, 2016, p.29). Constructionism, therefore, implies that social entities are not external of individual people, that knowledge is not independent of learners but is constructed (Vrasidas, 2000). In education, this ontological stance treats learning as an active process in which not only are learners engaged but it also involves consideration of the learning context as well as support from instructors.

In social research, the ontological position which one takes will have a direct influence on the later design as well as the implementation of research. However, ontology mainly deals with the 'What' questions concerning the knowledge of the world; we have to ask 'How' people can access the knowledge. This leads us to another key building block of research —epistemology.

3.2.2 Epistemology

Epistemology starts with the question of what and how can people know about social reality. To answer this question, one must rethink one's own ontological position (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Blaikie (2000) defined epistemology as *'the possible ways of gaining knowledge of social reality, whatever it is understood to be. In short, claims about how what is assumed to exist can be known'* (p. 8). Epistemology, as defined by Blaikie, is essentially about both what can be known and how to know. Bryman (2012) claimed that in social science, the central issue concerning epistemology was whether principles and methods applied in natural science should also be made available to social science research. Regarding this issue, two divisions of epistemology are revealed: positivism and interpretivism.

Positivism is the epistemological position which *'advocates the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the study of social reality and beyond'* (Bryman, 2012, p. 28). By applying scientific methods which are featured with rigour and standards in learning social reality, positivism views reality as objective and tangible and focuses on the *general, average and representative* side of social actions to reach *statistical generalisation and prediction* (Decrop, 1999,p.157). A positivist ontology upholds principles in both a deductive and inductive approach; it emphasises the way of carrying out research as value free and draws the line between theory and research (Bryman, 2012). However, the subjective side of social reality differs from the objective nature of the world, and positivism in this sense might not be compatible with research in learning social activities. In this regard, interpretivism, in contrast

to positivism, provides an alternative choice for researchers on which to base their epistemological stance.

Interpretivism requires *'respect on the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences'* and *'social scientists shall grasp the subjective meaning of social action'* (Bryman, 2012, p. 30). Interpretivism places emphasis on the subjective meanings generated by the people and institutions that construct the social reality. Unlike findings from the natural sciences which are both replicable and testable, the subjective meanings formed of human activities cannot be tested by scientific standards or brought for scientific verification. The interpretation of human action, which is affected by variables like cultural systems, is case-particular (Roth & Mehta, 2002).

In general, positivism and interpretivism are two epistemological positions that denote differences in conducting research. With positivism, researchers look to '*identify those details with propositions that then can be tested or identified in other cases…while interpretive work seeks to combine those details into systems of belief whose manifestations are specific to a case* (Lin, 1998, p. 163).

3.2.3 Methodology

Closely following ontological and epistemological issues are methodological issues which start with the questions of: '*in what ways can a social researcher find out what he/she believes can be known'*. Answers to this question are constrained by one's ontological and epistemological position (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

Grix (2002) claimed methodology concerning *the logic of scientific inquiry; in particular with investigating the potentialities and limitations of particular techniques or procedures* (p. 179). Schwandt (2001) referred to methodology as *'the analysis of the assumptions, principles, and procedures in a particular approach to inquiry'* (p.161). Methodology is therefore essentially related to the solving of inquiries.

Following a logical sequence, methodology, by following the ontological position on what is to be known and the epistemological position on what and how information can be known, is about how researchers can acquire knowledge. To acquire knowledge, one of the most persistent arguments within the domain of methodology is the dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative research - the researcher will discuss the divisions later.

3.2.4 Relationship of ontology, epistemology and methodology

In this research, the ontological stance taken is that social reality is mediated by human sense, that reality emerges when consciousness engages with objects which are already rich in meaning (Crotty, 1998). The social phenomena to be studied here — Chinese teachers' ways of thinking and behaving as professionals, instead of being beyond the reach of human influence as proposed by objectivism ontology, is closely related to and shaped by teachers' communication with their surroundings. Teachers' professional lives are therefore subjectively constructed by individual teachers.

With an ontological position admitting the subjectivity of social reality, the epistemological stance followed is that knowledge has been culturally derived and historically situated. When knowledge is believed to be

constructed in and out of interaction between humans and their world and is developed and transmitted in a social context (Crotty, 1998), a better understanding on Chinese teachers' professional lives can only be achieved by considering various factors (social, cultural, personal and contextual) affecting teachers in their work. When the various factors are to be studied and teachers participating to be treated as the writers of their own history, methodology adopted for this research enables *'the participants to make meanings of their own reality and to come to appreciate their own construction of knowledge through practice'* (Tuli, 2010, p. 101-102).

Ontology, epistemology and methodology are closely interrelated in *'such a way that the answer given to any one question, taken in any order, constrains how the others may be answered'* (Guba & Lincoln 1994, p. 108). That is, how one views the construction of social reality (ontological assumptions) informs what one can know about social reality (epistemological assumptions), and ways he chooses to find out what he thinks should be known (methodological issues) are logically following his views on both the nature of the world and knowledge (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Grix, 2002). The relationship of ontology, epistemology and methodology underpinning this study not only clears the philosophical arguments that have to be solved for every Ph.D study but helps to locate the current research into the paradigm which to be discussed in the following section.

3.2.5 Paradigm

Guba and Lincoln (1994) defined a paradigm as *'a set of basic beliefs (or metaphysics) that deals with ultimates or first principles'*(p. 107) . For them, a paradigm held a *'worldview'* for its holders to see the nature of the world and

possible relationships between individuals and the world. Bodgan and Biklin (1998) simply put a paradigm as *'a loose collection of logically related assumptions, concepts or propositions that orient thinking and research'* (p. 22).

Some of the literature offers three different paradigms: the positivist paradigm, interpretivist paradigm and critical paradigm (Mack, 2010; Scotland, 2012).

The positivist paradigm could also be named as the scientific paradigm. As the word 'scientific' suggests, characteristics of this paradigm include the use of scientific methods as those applied in natural science, an analysis based on accurate statistics and a generalisation of research findings (Mack, 2010). The ontological assumptions underlying the positivist paradigm are that reality and objects exist independently of the researchers, they can be captured by human sense and be predicted; the epistemological assumptions are that researchers, and those that are being researched, are independent of each, meaning that they rest solely on *'a set of firm, unquestionable, (and) indisputable truths'*(Mack, 2010, p.7). It is the researcher's responsibility to find meanings from such an objective reality. For methodology, since positivists aim to *'formulate laws, thus yielding a basis for prediction and generalization'* (Scotland, 2012, p. 10), quantitative data are often generated from methods like standardised tests, and close-ended questionnaires etc. (Pring, 2000a). However, it is difficult to apply a positivist paradigm to social research because whenever a certain social reality has been constructed, there are so many variables whose influence on both events and peoples' actions, could not be ignored. As Mack (2010) put it *'it is impossible for any theory in*

social science to be simple and precise and…… it is impossible to determine an absolute truth' (p.7).

The second paradigm, the interpretivist paradigm, has been formed as an 'anti-positivist' or an alternative paradigm; it is also referred to as constructivism for its emphasis on individual's capability to construct meaning from the subjective perspective of research participants which is opposite to the positivist paradigm that finds meaning solely from objective reality. The main ontological assumptions of interpretivism include: reality is socially and individually constructed and events are not subjected to generalisation. Correspondingly, interpretivists believe that knowledge is gained through personal experience based on varied contexts. Knowledge is not gained deductively for the test of a theory but inductively to create a theory (Mack, 2010). Using the interpretivist paradigm, the role of a researcher is to *'understand, explain, and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants'* (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 19). The methodology adopted by interpretivists is to get a deep understanding of a particular reality from a personal perspective which is under the influence of a changing historical and social context (Creswell, 2009). Case study, open-ended interviews and observations are among the tools used to achieve such a purpose.

The last one is the critical paradigm. Its ontological assumptions are that *'reality has been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic and gender values'* (Scotland, 2012, p. 13), all of which are manifestations of power relations within a society. Accordingly, its epistemological stance can be explained as *'what counts as knowledge is determined by the social and positional power of the advocates of that knowledge'* (Cohen et al., 2009, p.

27). The critical paradigm tries to address the issue of social justice and marginalisation. If applied to the educational field, it means the understanding of what is happening in schools is not enough and more should be done to make a change (Mack, 2010). Critical discourse analysis is one of the methodologies developed under the critical paradigm. In critical discourse analysis, language is seen as a reflection of social practice where social and political domination have been reproduced in text and talk is examined. Other methods derived from the critical paradigm are similar to that of the interpretivist paradigm, including open-ended interviews, focus groups etc.

In sum, the emphasis of the positivist paradigm is on the generalisability of research findings; the emphasis of the interpretivist paradigm is on the understanding of complex social meanings; and the emphasis of the critical paradigm is on emancipation from social oppression (Scotland, 2012).

As the present study places its emphasis on sense making through teachers' words, the researcher therefore chose to follow the interpretivist paradigm. The current study aims to arrive at a deeper understanding of the formation and development of Chinese teachers' sense of professionalism by collecting data from teachers with different teaching experiences and personal backgrounds. This study therefore neither seeks to explore an 'absolute truth' for prediction/ generalisation across all teachers, nor does it try to address inequality in schools resulting from political and economic decisions and to provoke change (though political and economic factors will be discussed when educational policy is analyzed, they are not the key points in this study but for the better understanding of school reality).

As discussed earlier, the researcher believes social reality is constructed subjectively through individual's different understanding and interpretation of the world. This ontological perspective enabled participants of different teaching experiences in this study to offer their understanding from their own positions, understanding that was derived from their personal experiences and background and can hardly be predicted and generated. Informed by this ontological position, the researcher sees knowledge as that which is gained through an individual's living experience based on different social contexts, thus interpretations from different participants helped to contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of teacher professionalism in a Chinese context. In terms of methodology and methods, instead of the standard quantitative measuring tools which are widely applied in natural science, the researcher's ontological and epistemological position have led to the adoption of a qualitative approach which will be further explained in the following section.

3.3 Qualitative Methodology

This section discusses research methodology which, as Cohen (2011) notes, should follow logically for both the purpose of research and the researcher's philosophical stance. A key factor of research is the choice of methodology and later, the methods for data collection and analysis. These serve as a foundation for the whole study.

3.3.1 Quantitative research versus qualitative research

Within methodology, although the distinction between qualitative and quantitative research has been criticised for its over-simplification (Wood & Welch, 2010), the two terms continue to be employed by many researchers since the distinction *'represents a useful means of classifying different methods of social research'* (Bryman, 2012, p. 35).

Quantitative research in social science is carried out on the basis of collecting and analysing numerical data for the identification and explanation of pattern and orders (Newby, 2010, p. 95). Its assumptions that social reality is as observable and measurable as the way an object is treated in natural science, state that quantitative research falls under the positivist paradigm. Because quantitative research follows the scientific mode applied in natural science, the procedures of quantitative research are therefore supposed to be replicable and the findings to be verifiable and generalizable. Followed by a deduction process, quantitative research often starts with a hypothesis. Newby (2010) even claimed that the search for proof of a hypothesis '*lies at the heart of quantitative research'* (p. 96). After the testing of the hypothesis (either proofing or rejecting), a theory is expected to be generated, '*a theory that is truths about behaviour and relationship and is applicable in a range of situations'* (p. 95). In general, reproducibility and generalisability are key to both the procedures and findings of quantitative research.

Qualitative research studies social meanings like how people choose to live, what they have experienced and their feelings as well as various factors associated with people's conditions (Newby, 2010). The interpretivist paradigm underpins qualitative research which believes the world is

constructed out of human interactions and *'stresses to understand the social world through an examination of the interpretation of that world by its participants'* (Bryman, 2012, p. 380). Unlike quantitative research which generates theory through deduction, qualitative research adopts an inductive way of connecting theory to research. Without a pre-set hypothesis, the induction process allows qualitative research to combine data of different types and different sources based on which a holistic view on the researchable issue is presented before any conclusion has been reached. This holistic approach, according to Newby (2010), is a true strength of the qualitative strategy applied to research.

Instead of insisting on a single truth like those to be tested in quantitative research, the conclusion that qualitative research reaches has concerned and reflected the complexity of social reality. The social meanings to be studied using a qualitative strategy are closely associated with people's perceptions, emotions, values and behaviours, all of which have been subject to various influences and may also lead to different consequences. When the world is seen as constructed from people's interactions, it is important to realise that *'there is no single rationality that determines the way people behave*' (Newby, 2010, p. 119), for everyone is affecting and has also been affected by other players who make up the entire social entity.

While both quantitative and qualitative research strategies have received criticism (to be discussed later), together they help researchers to understand the world in its tangible form as well as the meanings connected with intangible social reality. In general, the differences between qualitative and quantitative research can be explained by using three dimensions:

quantitative research is deductive and aims at the testing of a theory while qualitative research is inductive, aiming at the generating of a theory; the **ontological orientation** of quantitative research is objectivism whereas that of qualitative research is constructionism; the **epistemological orientation** of quantitative research is positivism while that of qualitative research is interpretivism (Bryman, 2012). Given the differences between these two approaches and the nature of this present study, the researcher has adopted a qualitative strategy to explore teachers' working lives against a complex social background where cultural, policy, economic and educational conditions have intertwined.

3.3.2 Rationale for the use of qualitative methodology in this research

Following an interpretivist paradigm, the present study intends to provide a better understanding of teachers' professional lives by collecting data from different people based on their own living experiences, all of which are specifically context-based. In this regard, quantitative research, which are criticised for its placing social life independent of people's lives and its failure to distinguish people and social actions from the nature world, does not go well with the methodological principles which underpin the current research. In other words, the emphasis of quantitative research on the standardisation and reproduction of the research process as well as on the '*seeking of causal determination, prediction and generalisation of findings'* (Hoepfl, 1997, p. 2) does not fit the kind of educational research which is carried out with the consideration of the '*richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and*

disjunctions of the social world in general and of the educational world specifically' (Cohen et al., 2011)

Qualitative research, on the other hand, instead of dissociating researchable issues from their contexts, has its emphasis on the *'wholeness and detailed connections between social worlds, emotional and cognitive process'* (Newby, 2010, p.116). A qualitative approach enables researchers to *'study things in their natural settings…to make sense of, or to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'* (Denzin, & Lincoln, 2011, p.3). In general, a qualitative strategy provides researchers with the tools to see and explore connections between social actions with certain flexibilities, which result from a variety of ways to interpret social meanings.

The present study investigates Chinese teacher professionalism by studying a group of sixteen teachers who had graduated from a full-time Master of Education programme starting from 2009. All important elements making up this research carried with them specific meanings which cannot be generalised or standardised. Among these elements was the Chinese context, teacher graduates of Ed.M., teachers' former experiences before master's study and finally, teachers' work and lives after returning to/entering teaching.

Teacher participants' understanding and perceptions of teaching offered insight into their sense of professionalism, which had been formed by a Chinese context in a broader sense and by their teaching/learning experiences specifically through different stages. Qualitative research studies people in their natural settings, which implies that all the factors related to people were taken into consideration in the research. These factors, by interacting, mediating and influencing each other, had all helped to shape who these people

were, why they were acting in certain ways and how to understand their perceptions and behaviours given the specific condition. In this study, each teacher's interpretation of her/his working life was person-directed and case specific; their interpretation blended the influence which society had on the teacher, the school where s/he had been working, his/her background and a lot more before s/he came up with her/his own ideas of the meanings of teaching and being a teacher.

There must be similarities as well as differences among teachers as to how they understood teaching and how they taught. These similarities and differences resulted from different social situations experienced by teachers, including different teaching experiences or/and the different schools they had been working for. The qualitative research allowed inquiry about teachers to move naturally with its emphasis on social connections. The similarities and differences among teachers later served as evidence to help draw a nuanced understanding of teacher professionalism. In other words, this research did not intend to test theories as quantitative research does but to provide an insight into teacher professionalism by careful examination of the participant teachers' talking accounts, which were socially situated and context-dependent. The interpretation of Chinese teacher professionalism was not the only 'truth' applicable to any situation but was a result subject to negotiations and to which other conditions may apply.

To carry out the present study I adopted a qualitative approach for its wholeness and flexibility in order to take account of teachers' interpretations and perceptions that later form the very basis of the data analysis. However,

qualitative research has also been long criticised in that it is difficult to replicate and that its findings are not easily generalised (Bryman, 2012).

Due to standardised procedures, the replication of a quantitative study is more achievable; however, '*it is almost impossible to conduct a true replication'* of a qualitative study (Bryman, 2012, p. 405). The critique on the difficulty of replicating qualitative research falls on the reliance of a qualitative study upon the researcher's own decisions. With qualitative study, the researcher herself/himself has heavy involvement in the process: s/he decides what to observe/ask/hear and which is more important; the interpretation of data might be subject to the influence of a researcher's personal biography and may carry with it the researcher's bias. Given the influence that a researcher may have on a qualitative study, the qualitative approach has been criticised for its subjectivity.

Beside the critique, there is another reason that makes the replication of findings from qualitative research hard to realise—the context-related feature of a qualitative study that involves a variety of factors that come into play with change. Changes are constant, either in society as a whole, or within institutions where people work and live (like the schools where teachers had been teaching in this research) or changes may take place individually. In this sense, the social meanings—people's perceptions, behaviours, feelings, relationships—in a qualitative study, may alter given changes in time and context. A qualitative study conducted in the past, which had been set against specific conditions, was therefore might not be applicable to later studies; and even though the social meanings, in most ideal cases, did stay as they were in previous research, different researchers (or even the same researchers) may still

come up with different conclusions because of the subjectivity in qualitative research.

The context-related feature also contributes to another critique of qualitative research—the difficulty of generalising its findings. Limited by numbers of participants and specific contexts, findings from qualitative research are questioned for its generality in applying findings to other cases. However, as stated earlier, qualitative research neither intends to generate a theory nor to test a hypothesis, it is to study the complex meanings which emerge among social entities. By studying meanings, *'it is the quality of the theoretical inferences that are made out of qualitative data that is crucial to the assessment of generalization…'* (Mitchell, 1983, cited from Bryman, 2012, p.399).

Quantitative or qualitative, it is difficult to argue which kind of research is better with their merits and limitations, but the researcher can decide on that which is more appropriate in helping to achieve the aim of the research. For the present study, a qualitative approach allows me to dive deeper into participants' perceptions of their Ed.M. experiences at the university, as well as of their teaching practice at local schools. Teachers and student teachers had brought their own perceptions to the master's course, and some of the perceptions had been re-shaped by their later learning and teaching. These perceptions, or in other words, these interpretations of teachers of their working lives, could never be torn apart from the life they lived, the place they taught and the cultural legacy they had inherited. It is the nature of the present study—an inquiry into meanings developed by teachers—that requires a qualitative strategy as the research approach for the present study.

While qualitative research is an overarching term under which there are various research approaches, this study shares some features of one of these approaches—ethnography.

Ethnography is where *'the ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions…collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned'* (Flick, 2002, p. 146).

By continuing to engage with participants over a lengthy period of time, the ethnographic researcher gains a closer understanding of knowledge that is produced within a society or in a community or in a specific cultural context. The notion of culture is central to ethnographic research (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999; Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989; Wolcott, 1999). Though there is no consensus on the definition of culture itself, in general, it is believed to be a sum of attitudes, knowledge, values and beliefs that influence the behaviour of a particular group of people. In other words, how people think and behave has been *'shaped by their shared experiences and interpretations within that group'* (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 267). The purpose of ethnographic research, therefore, is to '*provide a **thick description** of the situation, to capture the full complexity of the nuances in interactions, cultural practices, and beliefs of that group'* (p. 268).

Thick description here, which Merriam (2009) believed was the heart of ethnography, refers to a *'richly detailed description'* that has been '*intensively developed through a specific cultural context to produce extensive data'* (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 268). The requirement for the extensiveness of

data is key to understand the complexity of culture-embedded phenomena (Merriam, 2009). Using thick description, ethnographic research follows the principles underlying qualitative research: being descriptive instead of predictive, inductive instead of deductive, developing a theory instead of testing one, subjective in nature rather than objective. The aim of the instruments used in ethnography, including observation, interviews and other verbal or visual data, is therefore to record the behaviour and perceptions of a social group in its real-life setting. These records carry with them social structures, patterns and regularities to be revealed in later analysis, based on which knowledge of a particular group of people will be formed or restored.

Whilst the present research draws upon ethnographic approaches, it does not fulfill the requirements of sustained researcher presence in the field of study. **This research, therefore, is not ethnographic, where participatory observation plays a vital part in data collection.** This study has investigated teachers' professional lives—their learning and working experiences—which had spanned three periods: before enrolment in Ed.M, the period that teachers were enrolled in the Ed.M and for two years after their graduation from Ed.M. I was unable to participate in their teaching lives, nor could I observe their learning, teaching and interactions within their work environments. However, by taking into consideration of Chinese social, cultural and educational context, the research aims to provide a nuanced understanding of teachers' working lives in specific Chinese contexts.

The investigation of teachers' reports of their learning and teaching experiences over the years gave insights into what had, for them, constituted the core of Chinese teacher professionalism as well as possible changes in their

sense of professionalism regarding the different stages which they had gone through (before, during and after Ed.M). The research attempts to elicit *'socio-cultural knowledge from participants and provide a portrayal and explanation of social groups and situations in their real-life contexts'* (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 222-223).

The focus of this study is to understand social meanings (teachers' professional lives) developed in specific cultural contexts (within the national Chinese cultural context). The relatively long time that the researcher engaged with interviewees, as well as the detailed descriptions of teachers' working lives generated by three rounds of qualitative interviews (to be discussed in the next section), shared some similarities of ethnographic research.

3.4 Research Methods: qualitative interview

While the previous sections discussed principles underlying this research, this section will provide an outline of how the current research had been carried out step by step. Starting with the introduction of qualitative interview, the researcher clarifies the choice of a particular research method which fits the present study.

The researcher chose interviews as the method for data collection. As one of the most widely used methods in social research, Kavle (1996) defined interview as the '*interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest'* (p. 4) . By connecting interviews more closely with research, Cannell and Kahn (1968) regarded an interview as *'a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused by him or her on content specified*

by the research objectives of systematic description, prediction, or explanation'(p. 530). Interview, therefore, by *'seeing the centrality of human interaction for knowledge production and emphasising the social situatedness of research data'* (Kvale,1996, p. 4), aims to obtain information for the researcher when he does not have direct observation of the behaviours, intentions or feelings of those to be interviewed (Merriam, 2009)

According to Woods (1986), an interview involves three elements in order to make it work: a trust built between interviewer and interviewee, the researcher's curiosity in learning and discovering, and the naturalness to be achieved where bias held by the researcher shall be minimised. These three elements encompass the motive (curiosity), premise (trust-building) and principle (restraining subjectivity) of interviews used in both qualitative and quantitative research.

Similar to the differences between qualitative research and quantitative research, qualitative interviewing can be distinguished from quantitative interviewing in a number of ways. As qualitative research follows the interpretivist paradigm, the present study naturally adopts the qualitative interview for data collection. Unlike quantitative interviewing, which is strictly structured, deals with numbers/objective facts and is expected to yield findings with statistical meaning in relation to a pre-set hypothesis; the qualitative interview is carried out to collect life stories in the form of words. Instead of being too pre-structured, the qualitative interview *'adopts a deliberate openness to new data and phenomena'* and *'accepts the ambiguity, contradiction…and changes'* in participants by trying to engage and

understand participants' living experiences in their natural setting (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 414).

The application of interview in research, according to Kvale (1996), '*marks a move away from seeing human subjects as simply manipulable and data as somehow external to individual…but generated between humans'* (cited from Cohen et al., 2011, p. 409). The emphasis on human interactions and connections of qualitative interview *'enable(s) participants (interviewers or interviewees) to discuss their interpretations of the world……and to express how they regard their situations from their own point of view'* (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 349). The qualitative interview in this sense corresponds to the researcher's philosophical stance, which ontologically sees social reality as being constructed subjectively by the individual and, epistemologically, knowledge should be obtained through the interpretations based on the personal living experience in a different social context. To probe the mind of teacher graduates in Ed.M. for their understanding of teaching and being a teacher, and to see beyond what had already been presented from their verbal account, a qualitative interview was a suitable choice for the present research.

While interview had been decided as the tool for data collection, the immediate question was: Which kind of interview can provide data most helpfully to achieve the purpose of this study?

3.4.1 The choice of semi-structured interview

Three of the most commonly seen interviews in qualitative research are the highly structured/standardized interview, the semi-structured interview and the unstructured/informal interview, which correspond to the categories of interviews proposed by Cohen et al. (2011) as the standardised open-ended

interview, the interview guide approach and the informal conversational interview (p.413).

The standardised interview features a fixed sequence of wording and questions to be asked, both of which are determined in advance. The most structured interview, argued by Merriam (2009), *'is actually an oral form of a written survey'* (p. 90) where the influence of the interviewer has been minimised. Because of its highly standardised structure, this kind of interview has been criticised for its rigidity that constrains and limits the possibility of understanding participants' perceptions of real life circumstances. The lack of flexibility of the standardised interview makes it difficult to explore the individual's speciality. To achieve certain flexibility, the semi-structured interview provides an alternative.

A semi-structured interview is where interviewers have a list of pre-designed questions or topics but which will not be asked in exactly the same words or same order as prescribed for an interview. Besides, questions which are not on the list will be asked as the interviewers pick up interesting themes from what the interviewees have already said (Bryman, 2012). The flexibility of a semi-structured interview allows for individual variation by not strictly following the order of pre-fixed questions. It therefore makes the data collected more systematic and specific to each participant. However, the flexibility of the interviewer to adjust the sequence of wording and questions is believed to reduce the possibility of making comparisons among participants. The lack of comparability resulting from a lack of standardised structure is even more evident in the unstructured/informal interview, which is more *in situ* compared to the previous two types of interviews.

The informal interview, as the name suggests, is conducted in a rather loose and conversational way. It is used when the researcher cannot ask relevant questions due to the lack of enough knowledge on a particular phenomenon, usually in the primary stage of research (Merriam, 2009). With neither pre-determined wording nor questions, the interviewer asks his/her questions based on the immediate context, making the interview well matched to each participant and the specific conditions. The great flexibility poses considerable difficulty in later data analysis, for interviewers *'may feel lost in a sea of divergent viewpoints and seemingly unconnected pieces of information'* (Merriam, 2009, p. 91).

Depending on the stages and purpose of the interview, interviews of different types can be used either independently or in combination to provide a comprehensive insight into the research issue (Merriam, 2009). For the present study, I have used the semi-structured interview as the tool for data collection.

The aim of the current research is to extract participants' perceptions and understanding of teaching. There was a considerable difference among teachers in this research, which included their varied learning/ teaching experience, workplace and personal background. A highly structured interview, with standardised wording and questions, left little room for obtaining information that was case specific or/and individual oriented. As the variation among teachers served as an important clue for their similar/different perceptions and beliefs, interviews with flexibility were required.

By considering the difference among teachers, semi-structured interviews were more appropriate than unstructured informal interviews. Except for the difficulty of handling unstructured interviews for a new

researcher like me, what really mattered was that I had already decided the question topics and knew in general what was expected from the interviewees before the conduction of this study.

To sum up, a semi-structured interview allowed me to both capture the differences among teachers and to process the interview to move in a more organised and systemic manner.

3.4.2 Developing interview questions

Questions asked in interviews shall reflect the purpose of the research. The information extracted from interviews would later serve as the basis for the understanding of researchable issues. The purposes of the present research are to explore Chinese teacher professionalism and to examine possible teacher change. Interview questions for this research, therefore, had been developed by following both the identified dimensions of teacher professionalism as presented in the literature review as well as inquiries for detecting teacher change.

Questions connected to teacher professionalism — teacher knowledge, skill, ethics — had taken a significant role in all the interview rounds. For instance, the first round of interview for in-service teachers — where teachers had been asked to recall their M.A. experience as well as past teaching experience — consisted of seven parts. Among the seven, three parts asked teachers about what knowledge/skill they had acquired from basic/professional/selective courses in a rather general sense. In the rest four parts, except for relatively broad questions like how teachers understood teaching as a profession and what knowledge/skill/ethics teachers believed to be important in teaching, other questions were asked in a rather more specific

manner to examine if teachers had acquired or developed certain knowledge/skill/ethics from Ed.M., based on teacher knowledge/skill/ethics identified from the literature. In the second and third round of the interview, questions were asked in terms of if, what and how the knowledge/skill/ethics that teachers had acquired from Ed.M. were relevant to teaching and what knowledge/skill/ethics teachers believed to be important or as seen to be necessary.

While questions about teachers' professional knowledge/skill/ethics had run through all three rounds of interviews, inquiries on teacher change mainly began from the second round and continued to the third round. The reason was simple, the first round mainly dealt with teachers' past learning/working experience, while teachers' change could only be detected after their return to teaching. The second and third round covered the teachers' working period from the time they returned to teach until the day they were interviewed.

Inquiries about teacher change could be partly answered by questions on teacher knowledge/skill/ethics. These questions were asked in different rounds of interview to extract teachers' understanding in different periods (before, during and after M.A). Other questions to examine teacher change included asking teachers' understanding of teaching and of the role of being a teacher, which appeared in all three rounds of interview; also challenges and teachers' expectations of teaching, which were asked in both the second and third round; and factors which influenced teachers' working lives after their graduation (educational policy, school context). Questions for teachers without formal teaching experience before the M.A. were designed by following the same principles, only with some modifications to fit their specific conditions.

Every interview question came with a purpose which was aligned with the purpose of this research. In this study, teacher professionalism, with its identified dimensions and teacher change, which indicated three periods of time in teachers' working lives, had provided the specific basis on which questions had been developed.

3.5 Setting and participant selection

University H had been chosen as the site where graduates of Ed.M. would be identified as participants for this research.

3.5.1 University H as the chosen site for the MA programme

In China, a normal university is a university, which has its primary focus on preparing teaching force for different levels of schools. Normal universities capable of offering full-time Ed.M. in China are established on three levels: the six top normal universities directly under the charge of the Ministry of Education at national level; over 30 provincial normal universities scattered in almost every province/autonomous region in mainland China; and local teacher colleges at city level. Provincial normal universities and local teacher colleges, compared to the six top universities with limited enrolment and graduates of Ed.M., have served as the major sites for teacher education at master's level.

The chosen normal university H, is located in the central north region of China. This university has long established its reputation in teacher preparation and is in the leading position of pre-service teacher education among provincial universities, most especially with its innovative model of '3.5+0.5' (where student-teachers spend 3.5 years in university and the rest of

the 0.5 year at schools in less developed areas to assume complete responsibility as school teachers). University H has been promoted by the Ministry of Education to the whole nation for other normal universities to draw lessons from. As for teacher education at master's level, starting its full-time Ed.M. in 2009, University H is among the first universities to implement this M.A. programme with enrolment of both experienced teachers and fresh university graduates.

In general, three reasons backed up the choice for University H to be the site for participant selection.

History. University H has a history of teacher education/ training for over a hundred years. With a long tradition of teacher preparation, University H is a suitable location to begin research relating to teachers and teacher education.

Status. University H is the only provincial-level normal university in the local province. With its status as a provincial university, its Ed.M. programme draws students/ in-service teachers from the whole province. For this research, the students/ teachers who had enrolled had different teaching/life experiences based on various local contexts, which could later provide the researcher with rich background information in learning about Chinese teacher professionalism.

Access. As one of the graduates from University H, it would be easier for the researcher to gain access to the university to find suitable participants. And I was indeed lucky enough to be helped by the university staff.

3.5.2 Selection of participants

Participants in this research were chosen according to the following three criterion, including:

1. Teachers enrolled in a full-time Ed.M. who graduated in July, 2012, which meant that by the time of interview, all participant teachers had two years of teaching experience after graduation;
2. Graduates were non-experienced teachers, rural and more experienced teachers;
3. Teachers had been teaching in public secondary schools.

The selection of participants followed the purpose of this research. The purpose of this research is to investigate Chinese teacher professionalism by studying a number of teacher graduates of Ed.M. Among all the graduates, teachers with two-year teaching experience after graduation were chosen. It was hypothesised that their working experience would have an effect on their views and that they would still be close enough to their student experience to be able to recall it with a degree of accuracy.

In this research, years of teaching experience had been used as a criterion for selecting participants. According to Day et al. (2007) those who had taught to one-three years were in the first phase of their professional lives, a phase with the focus on ‘survival and discovery’; those that had taught from four-seven years were in the phase of ‘stabilisation’ and those that had taught from seven-18 years saw ‘new changes’ and had ‘new concerns’. Teachers of different career stages may provide the researcher with different insights into teachers’ understanding of teaching profession. Participants in this research were consisted of three groups: teachers who had entered Ed.M. without formal

teaching experience, teachers enrolled in the project '*master level teachers for rural areas*' who, by following their contracts with local education bureaus, had already taught for three years (in less developed areas) before their enrolment for M.A study, and experienced teachers who had taught around ten years before being awarded Ed.M. Two years' teaching experience after graduation from Ed.M. was required for all participants and this helped to locate these teachers into different career stages as stated by Day et al. (2007): the initial stage of 1-3 years for least experienced teachers, the stage of 4-7 years for rural teachers and the stage of 7-18 years for more experienced teachers.

For the last criteria, the kind of schools that teachers had been working for was critical. Contact with four teachers in the pilot study revealed that a considerable number of teacher graduates (mainly those who did not have formal teaching experience before their master's study) had neither worked as teachers nor were able to find a position in public schools. Some of the graduates worked as tutors at private training centres as an alternative due to limited vacancies in public schools. Because teaching situation in private educational institutions like training centres could be quite different from that in government-funded schools, the researcher therefore decided to only employ school teachers as participants in order to keep a relative homogeneity among interviewees regarding the nature of their workplace.

3.6 Gaining access and building contacts with participants

3.6.1 Changes to participant recruiting

To recruit enough teacher graduates, especially teachers with no teaching experience before Ed.M, the researcher revised the original participant-recruiting plan. In the original plan, all participants were supposed to be among the first group of students enrolled in 2009 to complete a three-year course in the English Department. Graduating in 2012, these teachers would have entered/returned to teaching for almost two years by the time they had been interviewed. However, an insufficiency of suitable participants, caused both by limited Ed.M. enrollment in the English Department in 2009 and the reality that some of the student-teachers did not secure a job at public schools, called for a revision of participant recruitment. To solve the problem, the revision took place in two ways.

Firstly, changing target teachers from those enrolled in 2009 to those enrolled in 2010. From 2010, the Ed.M. programme at University H had been shortened from three years to two years with minor changes to the curriculum but there was an increase in the number of students enrolled. The increase of student numbers in Ed.M. provided the researcher with a better possibility to find suitable participants. By the time the study had been conducted, teacher graduates enrolled in 2010 had already taught for two years after their graduation. The change in the year of enrolment therefore did not affect the purpose of the research.

Secondly, two departments had been involved in this research: the English Department and the Chinese Department. The assumption for choosing

these two departments was that since English and Chinese were two compulsory courses for all students in secondary schools (senior high school students were divided into science students who did not learn courses like history etc. and art students who did not learn physics, chemistry, etc.), these two departments may enrol a relatively larger number of students and their graduates may have a better chance of finding a job. This assumption had later been partially proved by the number of Ed.M. enrolments in both 2010 and 2011 as published by University H, which stated that the English Department in each year enrolled the largest number of students among all other departments. By recruiting participants from two departments, the researcher hoped to increase the possibilities of finding more suitable participants and also hypothesised that teachers teaching different school subjects, in this research namely English and Chinese, may bring with them a different understanding of teaching.

3.6.2 Building contacts

The researcher believed the most efficient way to find teacher graduates was to ask the university staff who were in charge of postgraduate affairs in each department. Such a person is usually called *Fu dao yuan* at Chinese universities. The researcher first found *Fu dao yuan* in both the Chinese and English Departments and asked them to recommend graduates whom they believed would meet the criteria as illustrated in the previous section.

By looking at the information on students who had left right after their graduation, these two *Fu dao yuan* were kind enough to help. They contacted potential participants by either email, QQ (a social network popular among Chinese young people) or phone calls to verify if they met the criterion and

also to investigate their willingness to participate in this research.

Besides seeking help from the *Fu dao yuan*, I was also aware that some graduates may still be in contact with lecturers, especially with their former supervisors at the university. With the help of *Fu dao yuan* and other university staff, I contacted four lecturers, two from the English Department and two from the Chinese Department. These four lecturers had been teaching professional courses for Ed.M. in their own department and had been supervisors for students enrolled in this M.A. programme. After realising the purpose of my research and the difficulty in finding suitable participants, these four lecturers were quite willing to help. They either contacted their former students on my behalf or provided me with useful information.

Apart from the generous help received from others, I had in my own hands a list of graduates available to be contacted. As stated earlier, I am one of the Ed.M. graduates from the English department at University H, enrolling in 2009 and completing my studies in 2012. During my time at the university, I met a number of students who enrolled in 2010, either because of school activities or because some of them had the same supervisor as I did. With the help of social networks like QQ or Wechat, I had successfully built contact with a few, some of who later became participants in this research.

Last but not least, though some of the graduates that I contacted did not fit my criterion, they nevertheless helped me with recommendations regarding other teachers. Their kindness and willingness helped me to identify suitable participants for the research.

Looking for and building contacts with participants required much effort and was time consuming. As rural teachers and other in-service teachers were still working in the same schools prior to their enrolment, it was relatively easy to find them through the contact information they had left for *Fu dao yuan* and the lecturers. It was the finding of teacher graduates with no teaching experience which posed a major difficulty in participant recruitment. This is because these teacher graduates had great mobility. They also faced difficulty in finding employment as a school teacher.

With the help from many people, I had finally had nineteen participants who agreed to be interviewed for this research. However, three withdrew from the research at different stages so eventually I had sixteen teachers who completed all three rounds of interviews. Among the sixteen teachers, three were from the Chinese department with the rest, (thirteen) from the English department. Altogether, six were teacher graduates with no former teaching experience before studying for their Ed.M., six were rural teachers and four were teachers with teaching experience of around 10 years. Table 3.1 presents general information on the sixteen teachers who participated in this research.

Table 3.1 Participant teachers in this research

Department		**Teacher**	**Department**		**Teacher**
English	Non-experienced (5 people)	CLX	**Chinese**	Non-experienced (1 person)	MM
		CB			
		MH			
		QL			
		CHT			
	Rural teachers (4 people)	WXY		Rural teachers (2 people)	YY
		ZN			XK
		XLH			
		ZY			
	Teachers with teaching experience of around 10 years (4 people)	YH		Teachers with teaching experience of around 10 years	
		ZXM			
		JZ			
		WXT			

These sixteen teachers, with their difference in teaching experience, schools where they had been teaching and two years' teaching after graduation from Ed.M., had fitted all the criterion set for participants in this research.

3.7 Pilot study

The pilot study was conducted to test the research instrument in order to see whether it worked well in practice. In this research, it was to test if and to what extent the designed interview questions could extract information from teachers about their work and lives.

With the help of university staff, I recruited four teacher graduates in Ed.M. from the English department at H University for this pilot. Among them, one was a teacher with no former teaching experience before Ed.M., two were from the project of *'master level teachers for rural areas'* and one was a teacher with eight years of teaching experience. These four teachers had been tested with questions from all three rounds of interviews. While in general the teachers responded well to questions in the semi-structured interviews, two problems had been raised from this pilot: the first was that teachers' responses to their understanding of the same issue in different periods (before, during and after Ed.M.) had been constantly mixed up in one response; the second was that there had been some repetition among questions.

The most obvious example for the first problem was teachers' responses to questions concerning teachers' knowledge/skill/value that they believed teachers should have. These questions had been asked in all three rounds of interviews, and the aim was to detect teachers' different understanding (if there were differences) of these issues based on their experiences, before, during and after their M.A. However, it turned out that quite often, teachers forgot that they had been asked to talk about their past understanding, for instance, their understanding before they had enrolled for Ed.M. Only when I reminded him/her or when I tried to confirm if he/she were

talking about the questions, that s/he realised that from a certain point she/he were talking about their present teaching experience. In cases like this, I had to ask the relevant questions again by emphasising the timeline. This problem made me realise that even though some teachers had been asked very clearly in the beginning to talk about their understanding of the past, they tended to forget this instruction during the interviews and mixed their understanding of the same issue over different periods. During later interviews, I had constantly asked questions to clarify if they had talked to the questions when there was an ambiguity in teachers' responses.

The second problem was that teachers' answers to some questions were highly repetitive. I had separated questions designed to probe teachers' understanding of teaching and on being a teacher. However, teachers' responses to these two questions largely overlapped. How they understood teaching was manifested by how they acted and thought as teachers. For instance, they answered that teaching was a profession worthy of great dedication and that teachers were dedicated, or that the meaning of teaching was to pass on knowledge and teachers were those who passed on knowledge to the next generation. I therefore had combined these two questions together to avoid further repetition.

With some minor modifications to the interview questions, this pilot provided me with experiences for later interviews in order to move on more smoothly; it also provided some insight into Chinese teachers' work and lives, which had formed the basis for the development of a deeper understanding of Chinese teachers.

3.8 Data collection in the field

Following the question schedule designed for semi-structured interviews, the researcher asked questions and followed participants' responses in order to raise issues for exploring new domains or for clarity of issues which appeared previously during the interviews.

There were three rounds of interviews for all teacher participants, with each round having its own focus. The main reason for designing three rounds of intervirews, instead of one, was that the latter two rounds were built on the basis of the previous round with flexibilities for each teacher. Each round had a specific purpose, which enabled the researcher to focus on particular issues and explore them in detail. It also enabled the researcher to build latter interviews on issues identified in the previous round and helped the researcher to examine connections across different interviews, which helped to enhance the confidence about trustworthiness of the data (e.g. through triangulation and/or by identifying the consistency in teachers' experiences and perceptions over time).

Table 3.2 is the timetable to carry out the interviews. Tables 3.3-3.5 present the main categories of each round to give a general idea of the purposes of different rounds of interviewing (lists of interview questions have been attached as appendix 3-8).

Table 3.2 Timetable for interview in 2014

Time / Round	Mid-February to mid-March	Sending teachers information sheet
Round one	Mid-March to Early April	Semi-structured interviews
Round two	Later April to mid-May	Semi-structured interviews
Round three	Later May to early July	Semi-structured interviews

Table 3.3 Categories of first round of interviews

Teachers **Categories of questions**	**Teacher graduates with no former teaching experience**	**In-service teachers**
Purpose of FIRST round of interview: 1. To explore teachers' thoughts on their Ed.M. learning experiences 2. To explore teachers' understanding of teaching before their enrolment.	Teachers' thoughts on basic courses	Teachers' thoughts on basic courses
	Teachers' thoughts on professional courses	Teachers' thoughts on professional courses
	Teachers' thoughts on selective courses	Teachers' thoughts on selective courses
	Knowledge that teachers acquired through Ed. M	Knowledge that teachers acquired through Ed. M
	Skills that teachers acquired through Ed. M	Skills that teachers acquired through Ed. M
	Ethic/values that teachers developed through Ed. M.	Ethic/values that teachers developed through Ed. M.
	Teachers' understanding of teaching and being a teacher based on their past life experiences	Teachers' understanding of teaching and being a teacher based on their past teaching experiences
	Teachers' thoughts on teaching practice	Questions around teachers' past teaching experiences

Table 3.4 Categories of second round of interviews

Teachers **Categories of questions**	**Teacher graduates with no former teaching experience**	**In-service teachers**
Purpose of SECOND round of interview: 1. To explore teachers' understanding of teaching shortly after their graduation from Ed.M. 2. To explore teachers' possible change in teaching shortly after they entered /returned to teaching. 3. How Ed.M. experiences and school context affected teaching.	Teachers' thoughts on first experience of being a teacher	Teachers' general feeling of returning to teaching
	Teachers' understanding of teaching and being a teacher based on first few months of teaching	Teachers' understanding of teaching and being a teacher right after graduation
	Teachers' changes in perceptions and performance in teaching	Teachers' changes in perceptions and performance in teaching
	Residual influence from Ed. M.	Residual influence from Ed. M.
	School influence on teaching	School influence on teaching

Table 3.5 Categories of third round of interviews

Teachers **Categories of questions**	**Teacher graduates with no former teaching experience**	**In-service teachers**
Purpose of THIRD round of interview: 1. To explore teachers' latest understanding of teaching. 2. To explore teachers' latest changes in teaching. 3. How Ed.M. experience and school context affected teaching?	Teachers' understanding of teaching and being a teacher after first years of teaching	Teachers' understanding of teaching and being a teacher based on current teaching
	Teachers' changes in perceptions and performance in teaching until the present	Teachers' changes in perceptions and performance in teaching until the present
	Residual influence of Ed.M.	Residual influence of Ed.M.
	School influence	School influence

As presented in the tables above, questions in the first round asked teachers about their perceptions of teaching before Ed.M. and their learning experience during the M.A.; the second round collected data on teachers' thoughts and experiences shortly after they entered or returned to teaching; and the last round was related to teachers' most recent understanding of teaching as well as their teaching practice.

These three rounds of interviews, designed by following participants' learning/working experience before, during and after the M.A. programme, tended to examine the development as well as possible changes in Chinese teacher professionalism. Various factors which had an influence on development, were also explored.

Teachers working in Chinese high schools were occupied by school work and the majority of them could not have regular rest, even on the weekend. Due to the busy working lives of secondary school teachers in China, teachers could not tell ahead when they were free to participate in an interview, and the researcher kept in touch with the teachers all the time. As each round of interview was stretched over one month to include every teacher, the completion of three rounds of interview stretched from early April to early July, 2014.

By respecting teachers' choices, interviews took place either in their houses or in their offices, depending on their own circumstances. Though there were thirteen teachers who had been teaching English in this research (the remaining three were teaching Chinese), all interviews had been conducted in Chinese. Teachers can express their thoughts better with their native language. There were in total forty-eight interviews for sixteen teachers in three rounds. These interviews had all been recorded by voice recorder and each interview generally lasted from 40 minutes to one hour.

3.9 Data analysis

Data analysis for qualitative research can be daunting. The analysis process is inductive and the data to be analysed, to a very large extent, are words *'(with) multiple meanings…(and are) harder to move around and work with'* (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). It often starts with the analysis of *'numerous small pieces of data, which later have been gradually combined or related to form broader, more general descriptions and conclusions'* (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 302). It is a time-consuming process requiring great devotion

and effort and there might even be back-and-forth movements through the analysis of different stages.

This section presents in detail how the researcher tried to make sense of the qualitative data to yield meanings. The analysis went from segmented words to codes, from individual codes to categories, from categories to themes. And finally, from themes, the researcher extracted more specific meanings to form sub-themes underlying the written structure of later findings.

3.9.1Transcribing and translation

Data analysis starts with transcription. Collected from the three rounds of interviews, all data was stored in the voice recorder preserved by the researcher. To transform audio recordings into words, the researcher requested help from personnel who were experienced in transcribing. The records were given out with a number marked on each copy in order to preserve the anonymity of interviewees. It took more than one month before the completion of the transcription of all 48 recordings.

The other issue was translating interviews, for all interviews had been conducted in Chinese. As a translation of all interviews could be very time-consuming, the researcher decided only to code it in English, which was helpful for later analysis processing in English. By doing so, the original meanings of teachers' words could be best preserved and would not be lost due to possible inaccurate translation. However, I had translated three rounds of interviews for one rural teacher, who had been chosen for her clear expression of thoughts and ideas during the interviews. Coding in this translation familiarised the interviewer with the coding process while communicating with my supervisors in English.

3.9.2 Initial coding

Starting as the first step in exploring meanings between lines, coding is a transforming and analysing process where small pieces of data are labelled. These segments of data carry with them similar meanings and these meanings have been given labels suggesting broad categories (Lodico et al., 2006). During the coding process, researchers will constantly come across new data and code it either under existing codes or develop new codes by examining both similarities and differences between new occurrences and previously coded data.

In this research, before coding, I had a review for each interview. This review provided me with general information including the interviewees' background, the subject he/she had been teaching in school, and years of teaching experience. All this background information helped to form a primary image of a teacher. Though rather vague, before coding, this image gave the researcher some sense of the characteristics of a teacher which may later affect his/her way of thinking and talking. Also, the purpose of the research as well as the research questions also served as a baseline for which codes were expected to be created.

In coding, the researcher read the transcript word by word to make sure no important information was skipped. Codes in their initial stage can be relatively specific like *'teaching as a childhood dream', 'teaching following exam requirements'* or be rather general like *'teaching methods help'* or *'not agree with school'*. For the former, they indicated specific issues with relatively little ambiguity, while the latter suggested more room for clarity or classification. These codes were prone to change, for the revisiting of codes

after initial coding revealed that some codes did not apply to the context, some codes were too general to incorporate a number of segments and some new codes appeared.

When no more new codes emerged and all codes were inclusive in meaning, the next step was to merge codes of similar meanings to develop categories which were richer and broader in meaning.

3.9.3 Developing categories

Thirteen categories were developed from the coding:

- Knowledge and skills acquired from Ed.M.
- What was needed for teachers that had not been learned through Ed.M.
- Reasons for becoming a teacher
- Understanding of teaching as a profession
- Qualities to have as a teacher
- Teachers' pressure
- Teachers' attitudes to educational policy
- School influence
- Teacher change
- Building the teacher-student relationship
- Teachers' influence on students
- Teachers' self-reflection
- Teachers' sense of achievement

These categories, formed by interview questions and developed from codes, helped to explore the deeper meaning of teachers' words. These categories did not exist independently but were connected to make better sense of teachers' working lives. For instance, teachers' *understanding of teaching as a profession* was closely connected with *qualities to have as a teacher,* for how teachers viewed teaching had nevertheless affected how they behaved as teachers. Connections among categories became even clearer when all the categories were put into a matrix, and when weight was given to each category in terms of its influence on teachers.

3.9.4 Drawing a matrix to identify themes

Themes are ideas, which are '*developed from previous stages of data analysis, and that provide the organising ideas which the researchers will use to examine and to explain the foreshadowed questions guiding the research'* (Lodico et al., 2006, p. 307). Themes thus are the most important ideas extracted from data to shed light on an ongoing study.

In this research, themes were generated by identifying patterns, or in other words, by identifying connections among major categories. The following table is a segment of a more comprehensive table which aims to identify possible connections among categories resulted from the previous coding process. Presented as a sample, this table intends to clarify how patterns among categories have been identified and how one of the themes emerged.

Table 3.6 Connections among categories of themes

+++ Very Strong influence: factors leading to teachers' changed perceptions/actions

++ Strong influence: factors which teachers were quite aware but which did not lead to changes in teachers

+ Weak influence: factors of which teachers only have few thoughts/impression

* Teachers who experienced changes across scenarios

Factors which influence teachers' lives	**Teachers from the project of 'master level teachers for rural areas'**					
	XK	ZY	XLH	YY	ZN	WXY
Teacher undergone change	*	*		*	*	*
Ed.M courses	+	+++	+	++	+++	+++
School influence (positive)	+	+++	+	+	+++	+++
School influence (negative)	+++	++	++	++	++	++
Policy (curriculum reform)	+	+++	+	+++	+++	+++
Teacher influence		++	++	++	++	++
Reasons for becoming a teacher		+	+	+	+	+
Teacher-student relationship	++		++	++	++	

In the table, weight was given to indicate the strength of influence that a factor (category) had on a teacher. Three pluses meant teachers had undergone changes in such factors (which corresponded teacher change in chapter five); two pluses indicated that, teachers did not change but were quite aware of influence from the factors. One plus referred to factors which did not much affect teachers in their working lives. More detailed explanations on the cross system will be presented in the beginning of Chapter four.

This table shows that teachers who had undergone changes over scenarios (before enrolment in Ed.M., during Ed.M. and after graduation from Ed.M.), had mainly been subjected to influence of their M.A experience, their schools as well as the curriculum reform. While these categories connected to teacher change and also related to each other in one way or another, *changes in teachers* as the focus of these categories had thus emerged as a theme. This theme, by taking consideration of teachers' working lives in schools, learning experiences from Ed.M. and the implementation of the national curriculum, had served the purpose of understanding teachers' work in a Chinese context.

The other main theme, teaching as work of conscience, had mainly developed from the categories of teachers' *understanding of teaching as a profession* and *qualities to have as a teacher.* These two categories had included meanings related to teacher morals, to the self-developed standards teachers believed they should follow and principles to be upheld. All of these: morals, standards and principles were derived from teachers' claim of their professional conscience. Teachers' professional conscience, with its rich meaning and its significance in helping teachers to explain their understanding of teaching, was a critical part to be examined in this study.

While these two themes had provided clues for the structure of this research, their detailed meanings required for deeper exploration. These meanings, framed as sub-themes, were extracted from corresponding categories underpinning the two themes (more detailed explanations will be given in the beginning of chapter four).

3.10 Researcher's role

The conduct of totally value-free research is hard to achieve (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) and qualitative researchers are especially value-laden in the research process (Cohen et al., 2011). It is believed that the personal influence a researcher can have on his/her research and the challenges s/he might encounter in research have been closely associated with the corresponding research paradigm (Postholm & Madsen, 2006). Qualitative research like the present study, by following an interpretivist paradigm, has its data collected and interpreted and intertwined with the researcher's knowledge of the field under study (Graue & Walsh, 1998, cited from Barrett, 2007).

Two challenges had emerged from the researcher's role in this study. The first challenge was the relationship between the researcher and some of the interviewees and the second lay in the process of data analysis/interpretation.

As presented before, some participant teachers and the researcher had already known each other on campus long before the conduct of the research. The relationship between the interviewer and interviewee may have a potential influence on the interviewee's responses to some questions. For instance, when asked about their perception of certain professional courses, taught either by the lecturer we were both familiar with or taught even by our shared supervisor, the problem was thus to what extent could the participant teacher reveal her/his true feelings about something we both knew quite well. The choice of participants who had graduated from the English department, where the researcher completed her Ed.M., had caused such a dilemma during the data collection. However, one way to see if teachers had their true feelings revealed was by examining if they had similar thinking or behaviours regarding the

same issue discussed either in the same round or in different rounds of interviews. When there were contradictions, the researcher raised the problem for further clarity.

The second dilemma was from data analysis and interpretation. As a qualitative researcher, it was difficult for the researcher to completely get rid of his/her personal knowledge or even bias during the research. The interpretation of data by following an interpretivist paradigm is prone to the influence of cultural and social context; in other words, how a researcher reads and understands data cannot be inclusive of his/her living experience. For the present study, for instance, the researcher inevitably brought her own perceptions into the current study because of similar learning experiences to that of the participant teachers from Ed.M. Retaining this subjectivity had become a critical issue which the researcher had been constantly aware of.

3.11Validity

Research, either qualitative or quantitative, should present results that can be trusted. Trust in a result lies both in the rigorous procedures of research or in the result itself which suggests insight and conclusions that ring true to readers, practitioners and other researchers (Merriam, 2009). The consideration of the extent to which research can be trusted for its rigour and accuracy in conducting the process and the implications of its results for further research, has been concerned as validity.

Validity of qualitative research is different from that of quantitative research. As presented before, quantitative research portrays the world as being objective, consisting of variables and static states. The validity of quantitative research mainly concerns to what extent the result from one research can be

applied to similar situations or to what extent the research instruments help to connect the research with its result. The former is called external validity and the latter is internal validity. Qualitative research, on the other hand, sees the world as being subjective where social actions are connected in one way or another. Qualitative researchers therefore make gaining an understanding of a certain social phenomenon as the primary focus of their research, and they provide readers with detailed descriptions to justify their research results. The criterion for trusting qualitative studies are therefore different from that of quantitative research, where '*the discovery of a law or testing a hypothesis is the study's objective'* (Merriam, 2009, p. 210).

The variety of types of qualitative research gives rise to different kinds of validity. Maxwell (2002) distinguished five types of validity, including descriptive validity, interpretive validity, theoretical validity, generalisability and evaluative validity. Descriptive validity concerns the accuracy of qualitative data in reflecting reality; interpretive validity deals with the interpretation of a phenomenon, under the influence of the researcher's intention, cognition and belief, and how he can respect the perspectives of the people under study; theoretical validity refers to both *'the validity of the blocks from which the researcher builds a model to apply to the setting or phenomenon under study'* and *'the validity of the way the blocks are put together as a theory of the setting or phenomenon*' (p. 51); generalisability refers to the conclusions from research that can help to make sense of a similar person or situation, and how different results are expected to be turned out under the same research procedures; and lastly, evaluative validity '*involves the application of an evaluative framework to the objects of study'* (p. 55).

For the present study, it is interpretive validity that applies most suitably. Central to interpretive validity is to *'comprehend a phenomenon not on the basis of the researcher's perspective and categories, but from those of the participants in the study situation'* (Maxwell, p. 48). The present study focused on making sense and exploring the meanings of teachers' interviews: on finding out what had constituted the core part of Chinese teacher professionalism and on identifying important factors affecting teachers' working lives. Validity in this research, therefore, had been realised by interpreting teachers' words based on teachers' own accounts. That is, teachers' thinking or behaviours towards a particular issue shall be explained with consideration of the same teachers' accounts in interview transcripts, either in an interview of the same round or in a different round, for the later, it is data triangulation which I discussed whiling justifying the three rounds of interviews designed for this research.

For instance, one of the rural teachers, during the interviews, claimed that *he who becomes a teacher is a loser in life.* The first time when he expressed this thought, the researcher was not yet clear whether this thought was just self-mockery because of his personal frustration with work, or whether it was a serious statement about the entire teaching profession because of his knowledge of many other teachers who were in a similar situation as himself. The meaning of this statement became clearer when he talked about it later during the same interview and he reiterated the same thought in a later round of interviews. What he wanted to say was that working as a teacher had been the last choice for a young man like him. He emphasised the *gender* here and

believed that these men, including himself, were losers as teachers because they could not find a job with more promise and a higher salary.

3.12 Ethical issues

An important issue for all researchers is their ethical stance. Research ethics are composed of a cluster of moral principles which guide the research, from its inception through to completion and publication of results and beyond; they concern participants' interests, dignity, right and welfare during and upon the completion of research (Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics, The University of Nottingham, 2015). For this study, ethical issues considered included participants' right to be fully informed about the research, the protection of participants' privacy, anonymity and confidentiality and the respect of participants' decisions in regard to their continuing participation and withdrawal at any stage of the research.

3.12.1 participant consent form

People who had been involved in this study had every right to know the purpose, methods and other issues concerning the current research.

For teachers who responded to this research, their agreement or in other words, their consent to be interviewed, was a priority. The *participant consent form* was provided by the University of Nottingham and was approved by the university staff from the Research Ethics department at the School of Education before the researcher commenced the fieldwork.

The consent form stated in it the researcher's responsibility of informing participants about the purpose of the research, method of data collection and storage as well as participants' freedom to either take part in or

refuse or withdraw from this research. The consent form was handed to each potential interviewee and terms of the form were well explained by the researcher to each individual teacher. When teachers agreed to participate after reading the form and after the researcher's explanation of questions concerning the form, they were required to sign before the interviewing process commenced. The consent forms were collected as an evidence to teachers' willingness to be part of the research.

I also explained to *Fu dao yuan* and the lecturers in detail about the current research. They did not sign the consent form, though, for they were not directly related to this study as interviewees. They were facilitators who helped the process move more smoothly.

3.12.2 Privacy, anonymity and confidentiality

One of the most important points in the consent form is to protect participants' privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that participants should not feel that their private domain has been invaded.

To make sure participants' privacy would not be threatened, no sensitive questions that probed individual's private affairs, were asked. Questions that may lead to participants' embarrassment or arouse feelings of being endangered, were not allowed.

In terms of anonymity, pseudonyms would be given to all participants and schools involved in this research. By using pseudonyms, neither the names of the participants, the schools where they had been working nor the university

where they had graduated, could be identified. Anonymity was a way to protect participants from potential harm in case their identity was exposed.

Lastly, for confidentiality, the researcher stored the interviews in a safe place and the the researcher was the only one accessible to the collected data; also, no critical information concerning either the participants' identity or words, which they did not wish to share with others, were allowed to be publicized.

The protection of participants' privacy, attention to anonymity and confidentiality were both an ethical issue and a way of showing respect to participants.

3.12.3 Participants' right to join and withdraw

Teachers' willingness to participate and withdraw from this research were fully respected. Teachers were given adequate time to make their decisions as whether to be involved as part of the study when they had achieved a relatively thorough understanding in regard to various issues concerning the research focus, content and processes. It was entirely teachers' own choice to make and no teacher was forced in any way to participate. While the researcher encouraged all teachers to seriously consider their right to join, those who eventually decided they were not to be involved, still received appreciation from the researcher because of their willingness to know and to help in the initial stage.

Teachers who agreed to be interviewed could still change their mind as they wished. They were free to withdraw from this research at any stage.

Chapter Four: Teaching as Work of Conscience

This chapter highlights one of the most important themes that emerged from analysis of interviews with Chinese teachers in this research: teaching as work of conscience.

However, before further exploration on meanings of teachers' professional conscience, several important issues need to be clarified concerning both Chapter four and five, which together constitute findings of the current study. Among these issues are the grouping of teachers in both chapters, and the cross analysis system in table 4.2, 5.1 and 5.2. The cross analysis system is used to mark and distinguish different strength of teachers' perceptions of their professionalism.

Three groups of teachers

These two finding chapters, Chapter four on teachers' professional conscience and Chapter five on teacher change, will be discussed with evidence from teachers of three different groups. These three groups of teachers—with teachers within each group sharing similarities in regard to their understandings of and behaviors as teachers — were analysed independently initially and were only inter-related when later attempts were made to find possible associations (see chapter six and seven).

These three groups of teachers include teachers in chapter four under the theme of *professional conscience*, teachers in chapter five under the theme of *teacher change in teaching* and under the theme of *teaching was believed as a job for economical surviving*. These three groups of teachers emerged on a closer analysis of interviews. Some teachers, for instance, were found to talk more about professional conscience while some teachers had more interest to

talk about their change. There were overlapping perceptions of teachers among groups (notably teachers with professional conscience and those who talked about changes in teaching), as well as clear division among teachers (notably those with professional conscience and those who were disheartened in teaching). Teachers in these three groups, therefore, were not viewed as completely independent from each other.

Tables were created for each of the three overarching themes (*professional conscience, teacher change in teaching and teaching was believed as a job for economical surviving)*, with sub-themes listed to further clarify meanings of overarching themes. These sub-themes were presented as categories within each table, and were identified by closely following the development of the overarching themes. Once the overarching themes were identified, teachers grouped under each theme were further analyzed for their talking accounts. Patterns of teachers' perceptions and behaviors were identified, and these patterns, after series of merging, dividing and re-constructing, became sub-themes. Each sub-theme carried its own meanings, yet was still related to another sub-themes.

The cross analysis system in tables

The different number of crosses in tables in finding chapters represent different strength of teachers' talking accounts. Table 4.1 shows how weight was given for teachers' answers.

Table 4.1 Standards of weight given in table 4.2, 5.1 and 5.2

	Overarching Themes in finding chapters			**crosses**
	Professional conscience	**Teacher change in teaching**	**Teaching for economic surviving**	
strength of teachers' words under each sub-theme (or category) in table 4.2, 5.1 and 5.2	Words that were used to define teachers' understanding on teaching/being a teacher; also similar statements were emphasized through interviews. Such claims were believed to have played **decisive** roles in constituting teachers' believes.	Obvious changes were found in teachers. In such cases, teachers' understanding had been greatly altered, that new understanding had been formed with a complete **departure** from the past.	Factors that caused **radical** changes in teachers. In such cases, teachers' past expectation on teaching was completely destroyed by such factors; and teachers were now seeing teaching mainly as a plain job for living.	+++
	Words gave evidence that teachers were highly aware certain aspects that made up their teaching lives. These aspects played **critical** part in their understandings on teaching/being a teacher.	Some changes were found in teachers. However, in such cases, these changes were more about teachers **adjusting to or incorporating** new ideas in teaching; they were not seen as a complete departure from teachers' past perceptions/behaviors.	Factors that **significantly** affected teachers. In such cases, teachers increasingly lost confidence in teaching, if not yet completely disheartened by teaching.	++

		Scarcely no change or minor changes were found in teachers.In such cases, changes might be traceable but had little actual influence in teaching		+

The standards of weight given are shared among all tables in the two finding chapters. The highest level of strength was decided when teachers' words indicated that the understandings/behaviors they described represented the highest level that can be achieved within the corresponding category — either understandings that played decisive roles in constituting teachers' beliefs or a change which was born from a complete departure from teachers' past perceptions/actions. The highest level of strength is marked with three crosses in tables.

The medium level of strength was decided when teachers' words indicated that the understandings/behaviors they described were maintained in a state that were not as decisive/radical as those in the highest level. These understandings/behaviors were either an integral part of teachers' beliefs or a change that partly happened, change that was still connected in some point to teachers' past understandings/behaviors. The medium level of strength is marked with two crosses in tables.

The lowest level of strength was decided when teachers' words indicated that the understandings/behaviors they described were of little significance in affecting teachers in their working lives. However, no strength of this level was given to teachers' talking accounts in regard to their

understandings on professional conscience and teaching as a job for economic surviving. Teachers' answers under these two themes were found to be important in influencing their beliefs and actions in teaching. The lowest level of strength is marked with a single cross in the table.

After explanations of these important issues—issues which might cause ambiguity later — the findings of this research on Chinese teachers' professional conscience are reported.

Eight out of sixteen teachers reported their understanding on seeing teaching as work of conscience. While in the first glance, it seemed that only half of teachers in this research shared views on the importance of teachers' conscience, the number of eight did matter significantly. The shared understanding on professional conscience was reached among these eight teachers of different teaching experiences, of different schools they were based, of different personal biographies, last but not least, of different understandings and manifestations of their professional conscience. For teachers in this research, the shared belief in professional conscience stood out of their multiple differences as teachers; this belief united these eight teachers to work under values and standards developed by themselves, which together distinguished them from those who did not claim professional conscience in this study.

I will begin with a detailed analysis of different meanings associated with the claim of teaching being work of conscience. Factors that affected teachers' understanding will also be examined, including school influence, teacher' roles as banzhuren (In Chinese primary and seconday schools, these are groups of teachers fully responsible for all student affairs of one or more than one classes,

see more detailed discussions on banzhuren in 4.1.2 and 6.1.3), family influence, etc.; and by drawing reference both from my data and from literature, I will then move on to present a definition of teachers' professional conscience. The last part of the chapter will raise issues identified during data analysis for further discussion.

4.1 The meaning of teaching as work of conscience

'When asked about their understanding of teaching, teachers responded unanimously that teaching was for them work of conscience' (Cai & Liu, 2010, p.6). In line with Cai and Liu's report on teachers' responses from interviews conducted about teachers' working lives in the northern part of China, eight out of sixteen teachers interviewed by the researcher also clearly stated the same understanding as *'teaching is work of conscience'*. However, it is important to note that 'conscience' here specifically refers to teachers' professional conscience. Professional conscience is connected to teaching activities, not the general meaning of the human conscience which has been the subject of ethical debate for thousands of years (Song, 2005).

Three main themes were developed from teachers' understanding of teaching as work of conscience: 1) Teaching was to make the best effort to pass on knowledge; 2) Teaching exceeded the literary meaning of mere class 'teaching'; 3) Teaching was not about looking for financial reward.

Table 4.2 below presents an analysis of different teachers' understanding of teaching as work of conscience. Their understanding has been organised inductively into three major categories which are further divided into six sub-themes. Data analysis revealed that teachers talked about their professional conscience in a rather serious manner and their understanding was

supported by relatively detailed descriptions. All sub-themes listed in table 4.2 were believed by teachers as being important and therefore no sub-theme has been marked with a single cross.

Table 4.2 Teachers' understanding of teaching as work of conscience

+++ Themes teachers believed as playing decisive roles in making them believe teaching as work of conscience

++ Themes teachers believed as important in constituting their understanding

+ Themes teachers believed might be relevant with professional conscience

Teachers		Teaching is making the best effort to pass on knowledge			Teaching exceeds the literary meaning of mere class teaching	Teaching is not about looking for financial rewards	
		Transmitting knowledge wholeheartedly to help students learn	Helping students out of school hours	Long working hours with heavy workloads	Teaching exceeded the literary meaning of class teaching	Teaching was not only for earning a salary	Teaching was not to seek profit from students
Least Experienced	CB	++	++			++	
	MH	++		++		++	+++
	MM			++	++	++	
Rural Teachers	YY		++	++	++ Banzhu-ren	++	
	ZN	++		++	++ Banzhu-ren	+++	++
	ZY	++					
Most Experienced	JZ			+++	++ Banzhu-ren	++	++
	YH	++	++	++		++	

4.1.1 Teaching was to make the best effort to pass on knowledge

As shown in table 4.2, this category consists of three perspectives: teaching was transmitting knowledge wholeheartedly to help students learn; teaching was helping students, even out of school hours; teaching was long working hours with heavy workloads.

Teaching was to transmit knowledge whole-heartedly to help students learn

Among the eight teachers who clearly stated their understanding of 'teaching as work of conscience', five teachers believed 'teaching wholeheartedly' was an important aspect in understanding teachers' professional conscience. Among the five, two (CB and MH) were the least experienced teachers, two (ZN and ZY) were rural teachers and one (YH) was with around ten years' teaching experience. The meaning of being 'wholehearted' in teaching did not necessarily mean the same thing to those who had mentioned it.

For the two rural teachers, ZY and ZN, teaching wholeheartedly was manifested by their eager wish to provide the best of what they knew to students.

> *...students come to school, yearning for knowledge and expecting to master skills, I feel wanting to teach them everything I know and give them all I can offer to help students learn...(From interviews with ZY, one of the rural teachers)*

> *…the devotion to teaching is absolutely wholehearted…s/he will teach everything s/he knows and if s/he is not quite sure about some knowledge, s/he will surely try a variety of ways to gain a better understanding of that so that she could later give a lesson, complete and accurate… (From interviews with ZN, one of the rural teachers)*

ZN believed teaching wholeheartedly was a manifestation of teachers' devotion, where she made every effort to make sure knowledge had been effectively passed on to students. These two rural teachers interpreted their

understanding of ‘wholehearted’ teaching by putting emphasis on achieving satisfying lessons which were complete and accurate. Besides teachers’ eagerness to pass on knowledge, there was another way to devote oneself to teaching: being serious in the treatment of students and acquiring better knowledge in terms of students’ learning differences.

> *To say teaching is work of conscience means a teacher devotes whole-heartedly for students’ learning, and the first thing about teaching wholeheartedly is that teachers must teach sincerely: A teacher cannot casually deal with students in class just to catch up with a pre-arranged teaching task and a teacher shall not ignore or give up anyone in her class … (From interviews with CB, one of the least experienced teachers)*

Two meanings unfolded from CB’s understanding: firstly, ‘wholehearted’ teaching was a serious and a sincere process where teachers taught their best on account of their own willingness. The seriousness and sincerity in teaching shall not fall into carelessness where teaching was dealt with as if it was only routine work subjected to some external scrutiny; second was that a ‘wholehearted’ teacher was one who did not discriminate against students based on school performance, she was fair enough to treat everyone equally and confident enough to help those who fell behind. To help students who did not catch up with learning, a better understanding of different students’ learning abilities was of great importance.

> *…one of the most important things to teach wholeheartedly is to have a good understanding of students’ learning capabilities and could find some supplementary materials that are suitable for their learning…I used New Concept English to help…Every two days, I teach them some short articles from that book, which include some grammar or some most frequently used*

English phrases, by doing this, some students with weak English knowledge can at least understand part of my teaching and would not lose confidence in English…(From interviews with YH , one of the most experienced teachers)

While CB made it clear she would be fair in teaching, YH gave a more detailed example to demonstrate her understanding of teaching wholeheartedly to everyone in the class. Having taught high school English for over ten years, YH had gained in-depth knowledge of students' learning differences where she not only found suitable teaching materials to help low achievers but also taught accordingly in a more specific way to make sure students with weaker English knowledge could be inspired.

Teachers had different ways to interpret what they understood as 'wholehearted' teaching. Eyes on what to teach, ZY and ZN worked hard to make sure knowledge could be passed on to students smoothly; insisting not to give up on students, CB and YH had their 'wholehearted' teaching manifested in their dedication to every student in their class, in despite of their school performance. As one of the most frequently mentioned sub-themes in teaching as work of conscience, passing on knowledge was more than routine work which could be standardised and measured; knowledge transmission required teachers' devotion to many different aspects of teaching.

Teaching was to help students, even out of school hours

Of those teachers who believed teaching as work of conscience, three teachers, with one from each teacher group, reported their efforts spent in helping students learn out of school hours, individually and collectively. Among the three, CB was the least experienced English teacher at a high

school. She was so anxious about some students' academic performance in her class that she insisted working extra hours to help.

> *...those students have the worst academic performance in my class; some cannot even write correctly the 26 English letters! If time allowed, I have to find one or two of them after school every day and ask them to at least remember several simple English words by sitting with me and I would give them dictation the next day...it is really difficult for them to learn actively so I have to make them study right under my eyes... (From interviews with CB, one of the least experienced teachers)*

CB was among those who believed teaching wholeheartedly was one of the most important manifestations of teachers' professional conscience; it was thus not surprising that she was willing to try her best to help students learn. A 'wholehearted' teacher like her put in great effort to support students' learning despite school time limitations, like another teacher YH said that when one of her students asked help, she:

> *…… was waiting for her in the teacher's office…and helped her by using the break (40 minutes) between the final class and the beginning of evening self-learning classes...(YH, one of the most experienced teachers)*

Besides helping students individually, teachers also tried to teach a whole class when they could have taken a rest. One of the rural teachers, YY, described her eagerness to help as follows:

> *...I kept students in my office after school to teach individually and negotiated with my colleagues to let me take the lead for students' self-learning classes in the evening where I could have more time either teaching or answering*

students' questions...the thought then was so selfless, it was all about teachers' conscience to teach well... (From interviews with YY, one of the rural teachers)

More than half the teachers interviewed had taught in less developed areas where class size usually was large, sometimes up to 60 students or even more. When there were so many students of different learning abilities studying together with only one teacher, teaching at one's best can hardly be easy. While it was already challenging to hold a large class, it might be more challenging by thinking that teachers had to effectively pass on knowledge within very limited class time.

Teaching was long working hours with heavy workloads

When teachers worked both whole-heartedly to transmit knowledge in class and to help students after school hours, with many other daily tasks including lesson preparation and checking of homework, it was not difficult to understand that to teach well, teachers had to work long and work hard. After a four-year study of teachers' working lives in England, Day (2008) confirmed that while nearly all school teachers talked about their workload, it was those who taught in secondary schools from socially-disadvantaged communities who turned out to be more negative (p. 252). In this research, except for two teachers who failed to talk about workload for reasons I shall elaborate on later, another six teachers with half from city schools and half from schools in less-developed areas, all referred to the problem of workload.

MM, one of the least experienced teachers, and teaching Chinese at a high school, described her teaching life as to some extent *'exhausting'*, she said that:

…while we had a lot of students' academic work to check on normal school days, we would be buried in students' paperwork after even a short vacation when all desks in our office, including the floor, were piled with paperwork waiting to be checked…except work checking, I need to spend a lot of time to prepare lessons, sometimes even worked up to 11 in the night…and I must be in class before seven when I am responsible for students' morning self-learning class and cannot leave school until seven in the evening… (From interviews with MM, one of the least experienced teachers)

MM's working day started around seven in the morning and ended seven in the evening, within the 12 hours at school, she supervised students' learning, checked students' work, prepared lessons and would surely have to teach even though she did not mention it in the transcript above. It was interesting that MM did not stress how many lessons she had to teach, her workload seemed to be more about teaching-related activities after classes; ZN, differed greatly from MM when described her teaching day, as she had a lot to say about a number of lessons she had to teach:

I have two classes of students to teach…on the busiest days, I have four courses to teach in the daytime and one evening self-learning class to supervise until 10! On other days, I either have at least two courses to teach with one evening self-learning class or two to four courses to teach on daytime… I have to teach two courses on both Saturday and Sunday, we only rest two days every other week …(From interviews with ZN, one of the rural teachers)

She placed her course timetable before me during the interview and described her teaching as being like *'in a battle'*. According to her course timetable, ZN had to work continuously for 12 days before two days' rest and within her 12 working days, she had 36 courses to teach in the daytime and

four students' self-learning classes to supervise in the evening. While MM and ZN provided some insight into teachers' workload from different perspectives, the other teacher, JZ, who had been teaching students to prepare for the annual National College Entrance Examination, further enriched our understanding of the variety of work which teachers undertook on their busy working days.

> *... I am teaching Grade 3 in senior high...every day I get tons of exercises to do, including exam papers and some other supplementary materials, before I can later explain them to students...it is pretty normal to work until late into the night... (From interviews with JZ, one of the most experienced teachers)*

As an English teacher teaching Grade 3 in senior high, JZ had piles of exercises to finish every day — just like his students did. While this paperwork took him a lot of time, like other teachers including MM and ZN, JZ has his teaching days

> *... (filled with) endless lesson preparations, teaching, checking students' paperwork… helping some students learn…*

JZ's understanding of teachers' heavy workload in teaching was marked with three crosses which meant that he had reiterated workload problems while talking about teaching as work of conscience. He was a teacher preparing students in Grade 3 in senior high to succeed in the annual College Entrance Exam among fierce competition. This is to some extent a fight that both teachers and students could not afford to lose. His most obvious speciality was that, while there were other experienced teachers like YH and ZN who also taught Grade 3 in senior high, these two followed the same classes for three years which meant they did not always work with students in Grade 3. JZ, on the other hand, had taught Grade 3 continuously over five years according

to the requirements at his school. The continuous teaching of Grade 3, where the pressure to prepare students for exams was always high and teaching was constantly overloaded with excessive exercise and other students affairs, was probably one of the most important reasons why JZ repeatedly mentioned teacher's heavy workload.

With six teachers talking about workload problems, long working hours with a heavy workload was one of the most frequently talked sub-themes when teachers referred to their understanding of teaching as work of conscience. Teachers' work stretched over the whole day and sometimes even late into the night. During the day, teachers did not have much time to rest, especially because some teachers tried to make use of extra time after class/school to help students. And because teachers' work could be both in and after class, it was difficult to tell the exact time when a teacher could rest or not. The timeline for teaching and resting was blurred and it was teachers' professional conscience that made teachers do well and better, and do much and more.

However, from table 4.2, we can see that there were two teachers who did not talk much about teacher workload. These two teachers, CB and ZY, with the former as the least experienced teacher teaching in the city, and later a teacher from a small town, did not seem to have many similarities at first glance. But a second look gives us a hint that it was not the teachers who shared similarities, it was their schools.

As there will be a specific section to discuss school influence later, this part only tries to find reasons why, while the rest of the six teachers identified in this theme felt the uneasiness of teaching as long working hours with a heavy workload, these two teachers did not mention it. CB was from a school

where there were neither strict requirements for students' English performance nor rigid rules for teachers to follow, as she said:

> *...my school favours science subjects more than arts...(as an English teacher)I do not feel a lot of pressure from the school... and unlike some other schools in this city which constantly check teachers' attendance both in and after class, my school gives teachers freer working lives...**I feel happy, relaxed and satisfied teaching here...***

The other teacher, ZY, came from a school where, other than heavy attention paid to academic performance, students' comprehensive development was emphasised,

> *...the school asks teachers to love students...and one of the most important manifestations of loving students has been attention paid to students' comprehensive development and teachers should not stress too much, only on scores...*

Both of the teachers were from schools which did not put a lot of pressure on teachers, though for different reasons; one did not favour the subject which the teacher was teaching and the other saw more importance in students' overall development. These two schools both made teaching happen within a relatively freer atmosphere without much stress on students' competition for better scores (at least not much for arts in CB's school) and teachers could actually enjoy and even felt satisfied with their work, which was not commonly seen among the teachers I had interviewed.

School culture and school leadership, therefore, played a very important part in influencing teacher's perceptions as well as their working lives as a whole. Choi and Tang (2009) claimed that *'a support to help...(and) a positive*

immediate work context where leadership was sound' (p. 775) was of great importance for teachers in their early and mid-careers. The former were helped by a positive school culture to overcome difficulties so that they could survive while the later had been supported to carry on with new challenges and responsibilities. It was also evident that school leadership had affected teachers' job satisfaction by influencing teachers' perceptions of various aspects of teaching (Bogler, 2001).

For this research, both CB and ZY's schools provided them with a positive working environment where teachers had not been overly pressured. Their feelings of being relatively less confined by schools might be contributing to their job satisfaction and a more positive understanding of teaching, where they did not stress the negative side of teaching.

The other reason that may help to explain why these two teachers did not speak much about workload could be that neither of them were *banzhuren*. Banzhuren are one of the most important groups of teachers in Chinese primary and secondary schools; they undertake work involving almost every aspect of students' school lives in her/his classes.

As shown in table 4.2, all three banzhuren (YY, ZN and JZ) had referred to workload problems. CB and ZY, who were among the remaining five teachers that did not assume the role of banzhuren, had relatively fewer responsibilities. It was a freer school and their freer position as only course teachers that helped them to shatter certain pressures and burdens away. But teachers' workload is not only about the academic aspect but also about the great amount of time and effort put into other school affairs, especially for those who are banzhuren.

4.1.2 Teaching far exceeded the literary meaning of mere class 'teaching'

Among those believing teaching to be work of conscience, four teachers, by describing their working lives as devoted to students' learning, also claimed that teaching required a variety of other things to deal with, issues ranging from school affairs to helping solve problems in students' personal lives. And among the four, three of them were banzhuren.

Banzhuren are usually fully in charge of student affairs of more than one class. One study investigated the busy working lives of 216 banzhuren at 12 high schools in Shanghai. It reported that among the teachers, 88.9 percent had worked up to ten hours with half working more than 10 hours on average school days; over 85 percent spent at least two hours managing class affairs and nearly 90 percent had spent more than one hour each day in educating students after class (Li & Cao, 2006). Thus, when an ordinary course teacher was more likely to confine his work to a smaller scale where knowledge transmission was the main part, for banzhuren, the meaning of teaching had far exceeded what was happening for and in class. For instance, one of the banzhuren, YY, had described herself as always being in a working state:

> *... (I have) been banzhuren of two classes for two years...I arrive at school before seven every morning to check the attendance of both classes, and stay until 11 after finishing dormitory checking...I am back home with my cell phone on all the time so that I can respond immediately once I am needed in school...at the time when there were activities like school sports meetings or various school evaluations, I was busy all day as a spinning top to get everything arranged...(From interviews with YY, one of the rural teachers)*

While it seemed that YY usually had quite long working days occupied by a variety of duties, she further explained her understanding that banzhuren were those who were *'capable of doing everything'*.

> *... (banzhuren) needs to manage classes with 50-60 students…to become a psychologist to help solve students' psychological problems or sometimes even love affairs...have to know how to deal with problematic students like those who are crazy for computer games…need to build sound relationships with parents…and I used to tell students how to do some exercises to relieve their fatigue during a break between classes…*

We learned two facts from YY's description of her working as a banzhuren: longer working hours than other teachers for things like checking the dormitories or for dealing with emergencies if needed; and a mastery of different teacher skills to cope with different aspects of teaching, skills including managing a class, comforting/persuading students, dealing with interpersonal relationships, etc.

As all three banzhuren in this section came from boarding schools where they were among the most reliable adults for teenager students living a life away from their own parents, ZN shared her experience as a trusted person to whom students turned for help.

> *Our school has been a boarding school, 80 percent of the students are living on campus. Whenever a student has some problems, either about personal lives, or study, or some other aspects, he might probably ask help from teachers, especially the banzhuren... (From interviews with ZN, one of the rural teachers)*

Based on the description above, Banzhuren were teachers who had to deal with almost everything related to his/her students. With a variety of work to be carried out, banzhuren had been the only group in schools whose responsibilities to her/his class became limitless (Huang, 2010).

4.1.3 Teaching was not about looking for financial reward

Among the eight teachers who clearly stated teaching as work of conscience, seven (three who were least experienced, two rural and two who were the most experienced teachers) said they believed that teaching was not only for earning a salary. Three teachers, with one from each group of teachers, had particularly mentioned that teaching should not become a tool to extract a profit from students.

Teaching was not only about earning a salary

With seven teachers giving salary relatively little importance, not teaching for money had been one of the most important views when teachers described teaching as work of conscience. Among the teachers interviewed, some had worked so hard but were rewarded with a salary which was just enough for a simple life:

> *My salary can just cover the basic needs and except teachers, I do not believe any other working people can accept such payment as teachers are so hard working... teachers in our school do not get paid for overtime working...we have monthly grade-level exams, and before and after these exams I almost have to stay at school until 10 every day in the evening...many things we do have just been work of conscience... (From interviews with MM, one of the least experienced teachers)*

And some teachers even made jokes about the low payment:

> *...sometimes colleagues make fun of our lives, saying teaching is where the efforts and energy made by us must be comparable to those who strived to make big fortunes, but the salary for teachers is only compared to that of small peddlers…(From interviews with CB, one of the least experienced teachers)*

The mismatch teachers felt between their devotion and payment was clearly demonstrated by the transcript above. The claim that Chinese high school teachers had not been well paid was evident in both my data and some research.

By investigating the relationship between teacher professionalism and the current payment system in China, Wang et al. (2014) presented the data (collected in the year 2012) where the salary for ordinary school teachers and banzhuren in Shanghai had not yet reached the average salary in Shanghai of 4,692 RMB. As the majority of my participants had worked in Province H, according to its Provincial Bureau of Statistics, the average annual salary of people working in the non-private sector (including public schools) was 41,504 RMB in 2014 (the time when the interviews were conducted), and teachers interviewed by me claimed that their salary had been around only 2000 or 3,000 RMB per month. Even such a low salary sometimes could not be guaranteed.

> *My salary was around 2000RMB and I have not been paid for three months till now… (From interviews with ZN, one of the rural teachers)*

ZN taught English at a school in less developed areas. She believed it was the inadequacy of the school budget that caused the delay in teachers' salaries. The most important thing, however, was that she was still persisting.

ZN's understanding of teaching as not for money was marked with three crosses which meant that she had a strong belief where:

> *... (teachers) do not only work for that amount of money or we are not more responsible because the school pays us better...teaching is work of conscience, while money is important but the original purpose of teaching can never be money; if one wants to be rich, teaching is surely not the right choice... (From interviews with ZN, one of the most experienced teachers)*

Teachers identified in this theme were quite clear about two things: teaching could not earn them a satisfactory salary and money was not the ultimate motivation to make them devoted as a teacher.

Teaching was not to seek a profit from students

Three teachers had particularly stated their refusal to make a profit by taking advantage of students. Here, profit referred to making money from students as stated by MH or to get benefit by using teacher-student relationship as stated by JZ.

> *Teaching is work of conscience...as long as a teacher normally carries on her daily work, she will not be punished by law but her heart will be nevertheless affected by how she has done things... My belief has been unchanged from before that teaching should never become a tool for teachers to seek profits from students like running a training school by forcing students to attend or indicating students' parents to give bribery for more attention to be paid to their kids...teaching is not business where merchants always try to make the best profits from customers... (From interviews with MH, one of the least experienced teachers)*

In MH's description, a teachers' professional conscience served as an 'unchanged' benchmark that not only regulated teachers' behaviours and prevented them from transgressing the law, but more importantly promoted teachers to work by their own standards, standards that were influenced and shaped by their professional conscience. For some teachers who had seen their students growing up and accomplishing goals later in life, teaching was not about material profits, but it had a deeper meaning.

> *Teaching is to transmit knowledge and prepare young people for a better further...it is such a selfless profession that even I see students as my own children and feel so happy when they have been successful in life, I have never had a thought of asking anything or gaining any advantage by our association...teaching is not going this way...I still see it as a pure profession with clear conscience which has not been contaminated by the negative side of our society...(From interviews with JZ, one of the most experienced teachers)*

As one of the most experienced teachers, JZ had taught over 10 years and witnessed a great number of students graduated from his class. But as he said above, his understanding of teaching as work of conscience kept him away from the thought of asking anything from his former students to whom he was devoted as much as to his own children. Teaching to him was free of worldly profits— it was about a strong love and sense of responsibility.

What was interesting was that, among the three teachers who emphasised their refusal to seek benefit from students, the two younger teachers, ZN and MH, both came from families whose parents or even grandparents, had been teachers. And both of them believed they had been greatly influenced by their family traditions in that:

……Both my grandfather and my parents had been teachers…they have been living very simple lives from the earliest days I could remember till now…what they have has to a very large extent only very limited salaries, sometimes with a little bonus…but they had been working so whole-heartedly…now that I am a teacher, I am trying to be a teacher as good as they are: upright, selfless, not asking much rewards and willing to make devotion…(ZN, one of the rural teachers)

I respect them (parents) a lot as teachers… they had all their efforts in teaching but cared less about personal gains and loss…this probably might be one of the reasons that I am now not willing to spend too much time thinking whether the treatment I have is fair or not… (MH, one of the least experienced teachers)

For the two younger teachers who had grown up in teaching families and later had also chosen teaching as a career, the positive influence received from their families had found application in their own understanding, both of teaching and the way of being a teacher.

While I keep discussing teachers' understanding on not treating teaching for the exchange of reward, there is a kind of reward so widely received that literally every teacher interviewed had mentioned it more or less: psychic reward.

Teachers' 'psychic reward'

For teachers, especially those who believed teaching to be work of conscience and clearly stated that teaching was not for financial reward, psychic reward seemed to be one of the most important factors to support them spiritually in spite of the unfairness they felt with their payment. A teachers' psychic reward in this research was closely related to his/her sense of

achievement. This sense of achievement had strengthened teachers' professional conscience, with which teachers kept working to their best.

Lortie (1975) defined teachers' psychic reward as feelings involved through teaching that *'rotate around classroom events and relationships with students; the cathexis of classroom life underlies much of what teachers feel about their work'* (p. 187). He further classified psychic reward into three categories, including gratified students who came back to thank teachers, public performances and celebrations and spectacular successes with individual students (Lortie, 1975, cited from Hargreaves, 2000, p. 818).

Partly echoed in Lortie's definition and classification, this study found that teachers' psychic reward had rich meanings and could be understood differently by different teachers. A teacher could feel 1) being rewarded for students' progress, 2) for the trust laid upon he/her, 3) for the respect awarded by students after graduation and 4) for the possible difference s/he might have made to students' lives later on.

Teachers received their psychic rewards largely from two groups of students: current students who were still learning with them and past students who left mostly because of graduation. In speaking of current students, the psychic rewards teachers received mainly consisted of seeing students making achievements/progress and the feeling that students had laid trust upon them.

> *……whether they (students) are good performers or weak performers, I feel happy for their progress, even it might just be a small progress… (JZ, one of the most experienced teachers)*

……I felt so worthwhile when students made progress… progress not only necessarily refers to academic but also they grown up as a person… (YH, one of the most experienced teachers)

Some teachers would feel happy for any student and about any progress made, just like what JZ and YH had described above. Teachers were in this sense rather selfless, for they were happy not necessarily because students had achieved good academic performance which might later bring them a bonus from schools, but they had genuine feelings of being relieved to see students doing well in different aspects. Together with the pleasure received from students' progress, trust from students had been another important source contributing to teachers' sense of being rewarded.

……what I feel relatively successful is it that, though I am not banzhuren, sometimes students come to me for their problems and are willing to share their thoughts… in the process of interacting, I feel their trust or even reliability on me which I cherish and feel delighted… (ZY, one of the least experienced teachers)

…… my students really trust me… they will come to consult with me when needed…he does not only see me as someone to teach but more as a complete person who can help or comfort him so that he feels more relieved……(MH, one of the least experienced teachers)

Students' trust made teachers feel that they had been needed, for instance, being closer to students as a person ready to help. Teachers' feeling of being rewarded, therefore, had partly come from closer interactions with students who, with a trust for teachers, saw teachers as more easily to come

into contact with or more reliable to ask for help. Interactions between teachers and students sometimes could continue even after students' graduation.

Teachers' psychic rewards from past students mainly consisted of teachers' feelings of being continuingly respected and believing their ongoing influence on students.

> *After graduation, most students would reunite on occasions like long vacations or important festivals when they sometimes came to me for a casual chat or sent me messages to extend greetings… some of my earliest students had already worked in the same small city, and we were not regularly in touch but once we met, students still showed great respect to me which I felt so happy as a teacher…… (YY, one of the rural teachers)*

> *.....I am happy that I have been loved by students, even though I do not teach them anymore. Due to lack of experience, I had rather terrible performance for the first class I taught…they are in senior high now (still same school but in the senior department), but will come back to see me when they have time, sometimes even just for a few words! (CB, one of the least experienced teachers)*

There is an old Chinese saying that 'one day a teacher, lifetime fatherhood'. Partly because of the declining status of teachers in contemporary Chinese society, this saying might be a little bit outdated these days, but the underlying emphasis on the existence of a long-term relationship between teachers and students can still find its application, just like the experiences shared by the two teachers above. Together with the ongoing relationships was the respect that students had reserved for their teachers even after graduation, and it was this respect that made some teachers 'feel so happy as a teacher'.

Besides the continuing relationship, the ongoing influence that teachers believed students had received from their teaching had been another element making up a teacher's psychic reward.

> *……Thinking that after graduation, you still have reserved a nice image in the students' mind which could have some influence in his later learning or working lives…this is where the pride in teaching lies… (YH, one of the most experienced teachers)*

Thinking that her teaching might have some positive influence on students' later lives, YH's pride in teaching was to some extent a sense of achievement.

As some teachers described their feelings as 'happy' 'worthwhile' or 'proud', teachers' psychic reward, claimed by Rosenholtz and Simpson (1990), was of vital importance in maintaining teachers in the profession, for teachers *'must have actively participated in creating the conditions that produce the rewards'* (p. 244) which meant that *'psychic rewards reinforce teachers' devotion of time to students'* (Nias, 1989, cited from Choi & Tang, 2009, p. 775). In this research, psychic rewards reinforced teachers' professional conscience with teachers' continuous dedication in teaching.

4.2 Defining teachers' professional conscience

The three aspects of meanings identified for teachers' understandings of teaching as work of conscience, include:

- Teaching was to make the best effort to pass on knowledge
- Teaching exceeded the literary meaning of mere class 'teaching'
- Teaching was not about looking for financial reward

These three aspects above had to some extent echoed the meanings of professional conscience in the literature. For instance, Tan (2000) and Xu (2010) examined teachers' professional conscience as: 1) teachers' high awareness of being responsible and wholehearted in teaching; 2) of working hard without being monitored; 3) teachers' unconditional, genuine affection for students; 4) teachers' continuing efforts in building harmonious collegial relationships. In addition, Cai and Liu (2010) believed teachers' professional conscience consisted of 1) teachers' awareness of being caring and kind to students, 2) teachers' devotion as wholehearted and 3) teachers should be highly aware of not misleading students.

Although there is no universal definition agreed on by researchers, the core meaning of teachers' professional conscience has mainly consisted of two perspectives 1) teachers' strong self-awareness of being responsible to students, schools and society, 2) an internal standard, valued by teachers and influenced both by external requirements (for instance, from school or policy level) as well as teachers' own understanding of teaching, by use of which teachers were making judgments on teaching activities and regulating their working lives (Tan, 2000; Cai & Liu, 2010). Teachers' professional conscience has thus served as an invisible guide to direct their daily behaviours in line with their internal standards (Song, 2005; Yang, 2009).

As teaching as work of conscience was one of the most important factors relating to teachers' understanding of teaching, the meaning of teachers' professional conscience shall be stated clearly so that later discussions can be followed without conceptual ambiguity. Based on my data

and other relevant research, I therefore define teachers' professional conscience as:

> ***a set of inner-formed beliefs and standards which is influenced by social and educational (school) contexts as well as personal values through time. It influences and is influenced by teaching practice. It may grow or diminish and therefore is prone to fluctuate over time.***

Because teaching to a very large extent is teachers' own affair, which means whether one works hard or not or whether one is highly responsible or just carelessly catching up with teaching tasks, what teachers have done is largely up to their free will, especially when there are no external mechanisms to supervise teachers' daily activities effectively (Tan, 2000). When the external mechanisms are not in place, it is teachers' professional conscience that has constantly monitored teachers' work and behaviours. Important issues, therefore, are to what extent teachers can be trusted to have and maintain such a 'professional conscience'.

From previous discussions, we see that the least experienced teachers had undergone the most obvious changes while more experienced teachers had a richer understanding of teaching. That is, among teachers of different groups, it was the least experienced teachers' understanding of teaching as work of conscience that had seen the most obvious changes two years after they entered the teaching profession.

> *...there was some mention of it (teaching as work of conscience) in books or articles...but not much true feelings on the saying then (during my Master's study)...Now I have so much more to tell...teaching is work of great intensity, a challenge for both teachers' physical and mental strength...I have a student*

who had almost given up learning English and he constantly studied other school subjects in my class since he hardly had any interest and confidence left for English...I did not give up and stayed with him almost every day after school to help... (From interviews with CB, one of the least experienced teachers)

Before becoming a teacher, the saying that teaching was work of conscience, to some inexperienced teacher-candidates like CB, was no more than a term printed on paper, a term that CB was to some extent familiar with but not clear of what did it refer to when teachers made such a claim. It was her experience as a real teacher that embodied her vague impression of the claim. Two years in teaching was already enough for her to interpret teaching as work of conscience through her own understanding. Another young teacher shared similar feelings with CB.

Before teaching, I did not quite understand why teachers got so anxious and angry when students did not do well in exams or misbehave...Now I fully understand...I am working from seven in the morning till seven in the evening, I hope my efforts could be paid with my students performing well in school...my salary can just cover the basic needs... many things we do have just been work of conscience... (From interviews with MM, one of the least experienced teachers)

MM did not feel that her efforts been well paid, neither through students' school performance nor a salary that was only enough to sustain a simple living. She understood teaching as work of conscience because the reality in teaching made her realise that even though the hard work was not necessarily rewarded with satisfying results, as a teacher, she would still prefer to devote herself to teaching.

From CB's little thoughts to *'much more to tell'*, and from MM's not quite clear to *'fully understand'* the meaning of teaching as work of conscience, it was the real teaching world that enriched teachers' understanding, causing them to realise that teaching meant a lot of extra effort, even after classes or the mismatch between dedication and results, devotion and payment.

For teachers with relatively longer teaching experience (including both rural and teachers with around 10 years' teaching experience), understanding remained stable after they returned to teaching. These more experienced teachers in general, however, tended to have a richer understanding in terms of teaching as work of conscience than the least experienced teachers did.

As presented in table 4.2, among the six identified sub-themes, the least experienced group had their understandings mainly included in three to four sub-themes; the more experienced group had their understanding largely occupied categories of four to five sub-themes. One of the most obvious differences between these two groups of teachers was seen from the sub-theme of 'teaching exceeded the literary meaning of class teaching'. Four people were identified in this theme with three banzhuren out of five experienced teachers and one ordinary course teacher from the least experienced group. It was thus compared to ordinary course teachers, those who were banzhuren were more likely to be burdened with a variety of school affairs and experienced teachers had more chance of assuming the role of being a banzhuren.

Summary

Teachers' professional conscience in this research is a term used by teachers to describe their general understanding of teaching. It encompasses

meanings which include teachers' dedication to teaching as well as teachers' self-developed values and standards of how to behave as a teacher.

Professional conscience has been subjected to several factors over time. For instance, we have identified how teaching experience made a difference where the least experienced group witnessed the most obvious changes in their understanding and the more experienced group had a richer meaning in claiming their professional conscience.

Teachers, whether they claimed to have a professional conscience or not, in this fast-changing world, were all facing a changing situation in teaching prompted by changing policies and changing schools. In the next chapter, I will explore which changes teachers and teaching experienced, why it happened and how it influenced teachers' professionalism in a Chinese context.

Chapter Five: Teacher Change

This chapter examines teachers' changes two years after they graduated from the MA programme. The chapter is organized into two parts: i) teachers' changing perceptions and behaviours in teaching. This part will discuss both what the change was and factors that influenced change (MA programme, school context, teaching experience, etc.); ii) elaboration of reasons why teaching was treated by some teachers in this research mainly as a means to make a living.

Part one: Teachers' change in teaching

Three main themes had been identified from teachers' changes in teaching: 1) A shift in teachers' roles in classroom teaching; 2) Teachers' changing understanding of the importance of students' academic performance; 3) Teachers had paid more attention to how students think and learn. Table 5.1 presents 13 teachers' changes by categorising their changes into five sub-themes derived from the three main themes above.

Table 5.1 Teachers' changes in teaching

+++ Obvious change in teachers;

++ Some change in teachers;

+ Not much change in teachers

Teachers		Teachers' shifting roles		Changing understanding of the importance of students' academic performance		More understanding of how students think and learn
		Changes in perceptions	Changes in actual teaching	developing 'correct' attitudes in students is more important than the pursuit of good marks	appreciating students comprehensively other than only by test scores	learning to understand how students think and learn
Least experienced	CB	+++	+++	+++		
	CHT					++
	CLX	+++	+			++
	MH					++ +
	MM		++			
Rural teachers	XK					++
	ZY	++	++	++		++
	YY	+++	++		+++	
	ZN	++	+		++	
	WXY			+++	+++	++ +
Most Experienced teachers	WXT	++	++			
	JZ			+++		++
	YH		++			

5.1 Teachers' changing views on their classroom teaching roles

In this part, teachers' change had been examined from two perspectives: teachers' change in perceptions and teachers' change in actual teaching practice.

5.1.1 Teachers' change in perceptions

As shown in table 5.1, six teachers across all three groups talked about their changing roles in helping students learn. Though they differed in working experience, these six teachers shared understanding when it came to teachers' shifting roles: from filling the class with teachers' talk to become more supportive to allow students' voices to be heard. Among them, three teachers' change (from the rural and least experienced groups) had been marked by three crosses, indicating significant changes happened where their thoughts had been altered and new understanding had been formed. Among the three teachers, CLX and CB were the least experienced teachers and they stated their changed thoughts clearly as follows:

> *I used to feel teachers had the biggest say in the classroom and took it for granted that teachers had everything in control, but later some courses in the Master's programme consistently emphasised that students shall be the main players in teaching while teachers provided necessary support …the courses and requirements on teaching these days had gradually altered some of my earlier thoughts and I begin to think how to leave more room for students in my teaching…(CLX, one of the least experienced teachers)*

> *...now teachers are encouraged to help students develop their autonomous learning ability where teachers mainly play supporting roles, the 'chalk-and-talk' way of teaching shall be discarded... these new ideas of teaching acquired from the reforms are indeed quite different from my previous understanding where teachers preside over the class all the time lecturing book knowledge… (CB, one of the least experienced teachers)*

Both CLX and CB used to believe that teaching was mostly about the teachers' own performance, and took it for granted that teachers controlled everything while students simply followed. However, the curriculum reform made them realise that the 'chalk-and-talk' way of teaching was no longer encouraged, the new era had new requirements of teachers and reform was promoted to develop students' learning competence. These two teachers came to understand that it was not the teachers but the students who had been emphasised as the main players in classrooms.

What is interesting about CLX and CB is, as two of the least experienced teachers, they seemed to understand teaching with some 'taken-for-granted' thoughts (for example, teachers' absolute authority in class and the lack of awareness to develop students' potential) even though they did not have much teaching experience. Those 'taken-for-granted' thoughts, which seemed to be so natural and ingrained in their mind, had been later challenged either by their learning in the master's programme or the curriculum reform promoted in schools.

As part of the master's programme, curriculum reform was repeatedly talked by teachers throughout this analysis. Begun in 2001 and gradually promoted through the nation (implemented from 2009 in the province where teachers studied in this thesis worked), this reform aimed to *'play down excessive emphasis upon book knowledge, and set the central task as cultivating students' competencies'* (Zhu, 2007, p. 224).

The influence of curriculum reform was one of the most frequently mentioned factors that teachers saw as part of their shifting roles in class, and this MA programme, it seemed, served as a channel to pass on national policies

to grassroots teachers and provided those teachers with good opportunities to learn up-to-date ideas. The third teacher, YY, whose changes had also been marked by three crosses, learned for the first time about new teaching ideas required by the reform from the MA programme.

> *…my class had long been filled with cramming teaching…and I knew nothing about the curriculum reform…during the Master's study, I realised there were curriculum reforms which had new requirements for both teaching and student learning…I reflected on my past teaching and my understanding of teaching had changed a lot…the cramming teaching cannot fit the new requirements for student learning… (YY, one of the rural teachers)*

YY realised that *'cramming teaching'* was not the proper way to develop student competencies (e.g. competencies like the ability to cooperate with peers or autonomous learning). As a rural teacher with limited access to study top-down policies like this curriculum reform, YY attributed her changes mainly to the knowledge gained during her MA. Similarly, another rural teacher ZY, whose change had been marked by two crosses, stated that:

> *…teachers are required to shift their roles as class controllers in the past…has been advocated as the main players in learning, students are encouraged to take more active roles with less teacher talk…especially that after learning the new curriculum in my Master's study, I had a stronger feeling that teaching cannot be teachers' solo performance in the classroom and students' participation must be emphasised… (ZY, one of the rural teachers)*

ZY's understanding does not change greatly. Differing from YY's realisation that her previous teaching was not appropriate to develop student competence, ZY just had a *'stronger'* belief that students' involvement should

be further emphasised, and that teachers should become more attentive and supportive of students' needs. Besides ZY, there were another two teachers, ZN and WXT, whose changes in understanding had been marked with two crosses. By observing some changes to her thoughts, WXT shared her changing experiences:

> *…in the past I felt teachers more as controllers of the classroom with the minor role of learning facilitator…(after MA learning) I began to feel teachers' roles as more of learning facilitators where teachers know how to guide and develop students to their potential… (WXT, one of the most experienced teachers)*

Teachers who had been marked by three crosses had more changes in their thinking. The three 'three-crossed' teachers, CB, CLX and YY, believed their previous understanding was not appropriate to fit the new requirements for teaching and learning. Their understanding, to some extent, had been reformed by new teaching ideas; and for teachers whose change had been marked by two crosses, their understanding did not take a new form but mainly incorporated or adjusted to new requirements.

5.1.2 Factors influencing teachers' changed perceptions: Years of experience

Among the six teachers claiming to have changed perceptions of teachers' roles, five had relatively less teaching experiences with only one teacher, WXT, who had taught around ten years; furthermore, as shown in Table 5.1 all three teachers with the biggest change in thinking (as marked by three crosses in the table) were less experienced teachers: CB and CLX had taught within two years and YY within five years. It therefore seemed that less

experienced teachers, with influence from the MA programme, were more likely to change their understanding in terms of teaching.

One rural teacher, YY, provided insight into understanding less experienced teachers' adoption of new teaching ideas in that,

> *…teachers of the old generations have still maintained a feeling of 'one day a teacher, lifetime fatherhood', an authority both in and after class…the younger generations of teachers have been educated under new teaching ideas to have more respect for students… (younger teachers are) more willing to try to cooperate instead of commanding, and to respect their (students') thoughts…(YY, one of the rural teachers)*

YY was a teacher that had just reached her 30's and had taught for five years in total. As a teacher of a younger generation, she believed she had been taught to be respectful in getting on with students. While she observed that some teachers with longer experience had become used to maintain authority in teaching where quite often students simply obeyed and followed teachers' orders, YY was more willing to transform her teaching role to become more supportive.

The other two rural teachers, ZY and ZN, also referred to the importance of maintaining an equal stance with students for teaching. ZY claimed to treat students more *'democratically'* to allow them independent thinking and ZN believed her fair stance helped to make up a progressive student-teacher unit.

> *Either my peers or I, compared to teachers of old generations, we are showing more equal stance, more open and democratic mind to get along with students…not that students must follow suit of teachers, they sometimes have*

quite amazing ideas if given time and enough patience…(ZY, one of the rural teachers)

I am coming to my students with a complete equal stance… I told my students that students and teachers were a unit: we provided mutual help and support and made progress together… (ZN, one of the rural teachers)

It was interesting to see that those less experienced teachers with changed perceptions claimed that they were teachers of *'new generations'*. They were not constantly in authority and were more willing to cooperate and to facilitate student learning.

Another commonality among these less experienced teachers was their clear and strong awareness of continuing to learn and improve.

….it is not that after the learning of professional knowledge including pedagogical and subject content knowledge, that all this knowledge will never change again…the change is constant… the textbooks are changing in which teaching aims and teaching content will also be changed…an open mind to accept change and a consistency in learning is the best way to both consolidate and to enlarge knowledge… (ZN, one of the rural teachers)

ZN had a mind ready to accept change. The change of textbooks was one of the external factors that triggered ZN's internal changes, and to make internal changes happen, further learning was required to both enrich and readjust her past knowledge. The same thoughts on change were shared with CB, who believed *'both learning and change have been young teachers' normal'*.

Change in thinking, however, was not the whole picture. There were eight teachers who had made actual changes in teaching. While there was

substantial overlapping between these two groups of teachers, changed thinking in teachers did not necessarily lead to obvious changes in practice due to various reasons and also changes in teaching could be caused by reasons besides teachers' change in understanding.

5.1.3 Teachers' change in actions

As shown in table 5.1, eight (including three least experienced, three rural and two more experienced) teachers believed there were actual changes happening to their teaching, changes ranging from obvious changes marked by three crosses to minor changes marked by one cross. Change here was about teachers' action to actually involve students in teaching when in the past (mainly before MA), teaching for them was largely an affair subject to teachers' will, either due to lack of teaching experience or insufficient knowledge on how to transform teaching to be more student-oriented.

Among the eight, CB was the only teacher who described to have obvious changes in her teaching.

> *… I pay special attention to purposely develop these abilities in students (Curriculum Reform lays great emphasis on developing students' ability in independent thinking, expression, reading, etc.)…some of my students were too shy and were lack of confidence, I created opportunities for those who dare not speak out…small speech, class debates or ask them to answer questions in public courses…some of them have at least began to show progress in expressing themselves before people…*

CB was one of the least experienced teachers. Compared to the initial time when she described *'teaching as followed by feeling, teaching to the books...teaching process was terribly organised…'*, she now knew what to

teach: developing students' various learning abilities instead of merely lecturing on book knowledge; she tried how to teach: encouraging students to speak out so that later they were more capable of expressing their feelings. Different from the earlier days when her teaching was led by personal feelings and limited book content, CB's teaching now was more guided by her understanding of students' learning deficiency.

Five teachers believed there were some changes happening to their teaching, if not as great as the changes described by CB. Among the five, two rural teachers had attributed the curriculum reform as an important factor in their change.

> *…curriculum reform is a big trend…the way of teaching needs to be and will be changed and so is the role of teachers…I try to let go of students, encouraging them to think and learn by themselves…though not completely, I am consciously changing the way of teaching when I used to make everything ready … (YY, one of the rural teachers)*

> *…In the past, I always wanted to talk more in class…and now I try to leave more time for students, observing how they have learned and encouraging them to think, to ask and to solve problems… (ZY, one of the rural teachers)*

YY believed the curriculum reform had been a *'trend'*, which would continue, probably to make a difference later. She and ZY did not change by greatly altering their way of teaching; they made adjustments to allow more time for students. While YY and ZY had attributed the curriculum reform as one important factor for their change, WXT, one of the most experienced teachers, had changed her teaching not only because the reform asked teachers

to shift roles, but mainly that she found it was better if students were given more time to actively learn in class.

> *…lesson preparation was more about my thoughts of how to teach and catching up with the pre-set teaching plans, I am now having more thoughts on whether students can understand my teaching …students took notes during my teaching but there was not much point if they did not return to their notes after class…I leave more time for students to practice and digest knowledge (in class), so that they can have a deeper impression for what they have been taught today… better than I press on them a lot of things once for all and repeatedly explain one point again and again later…(WXT, one of the most experienced teachers)*

WXT's descriptions left the impression that it was mainly her teaching experience rather than the MA or the reform that made her realise the importance of students' participation in class. She found it was not much use that teachers lectured a lot in class, even though students were taking notes. She decided to actively involve students in learning in class so that knowledge could be digested in time; and by doing so, she could later save some time in teaching new knowledge instead of being stuck on topics which already been taught but which students simply had not absorbed.

Compared to CB, the only one whose change had been marked with three crosses, the other five teachers with two crosses were all more experienced teachers, including three rural teachers and two most experienced teachers. In this study, *it therefore seemed that, teachers with longer teaching experience were less likely to experience substantial changes in teaching.* However, fewer changes in experienced teachers did not imply that less experienced teachers would all embrace substantial changes within their first

few years of teaching. Two teachers' changes had been marked by only one cross, which indicated a change, that although it was traceable, had little influence on teaching. Among the two, CLX was a least experienced teacher who taught in an urban high school and ZN was a rural high school teacher. CLX had a clear awareness that teaching nowadays was required to involve students as active players in learning, but at the same time, she had many reasons to justify her difficulty in turning understanding into acts of teaching.

> *…it is really difficult to place students as the main part in teaching…I know I should give more opportunities to students and I am trying so, but I do not have enough knowledge and experience to support me, and it is not so realistic to leave much time for students when the teaching schedule is already too tight…it always takes much longer time when students are involved in class activities… (CLX, one of the least experienced teachers)*

It was not that CLX did not change at all. She tried to encourage students to participate in class but, as she claimed, she had neither adequate teaching knowledge for teaching nor was allowed much freedom to try out new ideas while she had to catch up with the teaching schedule. CLX was not alone, as a more experienced teacher, ZN, also lacked confidence, not in her own teaching but in her students' learning abilities.

> *…there might be some changes that students begin to take increasingly active part in learning…but both students and I have not done it quite well… my students have rather weak knowledge base, I suspect they could not actually learn if asked to learn autonomously.....they get too used to passive learning, they just sit and accept… what worries me is that if granted more freedom, like learning in a group, students will lose control and make teaching a big mess… I have to control the pace of teaching… (ZN, one of the rural teachers)*

ZN did not believe her students could really learn something without her presiding over the class and was afraid of the class getting out of control when students were grouped to study together. This was interesting because the teaching described by ZN — the distrust of students, and the unchanged behaviour in controlling the class — seemed to be somewhat contradictory to her previous quotes where she believed *'the change is constant'* and claimed that she had an *'open mind to accept change'*. Teachers' understanding therefore sometimes was not consistent with their actual teaching behaviour. Including ZN, three teachers provided evidence of such inconsistency.

5.1.4 School influence in causing inconsistency between teachers' change in perception and in actions

As shown in table 5.1, CLX, YY and ZN's changes in teaching behaviour did not correspond to their change in understanding, as their change in the two categories had been marked by crosses of different numbers. School influence here, specifically rural schools, schools' over-strictness with less experienced teachers and insufficient support provided for teachers to make a change, were the main reasons contributing to such inconsistency.

Among the three, YY and ZN were rural teachers teaching at high schools in less developed areas, and they believed it was certain characteristics of rural schools that had restricted teachers from making a change in teaching.

> *…it is about school leaders' understanding of teaching, I mean, school leaders in rural schools like us…it is probably that school leaders in bigger cities have better understandings of students' comprehensive development, but they (school leaders in YY's school) only had their full attention on text score, on the College Entrance Exam…they see a well-organised class is where students*

are sitting quietly with great discipline…once the class is a little bit active, like students sitting around desks for discussion, the leaders believe this teaching is a failure…(YY, one of the rural teachers)

The pressure from her school made it difficult for YY to encourage student participation in class. While she stated clearly before that *'cramming teaching'* should be replaced with more student involvement in teaching, she did not believe her school leaders would agree with her ideas. The long-standing tradition of teaching, where students listened with great discipline to teacher talking, was still prevalent in YY's school backed by the school leaders' support. Similarly, ZN's school also saw 'discipline' as one of the most important means to ensure teaching goes smoothly.

…for schools like us, scores is still the most important thing to pursue…and discipline is emphasised all the time to make sure teaching is going on smoothly…while in teaching, both the front and back door of the classroom are required to open, so that teachers patrolling on every floor can see what is going on in every class at any time…noise is strictly prohibited…the active voices of students will draw close the patrolling teacher… (ZN, one of the rural school teachers)

These two rural schools both had strict requirements for student discipline. Because of such pressure from schools, teachers like YY and ZN had to stick to the 'old' way of lecturing even when they had realised the importance of student participation in class. Besides school pressure, the limited resources and equipment in rural schools had also put a strain on teachers' changes in teaching.

…In big cities, for example if teachers want to introduce a novel, they tell students what and how to search for the related supporting materials either in, or after school. This cannot happen here, students have nowhere to look for these materials after class, we do not have library nor many computers available for students…they mainly rely on my teaching…in terms of understanding, I have changed a lot but in practice, there are many difficulties to put thoughts into practice…it is still that students talk little, think little and do little…(YY, one of the rural teachers)

The restrictions of rural schools — school leaders' emphasis on discipline, reluctance to adopt new teaching ideas, and the lack of necessary equipment and resources to support teaching — had all hindered teachers' intention to put their thoughts into practice: thoughts that students should become active players in teaching instead of being passive learners, mainly waiting and following teachers' orders.

For another teacher, CLX, school influence also played a big part in causing the mismatch between her understanding and teaching. Different from YY and ZN, CLX taught in an urban high school, and her problem was that the school was so strict with less experienced teachers that teachers like CLX did not want to risk by trying new ideas.

…the school does not have much patience for young teachers…the school leaders believe that as graduates with a Master's degree, we are supposed to be capable of anything right after graduation…the pressure is enormous and the requirement is too strict…after attending the first class of one of my young colleagues, the principal simply commented before everyone that there were many big problems in her teaching and her teaching was nothing…this is very frustrating, the school barely leaves chance for young teachers to make

mistakes…to avoid mistakes, we learn from the experienced teachers rather than try out new ideas…(CLX, one of the least experienced teachers)

Because of the impatience and intolerance experienced at school, less experienced teachers like CLX were more willing to adopt a 'safer' way of teaching by learning from experienced teachers than trying out their thoughts to make a possible change. As a less experienced teacher, CLX felt pressured and frustrated, she wanted to secure her teaching job and to avoid mistakes, even though mistakes may sometimes be the prelude for progress.

Besides insufficient support from schools in helping teachers adopt new teaching ideas as stated by CLX and teachers' lack of confidence in students' ability to fit into new ways of learning as outlined by ZN, YY gave another reason that teachers could not change by supplementing other teachers' accounts:

… (also is) teachers' own problem. Teachers were taught in the traditional methods, when a new teaching method is promoted, we need time to learn and adopt. We may have some difficulties in trying new ideas, but still we are trying…and students, they were taught this way (passively sitting and learning) all around, suddenly there came the changes, they cannot do it! Like when asked to discuss in small groups, they did not know what to do and soon they began to chat… (YY, one of the rural teachers)

School influence, teachers' insufficient knowledge to carry out new teaching ideas and students' weakness in adopting new ways of learning, were among the factors contributing to the inconsistency of teachers' changed thoughts and acts. Besides the inconsistency, there is something interesting to note that, as shown in table 5.1, there were two teachers, MM and YH, who

only talked some changes in teaching but no change happened to their thoughts. They claimed some change in behaviour as follows:

> *…the school does not allow teachers to talk every minute and we had a propaganda that 'return the classrooms to students'…the classrooms belong to students where teaching is going on with active student participation…I am trying to replace the so-called cramming teaching with a way of where students have been guided to feel the pleasure of learning… (MM, one of the least experienced teachers)*
>
> *The teaching model promoted in my school is that teachers shall share class with students instead of commanding…the model requires teachers to leave time for students to discuss after explaining knowledge points, less teacher talk, more students' words…that's it... (YH, one of the most experienced teachers)*

MM and YH both taught in urban high schools. It was the promotion of new teaching ideas in their schools that changed their teaching. Unlike other teachers, with the absence of changed thoughts, these two teachers' change seemed to be more to do with the compliance with school policy, but less to do with the thinking on change itself.

5.2 Teachers' changing views on the importance of students' academic performance

Six teachers shared the view that compared to marks, there was something else to be considered first for the sake of students' better growth. Among those considered as more important was to help shape the 'right' attitudes in students and to find merit, even in the low performers.

5.2.1 Teaching students the 'right' attitudes to life

Four teachers talked about the importance of helping students develop proper attitudes in life, including both the least experienced and the most experienced teachers. Before reaching such an understanding, however, three teachers shared their experiences when they said they believed that teaching from textbooks or improving students' test scores, was a teacher's priority.

> *When I first began to teach, my teaching had been mainly about teaching book knowledge… (JZ, one of the most experienced teachers)*
>
> *I was full of passion and enthusiasm then, competing with other teachers…eyes only on students' academic performance… (WXY, one of the rural teachers)*
>
> *Before teaching, I felt the most important thing for students was learning book knowledge well… (CB, one of the least experienced teachers)*

These three teachers, though they differed in teaching experience, all recalled times when they saw improving students' academic performance as the most important thing in teaching. However, when asked to describe their understanding of teaching now, they gave a different answer as to what they hoped to achieve most through teaching.

> *….gradually I began to feel, and now I still believe that teaching book knowledge is not enough, the most important thing is to teach students right attitudes to life … these things have been most critical for young person…for book knowledge, it is not much use if they are forced to learn and as long as one wants, it is never too late to learn…first thing is that we need to help students become positive and optimistic in life, so that when they find what they want, they can strive for it with good attitudes…(JZ, one of the most experienced teachers)*

Teaching experience was the most prominent factor behind JZ's changes. While there was a time when he believed imparting book knowledge was almost everything in teaching, his thoughts now were more on helping students develop sound attitudes for life. It seemed that more than ten years of teaching experiences made him feel reluctant to ask students to work against their will for it was *'not much use'*; and knowledge to him was something ready to learn, as long as one had the intention of making progress. Compared to the acquisition of book knowledge, the forming of the right attitudes cannot wait, for these attitudes might be of great importance in helping students achieve their goals later on in their lives.

Like JZ, WXY was another teacher whose thoughts had been changed through past experiences; unlike JZ's efforts spent in shaping an optimistic character in students, she saw more importance in helping students develop some basic good qualities: to be respectful and to be kind.

> *…a good breeding is the most important thing…after years of teaching, I have increasingly felt that while I can tolerate a student who cannot do well enough in learning because not everyone is supposed to be capable of everything, I cannot stand a child without proper breeding…for instance, knowing how to respect and to be kind is something both basic and also things one should keep learning, we as teachers need to help students shape such attitudes in their teenage years…(WXY, one of the rural teachers)*

Though in her initial days as a teacher, WXY made a great effort to help students get good scores, years of teaching made her realise that not everyone could do well in her class but she did hope that everyone could behave properly in terms of respecting and being nice to others. She did not have much tolerance for ill-behaved students who lacked *'basic'* breeding, and

she felt as a teacher she had to help, especially that these students were in their teenage years, a critical time when one's attitudes in life took form.

Compared to more experienced teachers like JZ and WXY, CB's change was not inspired by extended teaching experience, but mainly because she had become a teacher.

> *…after teaching, I realised that it is too ideal to ask every student to work the way as I have expected…compared to academic performance, it is more important to teach them right attitudes to life……so that after graduation, what they can learn from my teaching is not only some English knowledge…but also to help them shape good attitudes and habits in life, like when a carpenter travelled, he only took with him his tools, but not a whole set of ready-made furniture…(CB, one of the least experienced teachers)*

JZ, WXT and CB's changes had been marked with three crosses, indicating a great shift in seeing the priority of teaching: from a heavy focus on students' academic performance to more attention being paid to shaping proper attitudes in students.

As the only teacher whose change had been marked by two crosses, ZY had referred to the school influence, and believed that students' learning to become a well-behaved person outweighed school performance,

> *….(understanding) is involved and consolidated…that while teaching, whether a student has good academic performance or not, the first thing is that s/he should learn to become a decent person. My school always says that 'First learn to be a man, then learn to learn'…no matter how good a performer one might be, s/he shall firstly have right attitudes and behave properly, that when walking out, people could feel his decency…at least not someone who makes others feel disgusted at first glance… (ZY, one of the rural teachers)*

ZY had taught for nearly five years, however, her understandings of shaping proper attitudes in students did not go through big changes but mainly had been *'consolidated'* through time. It was not surprising for she worked in a school where students' healthy growth, rather than an overemphasis on students' academic performance, had been promoted.

Either because of teaching experience, school influence or simply becoming a real teacher, the four teachers all made it clear that they saw more importance in supporting the 'healthy growth' of students. They understood that students would benefit more from good attitudes or nice characters in the long run and instead of satisfying marks, it was the development of some nice qualities that were required for every student.

5.2.2 Appreciating students from different aspects

As some teachers diverted their attention from the heavy emphasis put on academic performance, three teachers were identified in this research as appreciating students from different perspectives: to see students' talents and nice qualities despite school performance, and to help students develop the necessary working abilities in life.

One of the rural teachers, YY, shared a story about a girl in her class who had never been good enough at any schoolwork and she seldom paid much attention to her. Until recently and very accidentally that she found this girl's handwriting on the blackboard was so amazing that later she asked her for help when much writing was needed for teaching. Now this girl had become the first one to think of for any writing work in her class if needed. At the end of the story, she described this girl as being *'brilliant'*.

YY was a rural teacher teaching for five years. She described her changes, especially changes after graduating from the MA programme as follows:

> *…the main thing I saw in students then was marks, but when I came back (from master's programme), I feel that I should not see as much importance on students' academic performance as I did before…they might be excellent in other ways, only that we may not know yet…(YY, one of the rural teachers)*

Another rural teacher, WXY, had further given evidence that this MA programme had had an influence on teachers by emphasising more student-oriented teaching: she learned that teachers shall not label students only based on school performance:

> *After master's study I feel that I am more tolerant of students who cannot do well in schoolwork…one of the lecturer had particularly talked that teachers shall not label some students as being 'poor' (Chasheng) in schoolwork, but referred to them as 'difficult learners' (Xuekunsheng) or 'students with less school achievements' (Houjinsheng), for 'poor students' implies discrimination and a denial of students' other abilities… I am not using 'poor' anymore… schoolwork is one part, even some students cannot have stunning marks, most of them are lovely children, enthusiastic, helpful, and caring…(WXY, one of the rural teachers)*

For WXY, it was not only about the change in labelling students, but a tolerant heart and a stronger willingness to know more about her students.

Both YY and WXY's change had been marked with three crosses in table 5.1. For the former, she really learnt to identify different sides to her students and made new discoveries on seeing the brilliance of someone in her

class; for the later, she gave up labelling students based on their school performance and embraced a broader view to see good qualities in her students.

While YY and WXY found students' shining points after class, other teachers paid attention to students' various abilities demonstrated through class activities.

> *…students' everyday performance in schools should be considered…I have paid more attention to students' willingness in participating in class activities, or his ability in communication and cooperation in teamwork… (ZN, one of the rural teachers)*

In or after class, when marks were not the only thing that teachers spent all their effort on, the meaning of teaching was broadened. With a broader meaning, teaching allowed teachers to help shape the right attitudes for life in students and to discover students' positive qualities or various abilities. The change in understanding on seeing the importance of students' academic performance, however, was not something commonly found in every teacher that had been interviewed. The interesting thing was, among the six teachers with a changed priority in teaching, five of them were teachers with longer experience: four were rural teachers with five years' experience, and one had taught for over 10 years. It therefore seemed that *teachers with longer teaching experience were more likely to have changed views on the importance of students' school performance.*

5.3 Teaching by thinking from the students' perspective

Seven teachers talked about teaching by thinking from the students' points of view, making this sub-theme one of the most frequently mentioned themes when teachers shared their changing views in teaching. With six

teachers as early career teachers with teaching experience within five years, less experienced teachers made up the majority in this category.

Among the seven teachers, two less experienced teachers talked about their earlier days of teaching where they failed to see the difference among students as individual learners and tended to teach the whole class in a uniform way by following intuition.

> *…in the beginning (of teaching), my thought was very simple that I only passed on knowledge to the class and that was all…I just (taught by) following feelings… (XK, one of the rural teachers)*

> *…in the beginning, I did not know how to teach or how to deal with students… I tended to treat all my students the same way… (CHT, one of the least experienced teachers)*

As less experienced teachers, XK and CHT's failure to notice student differences had been identified in literature as one of the difficulties encountered by early career teachers, where teachers found they had problems in choosing teaching methods, in other words, in applying pedagogical knowledge properly while teaching a full class (Shoval et al., 2010; Tynjala & Heikkinen, 2011).

With time passing by, XK learned from his own teaching that there should be different ways for different students, that teachers had to consider students' different learning needs to best engage everyone in learning.

> *I am teaching Chinese…there was one time that amid the routine lecture on text, I explained the Chinese Character 灭 (means to destroy or distinguish something), I said the making of this character was superb, for this character was made of a fire (火 means 'fire') and a cover (一) on the fire. No language*

in use could be so vivid to describe a meaning by using a form of a single character, and we went on discussing similar cases in Chinese…I found students whose mind quite often was drifted away were listening closely and trying to think out something... there are always students who cannot well follow in class, teachers have to learn to find ways to make teaching attractive…

And he used a metaphor to further explain his understanding of the importance of students' differences:

…like dishes, someone likes it sweet while others prefer salty and to make this dish popular, the chef must have good knowledge of what his customers like, so it is in teaching. To make students feel interested in class, the teachers must think from students' points of view, so that we know what different students want, what their characteristics are in learning…when we can follow students' thinking, we know not only what to give and also what are the best ways to give…I do consider more from students' standpoint now…

From his own experiences, XK realised the importance and possibility of engaging different learners in learning. While routine teaching cannot always keep students' attention in class, a closer-to-life example had successfully aroused their interest to participate in class discussion. XK was quite aware that students were different in terms of needs and interests in learning; and he believed that teachers, like a chef, had to understand such differences to cater to students' specific needs.

For the other teacher, CHT, he extended his understanding of students' difference after class, and even emphasised strong gender awareness in that:

…when helping solve their problems after class, the way of dealing with each case shall be varied with each individual…especially that I am a male teacher

and I have to be more cautious in dealing with girls' problems… (CHT, one of the least experienced teachers)

Besides the lack of awareness in noticing student differences, less experienced teachers also had problems in teaching caused by their neglect to see difference between teachers and students in learning, like two of the least experienced teachers said that,

...you only thought you had many stuff ready to press on to them (students): language, culture, way of thinking… made every class full of teachers' talk… (MH, one of the least experienced teachers)

…in the past, my teaching plan was all about what I wanted to achieve through this class and I chose my teaching methods because I believed they can learn this way… (CLX, one of the least experienced teachers)

MH and CLX had their initial days of teaching mostly based on their own understanding of students' learning: they filled their classes with content they believed students would like to learn and they taught in ways that they believed were appropriate. Least experienced teachers began their teaching with few thoughts for students, which, however, was understandable, for they were often busy with surviving their new jobs. With time passing by, they became aware that there was something that needed to be improved in their teaching, in that:

...you cannot simply ask students to reach your standards and take the requirements for granted…you need to communicate and sometimes share the same feelings with them and to think from students' points of views…what you want to give quite often is not what students can accept so immediately...this knowledge might be easy for teachers but could be rather difficult for

students…my progress in teaching is that I do not rush now…Only that students can master what I teach is enough… (MH, one of the least experienced teachers)

MH's change had been marked with three crosses. From focusing on knowledge to patiently teaching according to students' learning ability, MH realised that teaching was not something determined only by teachers' will. For CLX, she believed it was age that prevented her from following students' development and therefore teachers had to catch up with students' thinking.

…(My) thinking cannot follow the speed of students' development and there is surely the so-called age gap between students and I…Until becoming a teacher, I did not quite realise that the things students were interested in or the way they understood things was so different from mine…students have their own characteristics …teachers need to follow students' thinking and pace…(CLX, one of the least experienced teachers)

These four less experienced teachers above, either because they had noticed the variety among students or had realised the difference between teachers and students, their understanding changed with the accumulation of teaching experience. This accumulation of experience was not just a simple repeat of their own teaching; they discovered new things from teaching like XK found that there were ways to engage more students in class learning, and they reflected on teaching like MH realised that teaching should go with students' capability to learn. During the accumulation process, there was a change in teachers' knowledge: XK and MH had made an adjustment to their teaching methods, their pedagogical knowledge had been consolidated; CHT

and CLX had been more aware that students were different, that their knowledge of learners had improved.

Besides the four less experienced teachers above, there were two other teachers, while talking about the changed belief that teaching should happen with more understanding of students' learning needs, they tended to refer to the influences received from the MA programme.

> *…the MA courses talked much about treating students with a more equal stance…one simple example is that in the past when students were asked to answer questions but responded terribly, I would probably get angry and lose patience, believing that it must be their problems as I had already spent so much time teaching. I think I have made some improvement after graduation…when he cannot answer properly, I reflect on whether it is because he does not get the question right or is there something wrong with my teaching that makes him feel puzzled or simply because he needs more time to think… (JZ, one of the most experienced teachers)*

JZ learned to show understandings to students with a more *'equal stance'*. He did not simply blame everything on students as if teachers were always right, but reflected and tried to find the causes in his teaching and tried to probe into students' thinking. When teachers stopped believing that they were always right, some teachers preferred not to force their way of thinking onto students anymore, but started to show more respect for students' thoughts.

> *I had a student who did not want to learn English because he wanted to become a taxi driver and believed there was not much use to study a foreign language. I had to change his thoughts then, persuading him to learn well so that he could get enrolled in a better university later…but now I think that it is alright for a young man who wishes to become a taxi driver, this is his dream*

and pursuit. What I can do is to teach him some everyday English, like how to call a taxi or how to make a casual chat with the customers… I do not have to force him to learn grammar or recite some articles… (WXY, one of the rural teachers)

WXY's change had been marked with three crosses. While she said she did not want to force her will on students now, she acknowledged that *'in the past… I just (believed) that I had the biggest say in the class and had to switch him onto the 'right track' by my own definition…'.* There was an obvious alteration happening to her understanding. She believed her master's study had played a part in changing her thoughts.

…(In MA study) the idea of making students the main players in class had been promoted… I felt that teachers did not necessarily have to change students but to teach them in accordance with their own abilities…after graduation, I do not feel like being in a tense state to have to change students…

It is interesting because except for WXY, the majority of less experienced teachers had attributed their change more to their working experience.

The idea that teaching is the affair of the teachers is no longer appropriate in this new era. Teaching nowadays is supposed to involve the active participation of both teachers and students, and instead of maintaining absolute authority, teachers are lowering their stance to get closer to students who are different and are full of potential. While the changes in teachers can be traced, there are still important issues to be discussed for the better understanding of teachers' changes in teaching.

The changes examined above were where teachers made progress and improvement in either understanding or actual teaching. Besides that, there was another change: six teachers used to have some positive expectations of teaching but now they mainly treated teaching as a job for economic survival. By examining teachers who had undergone change, I found an interesting match between those who failed to talk change in teaching and those who shared the view that teaching was mainly for making a living. This issue will be dealt with later.

Part Two: Teaching as a job for economic survival

Six teachers shared the understanding that teaching for them was mainly a job for making a living. While there was a time that teaching had been a 'glorious' profession where teachers had been listed as symbols after heaven, earth, emperor and parents to be treated with great respect in China, teachers identified in this theme saw teaching as mainly a job for making a living. Teaching here, subject to both school, social and personal influence, for a very large part, was more about meeting these teachers' practical living needs. Teachers stayed in the teaching profession, not because they saw teaching as being 'glorious', but because such a job was necessary to make a living. This change was important, not only because it demonstrated how and why teachers changed their understanding against a background where the status of teaching had declined in China, it also provides us with important insight into the reasons why some teachers did not experience much change in teaching. Table 5.2 summarises the reasons behind teachers' claim of teaching only as a job, where reasons are classified into three main categories.

Table 5.2 Teaching as a job for economic survival

+++ Factors with great influence on teachers' understanding, leading to radical changes in teachers' understandings

++ Factors with some influence on teachers' understanding without completely altering teachers' previous understandings

+ Factors with little influence on teachers' understanding

Reasons Teachers		Frustration in teaching	Negative school influence	Declining social status of teaching	
				low salary	less respect from students
Least experienced	CHT	++			++
	CLX	+++	+++		
	QL	+++	+++		++
Rural teachers	XK		+++	+++	
	XLH		+++	+++	++
Most experienced	ZXM		+++		

5.4 Less experienced teachers' frustration in teaching

Before feeling frustrated, all the three least experienced teachers in this research (CHT, CLX and QL) had a rather idealised expectation of teaching before, or in the very beginning of entering teaching profession.

...just after graduation, I was full of good expectations, feeling that I had learned a lot and eager to give them a try in practice. I believed I could handle well many problems...I had rather idealised expectations for teaching then... (CHT, one of the least experienced teachers)

...Before or even including the beginning of my teaching, I had rather idealised thoughts, felt that I should apply my acquired knowledge to teaching and that

my students would feel interested for my class… (QL, one of the least experienced teachers)

Both CHT and QL used to understand teaching was the way through which they could put their learning into practice and where they could accomplish work effectively. They expected themselves to be skilful in dealing with student problems or their teaching was attractive to everyone. They were confident in the knowledge acquired for teaching. Slightly different from them was CLX, instead of focusing on class teaching, she was pursuing a sense of fulfilment where students were touched by her dedication to teaching.

I had nice expectations…when I just began to teach, almost every day, I spent a lot of time having heart-to-heart talks with students, I believed that my students could be moved by my serious attitudes and devotion…(CLX, one of the least experienced teachers)

No matter what kind of expectations these beginner teachers had of teaching, the picture they drew of their work was optimistic in the beginning, filled with hope and ambition. Teaching reality, however, was not going the way these less experienced teachers had imagined. Less than two years into teaching, the three teachers had found themselves being caught in difficult situations caused by different reasons.

…there is no problem with my subject matter knowledge, I surely understand a lot; the problem is understanding is one thing while how to teach is another…I do not know how to teach, just tell students about knowledge…I tried some methods: carefully designed PPT slices to raise their interest, or encouraged them to engage in activities like making plays…but in general, my teaching is still rather dull, I was told so by my students…I cover 40 minutes to teach with my own talk, and rarely ask questions…I do not feel that I am so passionate

about teaching as I used to be, but more and more see it as a plain job.(CHT, one of the least experienced teachers)

CHT felt his inadequacy in pedagogical content knowledge: as an English teacher, he did not know how to teach English. While he was still confident about his subject matter, English in his case, he was quite aware that compared to knowing what to teach, knowing how to teach was much more difficult. He felt frustrated with his dull teaching and this frustration gradually eroded his past passion and expectation of teaching.

Another was QL, a high school English teacher. She was struggling between her own ideas of teaching and her compliance with the way of teaching at her school:

…I do not have many ideas left, almost following the way…I have to learn from these experienced teachers because their students do have better scores! For example, the experienced teachers can predict the topic of the composition in students' next exam and they required students to recite sentences from textbooks. As long as these sentences were related to the topic, students can at least get some marks...students feel painful in learning and I feel painful about teaching them this way…I feel so contradicted with myself, this kind of teaching is pointless… (QL, one of the least experienced teachers)

QL's problem was that even she did not seem to agree with other teachers' teaching, she had to follow suit in compensation for abandoning her own ideas of teaching. In a school where test scores spoke aloud, QL was constantly struggling with herself: she could not find much point in forcing students to learn only for scores, but she had to adopt ways of teaching that were prevalent in her school for better tests results. This unsettled dilemma had cast a rather negative influence on her feeling for teaching.

The last least experienced teacher to be discussed was CLX. She was not frustrated by not knowing how to teach, however, was hurt by the coldness from students:

> *…there was one student who I was so sincere to help and hoped he could be somewhat touched to make even a little change, all I got was his cold words that: you did this just for being rewarded by the school… there were many times students seemed to be completely indifferent to what I did for them…gradually, the heart is cooling down… teaching is only a job…every day I just get to work, I still work seriously, and finish the assigned teaching tasks…(CLX, one of the least experienced teachers)*

Without a proper response to her devotion, and her dedication wrongly interpreted because of student's misunderstanding, CLX did not see her efforts as worthwhile - she mainly felt big disappointment in teaching.

Shoval et al. (2010), by referring to Vonk (1995), had classified difficulties encountered by beginner teachers into three categories: the professional level, where teachers had problems in terms of subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, teaching skills, etc.; the environmental level, which included teachers' difficulty in integrating into school norms; and the personal level where teachers experienced negative feelings including anxiety, confusion, etc. (p. 87). The experiences shared by the three beginner teachers above had corresponded to difficulties on the three levels: the feeling of inadequacy of pedagogical content knowledge by CHT on the professional level, the contradicted feeling of following other teachers' teaching by QL on the environmental level and CLX's disappointment in students' indifference on the personal level.

The difficulties met by these least experienced teachers were different; the consequences of these difficulties were quite similar: beginner teachers felt frustrated with teaching. While their frustration increased, their past expectation of teaching had almost disappeared. They could not feel the excitement of teaching but referred to teaching as a 'plain' job with repetition; some less experienced teachers' thoughts did not fit into school reality for they saw that teaching for scores was meaningless; and when teachers' care and dedication meant little to students, teaching became routine work carried out without much passion.

While frustration in teaching was one of the most important factors that made beginner teachers treat teaching as a means of making a living, for all the six teachers identified in this theme, it was school influence that had been the most frequently referred to factor in contributing to teachers' understanding of seeing teaching as a job for economic survival.

5.5 Negative school influence on teachers of all career phases

Including the two least experienced teachers discussed above (CLX and QL), five teachers across all three groups described their disappointment with their teaching lives.

Not only disappointed by her students' coldness, CLX was also dispirited by her school where she found teachers' thoughts had not been listened to and respected, that schools had constantly interfered and interrupted their teaching:

> *…The school won't listen to us, school leaders insist leading teaching towards the direction they believe as right…ordinary teachers' voices cannot be heard, and their thoughts cannot be respected…there was a time one of our principals*

responsible for teaching affairs asked every teacher to write teaching targets before teaching otherwise teachers would lose some merits in later teacher evaluation…and next time, another principal forbade the writing of teaching targets…we do not know what they really want us to do……only teaching according to the requirements from schools and dealing with some other class problems…getting by day by day, that is…I do not have a thing called career planning…(CLX, one of the least experienced teachers)

Less than two years into teaching, CLX's attitude towards teaching was already *'getting by'* where she hardly had any intention to make teaching a long-term career. She wanted to raise her own voice but had been ignored; she tried to follow school requirements but found these requirements not only were changing but even contradicting themselves. The inconsistency of school requirements for teaching made her feel frustrated but still she had to follow. Similar to CLX was XK, one of the rural teachers, whose teaching had been constantly interrupted by various orders from his school. However, XK's disappointment with teaching had changed for a while when he was newly gradually from the MA programme.

…when newly graduated, I felt teaching was a kind of job with serious purpose and as a teacher I had a great sense of mission…

He believed it was the temporary distance from his school and the relaxed learning atmosphere at the university that allowed him to rebuild a good image of teaching and teachers. These images, however, did not last long.

…not long after I returned to work, my understanding is once again that teacher is just a craftsman and teaching is only a job for economical surviving…there is less and less freedom for teachers but more and more restrictions from schools, everything we do is about making students have

better marks, teaching has completely become work in a production line…to say teaching is a beacon in one's life has increasingly become light talk…

The return to work from university had dragged XK back to school reality and had smashed the previous nice images he had imagined about teaching. With requirements from schools becoming overwhelming, teachers' freedom had been squeezed. Teachers rigidly followed school rules and teaching became closer and closer to a production process: students were the products with marks as the only mould used to shape them. Besides the compliance with school rules, there was also continuing disruption to teaching by his school,

…the school forces teachers to do a lot of things without seeking any consultation with us…to impress leaders above, very often, our school forces teachers to divert attention from teaching by preparing various school activities…this time it is students' Mandarin competition, next time it is cleaning up every corner of the school for some city leaders to visit, and next time it is to stay overnight to hold a celebration for Teachers' Day…what's the point of all these, only that our teaching has been interrupted…I am disappointed…teaching here is not purely about teaching at all…(XK, one of the rural teachers)

XK's school forced him to do so many things which he saw not only as irrelevant to teaching but which had seriously interrupted his daily work. He felt that instead of seeing teaching as the most important thing, his priority sometimes was to help school leaders attract attention from someone 'above'; that teaching had to give way to activities because of school pride and teachers were wasting their time on meaningless tasks. For teachers like CLX and XK, even if they felt some requirements from schools were unreasonable, they were

helpless and had to implement them; dispirited by school interference, their enthusiasm for teaching had decreased and they began to work with a *'getting by'* attitude.

While CLX and XK could still *'get by'* as long as they followed school orders, two teachers from a special area could tell how desperate teachers could be when their schools pushed teachers to the extreme for good test scores.

These two teachers, XLH and ZXM, both came from schools located in the 'H' area. Located in the north of China, this less developed area is well known for its strict school management and high enrolment rate into universities. One of the teachers, ZXM described schools here as *'…being seen as models to follow, and every year… parents, teachers, school leaders and other people working in education visited our schools, eager to learn 'secrets' here…'.*

As an experienced teacher, interestingly, like the rural teacher XK, ZXM also had her understanding of teaching changed for a while when she was in the MA programme.

> *…time in the university was so relaxing…life was ideal, that people there began to have some nice expectations of teaching: cheerful, relaxing…*

The happy time in the university was like a filter which had filtered the negative side of teachers' past teaching experience and also provided enough time and space for teachers to re-form their understanding of teaching. But once they came back, what she faced was still a harsh teaching reality.

> *When you came back, you found that you could no longer catch up with other teachers…it was probably because of school teaching in this area…if you had*

not returned to previous teaching, you would definitely have been lagged behind in students' test scores in such a heavy exam-oriented place…

She went on to explain how school teaching was like this in 'H' area.

…school teaching in 'H' area is very rigid and strict…teachers manage students' every minute and all teachers think about is competition for universities and marks…for many teachers here, they do not need to understand students, only that they push students to learn hard and harder… (ZXM, one of the most experienced teachers)

The harsh teaching environment in 'H' area had had a considerable negative influence on teachers. Teachers there were working like overloaded machines that kept running.

…senior high school teachers in 'H' area are feeling exhausted… the working pressure here is enormous …like today I have a colleague who called me and said that she did not rest for two weeks. In the daytime, she was invigilating exams and at night she was marking the exam papers until 10, no time for a simple dinner. And she had to get up at five in the morning to supervise students' morning self-learning classes…the schools manage teachers to the extreme and no time is left for private lives…as long as students have any time available, teachers have to find them and teach……teachers do not want to teach this way, only that we are forced by schools...school is a big prison…teachers only see teaching as a job for a living, it is not a career, we all have enough of teaching like this…

ZXM described schools in 'H' area as *'prison'* where teachers like her worked under rigid requirements and heavy pressure. It seemed that teachers there had been stripped of joy, both in teaching and in life, for they had to work around the clock to win ever fierce competitions for the annual National

College Entrance Exam. The high university enrollment of schools in this area came with the price of teachers working until they were exhausted and the 'secrets' sought by visitors outside this area were only that both teachers and students were required to work hard and harder.

ZXM had taught over 10 years in 'H' area, and for the other younger teacher XLH, who had been working there for five years, the story was not different.

> *Including our school, the teaching model in 'H' area is very strict…that every minute shall be made full use of, no interval, all day teaching and never-ending consistency in managing students…the great intensity of teaching, the high requirement for academic performance…all of which have made teachers feel extremely restricted and tired…*

Different schools, similar experiences. The difficult realities of teaching made XLH almost forgot how he used to think about teaching.

> *There is hardly any time that I could remember teaching as a glorious profession, giving knowledge to the younger generation…my mind is now fully occupied with reality, I am teaching because this is kind of job provides me stability in life…*

The pressure in teaching was so persistent that, unlike XK and ZXM who had reformed some nice expectations of teaching on the MA programme, XLH did not feel at ease, even when he stopped teaching. He described his feeling while on the MA programme as:

> *…not much excitement…just felt like one had finally pulled his head out of water for a while when his head had been pressed into deep water for a long time…*

When teaching was all about endless competitions and heavy pressure and tiredness, for teachers like ZXM and XLH, the biggest reason to stay was because they needed such a job to live.

The last situation that made some teachers see little value left in teaching was the slim chance of being promoted in schools. QL, who felt pressured and contradicted in following teaching norms at her school, also had little confidence in foreseeing her promotion in the near future.

> *…the most important thing in getting promoted is seniority, including teachers' age and one's personal social network in or out of school…it is said that young teachers with a master's degree would get promoted after five year's working here, it will not happen…there are already so many teachers who have taught much longer than me waiting in the queue, and I do not have much of a social network developed yet as a new teacher coming from outside the local area...I have to wait at least until I am forty years old to get promoted…it is really meaningless to stay in teaching … (QL, one of the least experienced teachers)*

Promotion in QL's school was time-consuming, for teachers' working years were the first thing to be considered. Furthermore, this promotion seemed to be quite unfair for those who did not have much of a personal network to help them along. When teaching achievement was not the most important thing for a promotion, teachers like QL lost enthusiasm for teaching. She did not have many expectations of teaching in the long-term, for she believed it would take almost 10 years before it would be her turn to get promoted and began to feel *'meaningless'* by staying in this profession.

5.6 Declining social status

The last factor affecting teachers' understanding in seeing teaching mainly as a job for surviving was teachers' declining social status, which had been manifested by teachers' low salaries and less respect paid by students.

5.6.1 Low salary

In the previous chapter on teaching as work of conscience, there were already some discussions on teachers' low salaries. In that part, teachers acknowledged their low payment but shared the view that they did not teach only for money, that even being poorly paid, they still worked their best, for teaching for them was work of conscience. This time, when teachers again talked about low salaries, the negative side of the mismatch between teachers' hard work and unsatisfying payment became quite obvious.

> *…teachers' nowadays only have very low social status, and one of the reasons is because teachers have been poorly paid. When one's salary is low, very easily his sense of pride has gone and feels unfair for what he has done… for each month, my salary is only 2000 RMB, it is even difficult to raise a family by relying on this money…I feel sorry for myself…(XK, one of the rural teachers)*

Teaching at a school in a less developed area, what XK had been rewarded for his work was 2000 RMB (approximately 200 pounds) per month. The low salary took away his pride as a teacher, for he found his earnings were not even enough to support his family; while the pride had gone, what was left was his feeling of disappointment and unfairness of working in teaching profession.

Another teacher seeing low salary as an important reason for teachers' declining social status was XLH. This teacher from 'H' area worked under

great intensity and extreme pressure, but still he had not been well paid for his hard work.

…one's economic status decides one's social status, and teachers' low salary makes teachers' social status relatively low…people were encouraged to respect teachers in the past but the situation has changed because everyone is now judged by money…what teachers have been paid does not match what we have done…it is not right that teachers are only required to do this or that…as a person, I have to first see teaching as a tool for surviving…(XLH, one of the rural teachers)

XK and XLH were both rural teachers. In a world where money had been emphasis in measuring one's value, it was understandable that some teachers felt disappointed about their earnings: teaching was only able to provide them with basic living needs. Besides low payment, the other reason for teachers' declining social status was attributed to less respect shown by students.

5.6.2 Less respect from students

Three early career teachers: CHT, QL and XLH, expressed their concern about decreasing respect shown by the student:

…students are quite different from those of my generation…they have been spoiled and do not listen to or even deliberately go against my requirements…they are not as polite and respectful as I was in the past…(CHT, one of the least experienced teachers)

Kids these days are more mature than their age and they are not afraid of teachers as we were in our school times…one extreme case is that one kid, and even till now I do not know where he got such ideas, said that teaching was

kind of service and what teachers did was just providing service…I was astonished by his words… (QL, one of the least experienced teachers)

As two of the least experienced teachers, both CHT and QL recalled how they respected their teachers in the past. Influenced either by their families or by misunderstandings of teaching in society, students showed little care for teacher requirements and devotion. The rural teacher, XLH, put it even clearer that instead of learning to show respect for teachers and teaching, students even held teachers in contempt, in that,

…with the fast development of society, kids these days are more mature than their ages and are difficult to handle. They do not have much understanding of teaching and they even look down upon teachers…for the whole society, there is not much respect left for teachers and teaching… (XLH, one of the rural teachers)

Low salary and students' lack of respect, contributed to teachers' deteriorating social status and because of teachers' declining social status, there was a misunderstanding of teaching which further affected students or even society's respect for teachers.

Summary

We see that teachers experienced different changes, and their different ways of changing were aligned with different kinds of influence — top-down educational reform, teachers' attendance at the MA programme, school context and individual histories including teaching experience, family background, etc. Teachers' change had been either subject to one prominent influence or had been subject to the results of interaction among different influential factors. While this chapter presented a detailed analysis of various types of teacher

change and factors affecting change, we will now go deeper in the next discussion chapter to see how the interplay of influential factors affected teachers' change in relation to teacher professionalism in China.

Chapter Six: Discussion

Introduction

The previous two chapters have reported i) findings on the nature of professional conscience; ii) evidence of its importance as a core component of Chinese teachers' sense of professionalism; and iii) how changing contexts influenced teachers' perceptions and teaching. Although initially the sixteen participant teachers had been grouped with reference to their teaching experience, the differences which the research revealed were associated with the influence of many more factors than just their years in teaching: the interaction over time among teaching experience, MA experience, school context (rural vs. urban or heavily examination oriented schools vs. less examination oriented schools) and personal biography (assuming different roles as teachers or family backgrounds).

In this chapter, I will first try to explore in depth the meaning of key elements of teachers' professional conscience, based on data generated from this research and existing research. The intention here is to present a more nuanced understanding of teachers' working lives, especially among teachers in a Chinese context. After exploring the meaning of teachers' professional conscience, I will move on to explore professional conscience and teacher change with two overarching questions:

1. How and to what extent are teachers' professional conscience and teacher change associated?

2. How does an understanding of variation in the professional conscience of teachers in China provide us with a better understanding of the nature of teacher professionalism?

6.1 Teachers' professional conscience

In chapter four, after presenting the meaning of as well as factors affecting professional conscience, teachers' professional conscience has been defined as:

> ***a set of inner-formed beliefs and standards which is influenced by social and educational (school) contexts as well as personal values through time. It influences and is influenced by teaching practice. It may grow or diminish and therefore is prone to fluctuate over time.***

This definition suggests that there are four aspects/components of professional conscience which together contribute to a fuller understanding of its nature.

1. Professional conscience is subject to the influence of external factors including broader social-cultural contexts and the local school context.

2. Professional conscience is not only influenced by external factors but also located in teachers' personal biographies and perceptions of teaching.

3. Professional conscience constitutes part of teachers' internal moral values and standards that mediate teachers' actions and behaviours.

4. The nature and strength of professional conscience may fluctuate.

Professional conscience has been one of the key factors identified in this research that has influenced teachers' working lives in China. However, before further discussions on professional conscience, we must make it clear that professional conscience is not identical to moral purpose. A review through literature reveals that the concept of moral purpose in the West has been mostly related to school leadership, to school improvement/reform or to systematic changes in education. In discussions on moral purpose, there is hardly any clear definition for teachers' moral purpose specifically.

The following sections will be framed under the four components identified above for meanings of professional conscience. Among them, the influence of a broad social context on professional conscience will be discussed first.

6.1.1 Professional conscience and social-cultural contexts

Teachers' social status

Within Chinese society and culture, teachers and teaching, to a large extent, have been understood differently from that of the West. There is continuing debate and discussion around whether teaching is a profession in Western literature. There were arguments which stated that teaching was simple work requiring little specialised knowledge; there were even claims like 'teaching is not highly esteemed work' (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003, p. 583). Involving a wide variety of social forces at play (Dolton & Marcenaro-Gutierrez, 2013), teachers' social status could be seen as an indicator of how teachers and teaching are regarded by society.

According to an interesting report investigating teachers' social status in 21 countries participating in the latest OECD PISA assessment, it emerged that Chinese teachers enjoyed the highest social status compared to their counterparts in all other participating countries (Dolton & Marcenaro-Gutierrez, 2013). The report claimed that teachers in China were believed to hold the same social status as doctors while the majority of other countries rank teachers as social workers; and teaching in China was a sought-after profession where Chinese children had been encouraged to become teachers by their parents. These findings, based on data collected from questionnaires responded to by 1,000 Chinese people who had been selected according to criteria including age, gender and region, are not surprising.

In line with the findings above, Chinese teachers' high social status has been partly supported by evidence from this research. In chapter four on **professional conscience**, there is a specific section which talks about teachers' *'psychical reward'*. Teachers' *'psychical reward'* has been evidenced as one of the factors contributing to teachers' feeling of being rewarded; it is realised by the high respect paid to teachers by both former and current students. However, despite all the evidence showing Chinese teachers' high social status, four teachers from this research claimed that teachers' status had actually been declining in China. According to these four teachers, teachers' declining status was due to reasons such as low salary (reported by two teachers) and less respect from students (reported by three teachers). Although these four teachers' claims cannot represent the whole picture, they carried some information about possible negative changes in teachers' social status. Because these four teachers had all failed to refer to their professional conscience while

reporting a feeling of being less respected, the question is thus: *To what extent does teachers' perceived declining social status connect with their claim of professional conscience and what could be the reasons behind such connections (or a lack of connections)*.

However, apart from the claims by the four teachers, other Chinese teachers interviewed in this research still believed they enjoyed a relatively high social status. There are multiple reasons contributing to the relatively high social status of Chinese teachers. Among them is a long-standing tradition of teacher respect in China and Chinese people's deep rooted impression of teaching as a 'glorious' or even 'sacred' profession. These two reasons are closely connected in ways that Chinese teachers have been portrayed as selfless or even been 'sacred', who deserve great respect from society. This teacher-respect culture and people's persisting impression of teachers and teaching still find its applications among people working in the profession.

Teachers' established public image

The public image established for teachers in Chinese society is passing down and is manifested by teachers of different generations. This image has affected both teachers' perceptions and behaviours.

> *…(being a teacher) is glorious in people's thinking…it is all about making a contribution, being dedicated and hardworking…we have not been deliberately taught to do so but we nevertheless know how to work as teachers from our sub-conscious…(MH, one of the least experienced teachers)*

…there are lots of times that teachers have almost been made as divine... under such public voices, teachers almost believe that we are capable of doing everything and are supposed to take all the responsibilities in schools… (YY, one of the rural teachers)

…people say teaching is a glorious profession… teachers still stick well to the principles in such a profession… everything we do, we do it for the sake of students and not give too much thoughs of how much we shall be paid… we get low salary but without much complaint…it is all about the willingness to dedicate… (WXY, one of the rural teachers)

There is a saying that 'teaching is the most sacred and glorious profession under the sunlight'… there is a halo around teachers… (being a teacher) means we shall do more for the good of children and for the society… (JZ, one of the most experienced teachers)

These teachers, who differed in teaching experience, schools where they had been working and personal histories, all but talked to similar public understanding of teaching in Chinese society. Within such public understanding, teaching is a *'glorious'* profession and teachers have lived up to the image of dedicated and selfless people. Teachers in this research had a clear awareness of what and how they were expected to work as teachers. By claiming their professional conscience, some teachers were persistently working under heavy workloads; some were devoted to teaching with little thought of money; some were committed to teaching in less developed areas under difficult working conditions; and some cared about their students as if they were their own children. The actions reported by teachers in this research corresponded well to stereotypes established for Chinese teachers—'silk

worms' or 'candles' where teachers' selfless devotion and even self-sacrificing, are heavily emphasised.

Teachers' strong awareness of being selfless and hardworking reflected how teachers and teaching had been conceptualised by this group of teachers in China. The stereotypes of teachers have embedded in Chinese culture, have carried with them expectations laid upon teachers in Chinese society, and have been realized by teachers of different generations. They are passed down among teachers in a tacit way and no teacher has been deliberately taught to work with a professional conscience; it shapes teachers' thinking and actions with its salient power which, though it cannot be seen, is ever-present. Affected by teachers' stereotypes in China, the development of teachers' professional conscience can be understood as a process in which stereotypes of teachers are internalised with teachers' own understanding.

Although teachers in this research did not clearly articulate how their perceptions of teaching had been affected by such stereotypes, their understanding and actions in teaching had nevertheless been sufficient to show how their devotion to working was aligned with the publicly promoted teacher images. Chinese society gives relatively high recognition to teachers and teaching, and teachers' professional conscience, to some extent, could be seen as one of the responses from teachers to the high expectation and respect paid to them. When teachers, irrespective of all their existing differences including teaching experience, schools where they were working and personal biographies, tended to make the same claim about teaching, it became much clearer that it was the social-cultural influence that had played a vital part in forming teachers' professional conscience.

6.1.2 Professional conscience and local school context

Together with social-cultural influence, school context was another prominent factor in affecting teachers' professional conscience. School context had been examined by Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2009, 2011) from four dimensions, including support from school leadership, teacher workload, teachers' relationship with parents and autonomy regarding teachers' choice of what to teach and how to teach. These dimensions, however, are not quite compatible in examining the influence of school context on Chinese teachers' professional conscience.

In this research, both teachers that claimed professional conscience and those that did not, to a very large extent, could not decide by themselves on what to teach nor how to teach.

> *…We have unified requirements from the teaching group (jiaoyanzu)…everyone teaches the same thing… (from interviews with YY, one of the rural teachers)*
>
> *…teachers teach under the curriculum and the curriculum is designed by the school solely…an ordinary teacher like me cannot have a say… (from interviews with ZY, one of the rural teachers)*
>
> *Very often, the teaching methods have been fixed…you do not have much choice…even that what to do under certain circumstances has been pre-decided by more experienced teachers to follow… (from interviews with CLX, one of the least experienced teachers)*

We have collective lesson preparation…each teacher has his/her turn to lead the preparation to present how he/she will give a lesson. After that there will be discussions around the given lesson…there will not be much changes in teachers' class for both what to teach and how to teach later… (from interviews with WXT, one of the most experienced teachers)

These four teachers include those teachers who claimed professional conscience (YY and ZY) and those who did not (CLX and WXT); were both from rural schools and from urban schools; who were less experienced and who had been teaching for over 10 years. The situation regarding teachers' autonomy of what to teach and how to teach did not differ greatly among teachers with different teaching backgrounds – which supported the claim by Lo et al. (2014) that *'to Chinese teachers, knowledge, responsibility and authority are essential components of their professionalism while autonomy is a more confining concept with limited application'* (p. 43). Teacher autonomy, therefore, cannot serve as a criteria for the measurement of school influence on Chinese teachers.

Moreover, there was limited discussion by teachers on teacher-parent relationships. Teachers tended to talk more about the influence of examinations on their daily work. School context, to understand Chinese teachers' working lives, therefore, might be more appropriate here by including school *leadership, influence of examinations* and *teacher workload.*

Among the three, influence of school leadership and examinations was more seen in teachers who had changed as illustrated in Chapter five. In terms of their influence on professional conscience, what this research can tell is that none of the eight teachers claiming teaching as work of conscience came from

heavily exam-oriented schools (like schools in 'H' area) nor from schools where teachers felt their teaching had been constantly disturbed through the will of school leaders.

In terms of teacher workload, six out of eight teachers saw *teaching under long working hours and heavy workloads* as part of their professional conscience which in turn supported them in remaining committed under heavy workloads. The stereotypes of Chinese teachers, where teachers are expected to be and are portrayed as selfless people displaying devotion amid hardship, are embodied by teachers with a professional conscience working with enormous teaching tasks.

While it seems that school context does not have a prominent impact on professional conscience, an interesting match emerges if a slightly different perspective is taken to understand how school context matters: the six teachers who failed to talk about professional conscience happened to be the same six people who had little passion left for teaching. Negative school influence had been perceived by them as one of the main causes for teachers' disappointment with teaching.

Detailed explanations of the influence of negative school context on teachers are presented in chapter five. Here is a quick review. Among these six teachers, CLX and XK had experienced their frustration in teaching due to constant school interference; CHT had feelings of uncertainty in teaching because there was hardly any school support available to him; teachers from 'H' area were struggling with extremely heavy workloads due to an overly heavy examination culture; and as one of the least experienced teachers, QL felt that teaching for high scores was against her desire to be a teacher. These

teachers provided us with a multi-perspective in understanding the negative influence of school context on teachers' lives. When examining these disappointed teachers against teachers claiming professional conscience, it is interesting to see that while a teacher who failed to talk about professional conscience tended to have struggled with a negative school context/unsupportive or even disturbing school leadership/ heavy exam culture; a teacher who referred to a professional conscience was:

1. not necessarily backed by supportive school leadership. In fact most teachers listed in table 4.2 where professional conscience had been discussed, had talked little about school support.

2. by no means free from exam culture or workloads. Including the two teachers from 'H' area, almost all teachers interviewed talked about exams and workload problems.

The three issues, school support, exam culture and workloads, were therefore not necessarily the decisive factors which caused differences among teachers in this research. I thus argue that, though school context — school leadership, teacher workload and school exam culture—had its impact on teachers' claim of professional conscience, this impact, however, shall be combined with other factors to make a difference among teachers. Among other factors which co-existed with school context to affect teachers' professional conscience, was teachers' personal histories.

6.1.3 Professional conscience and teachers' personal biography

Saying teachers' personal biography, it includes teachers' family background, a position assumed in schools and teaching experience. A combination of school context and teachers' personal biography can provide us with better insight into why some teachers working under similar circumstances differed in claiming their professional conscience.

Family influence

Research suggested that teachers' personal history, including family influence, had played a critical part in shaping teachers' understanding of teaching (Bodycott, 1997). This family-affected understanding of what teaching means and how one works as a teacher, has made a great impact on teachers who grow up by witnessing their parents who are dedicated to teaching. Family influence partly helped to explain why some teachers, while working under heavy workloads with a small salary, still claimed their professional conscience, while others working under similar circumstances lost heart in seeing teaching not as a profession but a job for making a living.

Though the importance of family influence on teachers cannot be ignored, it only worked on a very small number of teachers in this research — just two teachers talked about how their understanding of teaching had been affected by their own teacher parents who were devoted and selfless in teaching. The majority of other teachers listed in table 4.2 did not talk much about their family influence. Teachers' family influence mattered, but it cannot be selected alone to explain teachers' difference in claiming their professional conscience.

‘Banzhuren’s professional conscience

Apart from family background, the role of ‘banzhuren’ in schools was another reason that some teachers had a different understanding of teaching as work of conscience. The biggest speciality of ‘banzhuren’, compared to other course teachers, was that they had additional responsibilities outside teaching, including class/student management, student consultation, caring about students’ school lives and much more.

The importance of teachers’ roles as ‘banzhuren’ has already been discussed in chapter four. The great variety of schoolwork undertaken by ‘banzhuren’ had enriched teachers’ understanding of the meaning of teaching and of being a teacher. What has not been discussed yet is why some ‘banzhuren’, especially ‘banzhuren’ who failed to claim professional conscience in this research, had different perceptions of teaching.

In one aspect, three out of four teachers who understood teaching as undertaking unlimited schoolwork had been ‘banzhuren’. The role of ‘banzhuren’ in this sense made a difference among teachers in understanding the extensive responsibilities which a teacher could have; in another aspect, however, four out of six teachers who did not claim professional conscience were also ‘banzhuren’. It seemed that there were also subtle connections between the role of ‘banzhuren’ and teachers’ frustration in teaching. Why were there such differences among ‘banzhuren’? Here, teaching experience together with school context and socio-cultural influence, provide us with clues to the answer.

The three ‘banzhuren’ claiming professional conscience were teachers with teaching experience ranging from five to more than ten years; Among the four ‘banzhuren’ who were deeply disappointed in teaching, two had taught less than three years and the other two had taught for around five years. In general, ‘banzhuren’ who claimed professional conscience were more experienced in teaching than those who did not. Day and Gu (2007) claimed that in teachers who were subject to the influence of ‘*level of support and recognition of their work from school culture*’ (p. 73), those with teaching experience less than three years would either keep enjoying teaching or gradually lose heart. This claim partly applied to the two least experienced teachers as banzhuren. One teacher (CHT) did not get enough school support in knowing how to teach; while the other one’s (CLX) teaching had been constantly disrupted by inconsistent and fragmented school requirements.

However, less experienced teachers’ frustration with teaching was not only a result of the lack of support or lack of recognition from schools. Students’ behaviour was also one of the identified reasons contributing to early career teachers’ difficulties in teaching (Day&Gu,2007). This can be seen in CLX’s hurting feelings caused by students’ coldness as illustrated in the previous chapter.

For the other two experienced ‘banzhuren’ (XK and XLH) who had taught for around five years but failed to clearly refer to professional conscience, it was the negative school influence that accounted as one of the leading reasons for their disappointment in teaching. XK was deeply disappointed in the school’s interference in his teaching and XLH felt

exhausted through teaching under enormous pressure, due to a strong examination culture in his school.

Besides the influence of teaching experience and school context, social cultural influence also cannot be ignored. Three out of the four disappointed 'banzhuren' — one least experienced (CHT) and two rural teachers (XK and XLH)—had been negatively affected by teachers' declining social status. Banzhuren's disappointment in teaching had thus been found to be associated with multiple factors in this research.

Summary

This research suggested that teachers' professional conscience had been affected by teachers' family background, roles assumed in schools, teaching experience, teachers' working schools as well as the broader social-cultural context. These influential factors did not stand alone but were connected to affect teachers' lives. The difference among teachers — differences in claiming professional conscience and in understanding professional conscience — was resulted from a combination of these factors.

6.1.4 Professional conscience as moral values and as self-developed standards

After discussions around what had influenced teachers' professional conscience, I now come to the nature of professional conscience. *Professional conscience is a sum of teachers' moral values and self-developed standards that affect both teachers' understanding of and mediating teachers' actions in teaching*. The claim that teaching was work of conscience was a depiction of Chinese teachers' moral values and internal standards that were manifested in teaching.

Professional conscience as moral values

There was a substantial body of literature that talked about teacher morals. It was claimed that teaching was the kind of profession *'driven by values, ethical motives'* (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2011, p. 1031) and was *'fundamentally moral in nature'* (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2001, p. 873). However, it is also interesting to see that, teacher values as discussed in the literature, very often, had been what Ormell (1980) distinguished as *educational values* instead of *moral values*. The former referred to *'values…in judging the worth of actions, programmes, and products which are…conductive to the education of the child'* and the latter were *'values…in judging the worth of actions and products which affect the life- energy and welfare of others and oneself'* (Ormell, 1980, p. 78-79). In other words, when teachers' moral values were discussed, most of the literature tended to talk about the values to be passed on to students as part of moral education in schools. Values of this kind included teaching students to be disciplined or to be honest. Moral values, however, were *'things which one has to work at, to strive for, to expend effort in living up to'* (Ormell, 1980, p. 73). Moral value and educational value are different in their purposes and the objects they work on. Moral value works on the work one is undertaking and it inspires people to work better; educational value works on people and is required to be passed on to students. Teachers' professional conscience, which inspires teachers to work their best and to be persistent amid hardship, is within the realm of moral value.

Values, no matter what kind, is said to be consistent and stable and they requires effort or even sacrifice to be realised (Ormell, 1980). This statement provides good insight in understanding teachers' professional conscience. In terms of consistency, teachers in this research did not do their best in knowledge transmission on Monday and quit the idea of being hardworking on Friday. They kept on being dedicated to teaching. In terms of effort, it was never easy for teachers to endure hardships—either teaching under difficult circumstances or struggling under heavy workloads—by still clinging to her/his professional conscience.

Chinese teachers' professional conscience was found to be stable in two senses as was evident from this research: 1) for experienced teachers (both rural and teachers with around 10 years teaching experiences), there had not been much change in their understanding of teaching as work of conscience before and after their masters; and 2) the idea of teaching as work of conscience had been agreed upon among different generations of teachers despite their differences in experience, schools where they had been working and personal background. Teachers' professional conscience, shaped by Chinese social culture, school context and teachers' own biography, found its stability in most teachers in this research, both individually and collectively. For the second point, that values required intensive effort to be held up in practice, it was realised by Chinese teachers' endurance of heavy workloads and their resolute determination in resisting the temptation to gain financial benefit from students.

While teachers' professional conscience could be seen as a sum of teachers' moral values that teachers lived up to (for instance, teachers had been clinging to the value that teaching was not about looking for financial rewards), it also worked as a set of *standards*, standards which had been developed by teachers instead of being imposed by external authorities.

Professional conscience as self-developed standards

There is no universal definition for standards, for the meanings associated with standards vary in different contexts (OECD, 2013). Straughan and Wrigley (1980) believed standards referred to '*level of achievement or expectation against which people and objects can be assessed or…which is hoped, expected, desired…(to)be reached*'(p. 16). By using slightly different expressions, the OECD report on school learning standards provided similar understanding in explaining standards with key phrases including '*used as measures or benchmarks*' and '*worthy or desirable to achieve*' (OECD, 2013, p. 14). Standards, therefore, are understood either as measurements for assessing what has already been achieved or as a certain level of achievements to be realised. Teachers' professional conscience has more to do with the later by considering teachers' claim that they tried to give their best to help students learn.

However, the difference between standards discussed through literature and professional conscience as standards is obvious. The keywords for standards from the literature—measurements, assessments, expectations—have strong implications in that standards are either to assess teachers' actions and behaviours for further improvement or to be used as benchmarks to certify teachers. These standards are mandatory instead of being developed by

teachers. Standards like these are often authorised by the government like the Teachers' Standards for schools in England (2012) by the Department for Education in the UK and Professional Standards for High School Teachers (2011) by the Chinese Ministry of Education. There are different parties involved in the use of these standards, including teachers, the authority which mandates standards and the agents who assesses teachers' behaviours. Teachers, however, are often put in a passive position and have to accept them.

The difference between mandated standards and professional conscience as standards becomes ever clearer. Professional conscience was not used to assess nor certify teachers but to mediate teachers' actions. In this research, according to their own standards, teachers either worked towards the levels of teaching they expected to reach (to teach their best) or kept working at the same level of teaching where they already were (working even outside of school hours). Professional conscience as standards involved neither external authorities like governments nor another agency to assess teachers. It was developed by teachers and for teachers where teachers were actively enacting.

Teachers' professional conscience, with its rich implications, included both meanings associated with teacher moral values and with teacher standards. As values, professional conscience prompted teachers to gain a better understanding of the meanings of teaching and being a teacher. Teaching was more than a job and teaching was not to get any benefit from students. As standards, professional conscience urged teachers to teach wholeheartedly and to work hard and better to do the best they could do.

Teachers' moral values and standards, however, are not completely independent of each other but are related. Standards are value-laden, for it is values that help to '*explain why certain levels rather than others are established as standards'* (Straughan & Wrigley, 1980, p. 12). In other words, standards have reflected what has been valued in a profession (OECD, 2013). For teachers who claimed professional conscience, their self-developed standards of teaching one's best and adhering to moral values and not merely teaching for financial reward, were related in a way that, teaching for these teachers was a profession in which they were devoted, contributed and even made sacrifices.

In previous discussions on professional conscience as moral values, I argued that teachers' professional conscience as values was kept in a relatively stable state. This stability was evidenced by the little change observed in experienced teachers' understandings of teaching as work of conscience before and after their master's study, and by the fact that professional conscience stayed in different generations of teachers. The stability of teachers' professional conscience could be seen as a result of teachers' clearer awareness of teacher values and standards through the years. These values and standards had been developed through teachers' living experiences, and these living experiences helped to make teachers' understanding become more deep-rooted in life.

However, stable as it was, teachers' professional conscience did not necessarily stand still all the time for all teachers, but tended to fluctuate in some teachers before it reached relative stability.

6.1.5 Professional conscience fluctuated

Teachers' professional conscience, under the influence of multiple factors elaborated on in previous sections, can grow, keep stable, and reach greater stability as well as diminish.

As reported in chapter four, the growth of teachers' professional conscience was mainly seen in the least experienced teachers, whose understanding of both teaching and the meaning of being a teacher had been deepened after they officially assumed roles as school teachers. Here teaching experience was the most important reason contributing to the growth of professional conscience. The increase of one's teaching experience, in this sense, might have helped professional conscience develop until it reached a stable state. Although social-cultural influence and school context mattered regarding the development of professional conscience, for least experienced teachers in this research, it was everyday school practice that weighed out other factors in shaping their understanding of teaching.

After years of teaching, some teachers' professional conscience reached stability. Professional conscience at this stage had become a stable part of teachers' inner moral values and standards where teaching experience, school influence, professional development programmes like M.A. and other factors did not seem to be able to make much difference. The meanings associated with a professional conscience had been sharpened by multiple influential factors, and these meanings were kept unchanged when these influential factors remained stable. However, some of these influential factors, while for some teachers they might be seen as stable, for others, they had undergone changes which later affected teachers' understanding of teaching.

Four teachers from this research had observed declining social status of teaching and teachers. These were teachers who felt great disappointment in teaching, partly because of the low salary and less respect from students. The failure of referring to one's professional conscience did not necessarily mean that these teachers never had a similar understanding of teaching to those who claimed a professional conscience. Among these disappointed teachers, some of them used to be as dedicated and hardworking as other teachers were, which was well presented in the previous discussion on teacher change. However, either affected by the changing situation of teaching as a profession or by negative influence from schools or from their own teaching experience or from both, some teachers gradually lost heart for teaching. In losing heart, their devotion and dedication to teaching, which had been an integral part of professional conscience, was also weakened.

Summary

As moral values and inner standards, professional conscience was found to be stable in most teachers reported on in this research. It mediated teachers' actions and behaviours to be in line with their understanding of teaching. It set working standards which teachers were striving to realise. Professional conscience did not purely grow from teachers' thinking nor had it been taught consciously, it evolved through time under the influence of social-cultural, school context as well as teachers' personal histories. Subject to different influences, professional conscience may fluctuate in some teachers by considering their specific circumstances.

After all these discussions on professional conscience, it is clearer now both on its nature (as moral values and standards) and on its state (stable yet could fluctuate). It is closely related to teachers' working lives and is manifested in teachers' actions from various aspects. Professional conscience is important, but our immediate question is, to what extent does professional conscience help us gain a better understanding of Chinese teachers' professionalism?

6.2 Connecting professional conscience to teacher professionalism and professional identity

6.2.1 Professional conscience and teacher professionalism

The discussion on teacher professionalism in Western literature has been dominated by the examination of teachers' knowledge, skill, responsibility and autonomy since the 1980s. Researchers had either tried to identify what kind of teacher professionalism existed within a given socio-cultural context (Saqipi et al. 2014; Wang et. al 2014) or more recently, had paid their attention to teacher accountability in responding to changing social and educational circumstances from different parts of the world (Day & Sachs, 2004; Lai & Lo, 2007; Wang et al. 2014).

This research neither tried to follow literature in discussing de-professionalisation or re-professionalisation of teachers through social changes nor to give further evidence or arguments as to whether Chinese teachers had mainly 'confined' or 'compliant' professionalism (Lai & Lo, 2007; Wang et. al 2014). It took a closer look at one of the most obvious factors in influencing Chinese teachers' professional lives.

Professional conscience reported in this research is believed as one of the key components of teacher professionalism for Chinese teachers. As moral values and inner standards, professional conscience stays stable over social and educational change and it is one of the most important reasons for the shared understanding and similar behaviours found among teachers of different backgrounds. Professional conscience in this sense could be seen as one of the most stable components of Chinese teacher professionalism amid all the changing circumstances.

This research suggests that teachers' professional conscience would reach its stability after years of teaching. However, professional conscience connects to teacher change in a subtle way that all teachers who claimed professional conscience in this research had undergone changes in teaching (as evidenced in chapter five), and they tended to undergo more changes compared to other teachers. Though teacher change had been the result of interaction between multiple factors—changing educational and policy context, teaching experience, and teachers' M.A study—this research cannot rule out the possibilities that professional conscience had also played a part in teacher change. As professional conscience motivated teachers to work hard and better, it is not surprising that teachers made changes to improve teaching. Their changes were manifested either in perceptions (more understanding of how students think and learn) or in actual teaching practices (changing teaching from teacher-oriented to more student oriented).

Changes in teachers' perceptions and practice lead to changes in teachers' knowledge and skills. For instance, teachers reported their need for more knowledge on students' way of thinking and learning as well as more practical skills for managing student-oriented class. With some changes in professionalism, professional conscience is an unchanged aspect of teachers' professional lives.

Either because of the inspiration that teachers gained from teaching practice or from M.A. experience, or because of teachers actively following requirements of the curriculum reform or from schools, Chinese teacher professionalism, as evidenced by this research, has undergone changes in terms of teacher skills and knowledge. Chinese teachers' professional conscience, however, goes beyond all these social/educational/school changes and stays relatively stable as one of the core qualities to be demonstrated by teachers of different backgrounds and different generations. Chinese teacher professionalism in general, however, cannot undergo sweeping changes witnessed in every dimension of professionalism nor can it experience great changes in a short time by only following external requirements like the ongoing curriculum reform.

With the impact of Chinese society and culture, professional conscience carries with it distinctive Chinese features to help interpret teachers' working lives; remaining as a relatively stable feature of professionalism, professional conscience is a lens through which people could have a better understanding of Chinese teachers' ways of thinking and behaving.

Looking back on teacher professionalism in the literature review as well as works on teachers' professional lives and teacher identity in the West, the concept of professional conscience adds some particularity to the relatively barren land of research on Chinese teacher professionalism.

Professional conscience has been discussed within the overall framework of professionalism, where teachers as professionals are believed to have certain qualities which are less likely to be found and developed in people outside of teaching. Professional conscience has been argued as one of such qualities among Chinese teachers, which distinguish them from people in other occupations. While western literature on teacher professionalism tends to have its focus on teacher knowledge/skill/autonomy or/and accountability; professional conscience provides a new perspective within the Chinese teaching community.

Chinese teachers' professional conscience makes up the core of their professionalism. This shared belief of teaching as work of conscience can be found in teachers across different professional life phases in this research.

6.2.2 Professional conscience and professional identity

As presented in Chapter two, professional identity is a key issue raised in literature when teacher professionalism is discussed. Professional identity and professional conscience shares both similarities and differences.

In terms of similarity, firstly, value is an important part in constituting both professional conscience and professional identity. In both cases, teachers make sense of themselves through values, which are closely associated with and affecting teachers' understanding of being a teacher and teaching.

Secondly, professional conscience and professional identity are both socially and individually constructed. These two concepts, as discussed earlier, are developing under multiply influential factors (including social-culture, educational context, school context and personal histories). Last but not least, because professional conscience and professional identity are shaped by multiple factors, changes of influential factors may also trigger to changes in how teachers understand teachers and teaching. Professional conscience and professional identity are therefore not fixed concepts but are prone to change overtime.

In general, professional conscience and professional identity share some similarities in their making (values), formation (being socially and individually constructed) and state (not being static). However, these two concepts are not entirely identical in meaning.

Professional identity is negotiated through contexts, values and also teachers' professional knowledge and skill, all of which help teachers make sense of their roles as teachers and distinguish them from other occupations. While context and values also matter in the development of teachers' professional conscience, teacher knowledge and skill, however, are not closely associated with Chinese teachers' perceptions when they claimed teaching was work of conscience (see chapter four).

In this research, professional conscience is mainly conceptualized in ways that how Chinese teachers, under the influence of Chinese culture, educational context and personal biographies, have adjusted and mediated their perceptions and behaviors, so as to conform to their values and self-developed standards in teaching. As these values and standards are largely shaped by

factors that exist beyond teachers' learning of professional knowledge/skill (for instance, factors like consistent cultural influence and teachers' personal histories), teacher knowledge and skill therefore do not seem to have a big part to play in affecting the development of a teacher's professional conscience.

In a word, one of the most important differences lies between professional identity and professional conscience is that, the former is more about teachers' understanding of who they are, what kind of teachers they want to become and how they as teachers are different from people in other occupations, with the later is more concerning value-adherence and standards-achieving among those working in teaching profession. In this research, based on teachers' report of their understanding on teaching and being a teacher, it is professional conscience, rather than professional identity, that is believed as the focus of Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism.

Summary

Professional conscience, professionalism and professional identity are inter-related concepts in studying teachers' working lives. Professional conscience in this research resides in the overarching term of professionalism; professional identity discussed in western literature shares similarities and differences with Chinese teachers' professional conscience. After detailed discussions on professional conscience from different perspectives, the next chapter will bring the whole thesis together and make clear the contribution of knowledge from this research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Introduction

This thesis set out to explore Chinese teachers' work and lives by studying the working lives of a group of sixteen serving teachers before, during and after their master's study. Among these sixteen teachers, six completed their Ed.M. as part of their initial teacher education, which means they did not have much formal teaching experience before the M.A.; other teachers had been working in schools for at least three years prior to their enrollment in the M.A. Earlier chapters have analyzed and discussed changes in teachers' perceptions of and behaviors in teaching over time and variations in their reported sense of professionalism. The last chapter identifies professional conscience as an important component of Chinese teacher professionalism, and in doing so, provides new empirically based findings about the nature of its relationship with the broader concept of professionalism in contexts of change. This final chapter consists of three parts: findings in relation to the original research questions; the contributions of this research to knowledge; its implications for policy and teacher education, and the research limitations.

7.1 Summary of research findings

This research began by asking 1) *what are Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism*, 2) *what factors have affected their professionalism*, these two questions are essentially about teachers' perceptions of professionalism in a Chinese context and will be addressed as the first part of this section. The third question 3) *to what extent are Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism similar or different from that in the West* will be

addressed in the second part. The rest two questions 4) *does Chinses teachers' sense of professionalism vary through their working lives* and 5) *what are causes and effects of the variations of professional conscience* will be discussed as the third part in this section. The last question *6)What are the implications for policymakers and school leaders?* will be illustrated in the implication and limitation part of this research.

7.1.1 Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism

For teachers in this study who saw teaching being more than a job for economic survival, teachers were groups of people who had high levels of professional knowledge and skill in teaching, were highly dedicated and were able to live up to the expectations laid on teachers within the Chinese society.

Teachers' professional knowledge and skill were perceived to be highly important by teachers in this research, as were identified in the research literature (See Chapter 2). Teacher knowledge and skill were the foundations for teachers' work and helped to distinguish them from other professions. This research revealed, however, that although these were important to teachers, it was a set of moral values and standards that they themselves developed was the key component of professionalism. These affected how teachers thought and behaved and, therefore, were most influential to their perceptions of themselves as professionals.

Teachers in this research reported that, they lived up to their self-developed standards and values on what to do and how to behave as teachers. They were highly dedicated to work, were resilient under difficult working conditions and had strong and clear understanding that teaching was far more than a way of earning a salary. These were all constituent parts of

their professional conscience (I will come to this later in the second part of this chapter), which, in turn, contributed to how they defined themselves as professionals. Those teachers who saw teaching merely as a means of surviving most felt frustrated and disappointed, and some had even began to treat teaching with a *'getting by'* attitude. A clear set of self-developed moral values and standards, which eight teachers had been closely clinging to in this research, to a very large extent helped to define what was essential for someone to be called as a teacher. The ways of teachers' thinking and actions—being wholehearted, selfless, dedicated, and upright—were the core part making up teachers' professional lives, without which teachers could hardly see teaching as a profession but no more than a job for making a living.

Multiple factors had interacted to affect Chinese teachers in their work and lives, ranging from macro-level social and policy context to meso-level school contexts, to micro–level teachers' personal histories. That is, the Chinese social-cultural context, educational context (influence of CEE in particular), national curriculum reform, local school context, teachers' MA study and teachers' teaching experience, family influence, roles in schools had all played a part in affecting teachers' perceptions and behaviours. The research found that none of these factors stood alone, and that different combinations influenced teachers and the strength of particular influences impacted negatively and positively on teachers in different ways.

In the previous discussion chapter, I gave examples of how teachers—especially those who claimed to have a professional conscience—believed they had been influenced by the cultural-embedded social stereotype of teaching as a 'glorious' profession, in which teachers

were regarded as selfless and dedicated in China. These teachers still believed teaching was a positively depicted profession in Chinese society; and they did not report serious negative influences on these beliefs caused by, for instance, dysfunctional school contexts. This, however, was different from the six teachers in this research who treated teaching as just a job to enable them to survive economically. They reported that teachers' status in Chinese society was deteriorating. They believed teachers were treated unfairly, had less respect and received an inadequate salary. Furthermore, these teachers reported great frustration from their work, caused either by their own problems (for instance, lack of teaching experience) or/and by school contexts.

Besides these two broadly contrasting perceptions of teaching (teaching as a glorious profession and teaching as a job for surviving), the influence of combinations of factors on teachers was also evidenced by how teachers reported that they had changed in different ways (as reported in Chapter five).

The research revealed similarities between Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism and those of teachers in the West, despite the great cultural differences. Both emphasized the importance of teachers' professional knowledge/ skill as well as teachers' dedication/ devotion/ care in teaching. However, there are also differences.

7.1.2 Similarities and differences between Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism and those in the West

Professionalism, as discussed in Chapter Two, is a broad and abstract concept encompassing aspects of teachers' knowledge, skill, autonomy and teacher morals. As we have seen, for Chinese teachers, alongside the importance attached to knowledge and classroom skills, it was their

self-developed moral values and standards that this study found were at the heart of their perception of professionalism. They shared more similarities than differences with teachers in the West in their understandings of *teaching as vocation*, *moral purpose* and *teacher care*.

Teaching as vocation

David Hansen's (1995) work on 'The Call to Teach' remains influential in the West. He believed two meanings were involved in the discussion of teaching as a vocation: the responsibility to public obligation and the degree to which a person found fulfilments. To say that teaching involved a sense of vocation *'suggests that one conceives teaching as more than a job…but has something significant to offer…it is larger than carrying out a finite number of pre-specified duties and responsibilities, with a pre-ordained set of rewards as compensation…'* (Hansen, 1994, p.2). From this perspective, teaching as a vocation implies that it is both about contributing to the society and *'a way of coming at life and of finding oneself'* (Bullough , 2011, p.128).

When people do not work for the sake of rewards, they work for the work's own sake. When a profession is seen as a vocation, the fulfilment of one's routine work is no longer the most important purpose to achieve. Vocation entails commitments and passion from people to achieve things that are meaningful and important. These achievements are not demanded by organizations; they are the results of ones' desire to do more and better. Doing more and better means extra time and energy. Teaching as vocation requires teachers' extra time and energy to make devotion. Through hard-work, teachers find self-fulfilment. Chinese teachers' moral values/standards are, therefore, similar to Western concepts of teaching as vocation in this regard. The

differences are to be found in the cultural background embedded in these two terms.

Teachers who saw teaching as a profession in China and teachers saw teaching as vocation in the West, both sustained their devotion to teaching and their commitment to make a contribution to the society. *However, Chinese teachers' sense of professionalism, especially the self-developed moral values and standards, as found in this research, reflected the publicly-promoted stereotype of teachers in Chinese society—teachers who are enduring hardships to devote or even making self-sacrifice to pave better ways for students' progress.* Those who understand teaching as vocation, on the other hand, have a 'calling' to and from heart to become teachers, to serve and to dedicate in a rather personal level. This sense of 'calling' is not necessarily connected to how teaching and teachers have been perceived in the Western society.

Differences to the concept of 'moral purpose'

Teachers' moral purpose has been one of the most frequently discussed terms in regard to teacher morals in the West, and has often been associated with *'making a difference'* in students' lives. This is most evident in Fullan's (2001) work where he stated that *'moral purpose is about both ends and means. In education, an important end is to make a difference in the lives of students'* (p.13).

The belief that they can *'make a difference to students' lives'* has been a critical motivating factor to many teachers in the West. A recent survey (2015) of 889 teacher trainees and newly qualified teachers in England reported that

74.8 % stated that it was wanting to make a difference among the most important reasons for them to become teachers (Association of Teachers and Lecturers, 2015). Howard and Johnson (2004) claimed that some teachers who had chosen to teach in disadvantaged schools displayed strong moral purpose. These teachers were confident that they were able to make a difference in children's lives and to bring about changes within limited school context against challenging circumstances.

In the research reported in this thesis, six of the teachers worked in disadvantaged schools in socio-economically less developed areas. Working in difficult situations, they were as dedicated in teaching as were the teachers in Howard and Johnson's report. There are, therefore, overlapping meanings connected both to Chinese teachers' self-developed moral value/ standards and moral purpose. Both of them require commitments from teachers, either for them to be selfless or to make a difference in students' lives. Chinese teachers' self-developed moral values and standards, however, are not completely synonymous with Western conceptions of moral purposes. Chinese teachers also emphasised the importance of serving the collective good of Chinese society.

Teacher care

The last concept from Western literature is teacher care. Kim et al. (1995) defined teacher care as *'teacher activities and practices that promote students interaction, collaboration and active participation'* (p. 4). Caring teachers, according to Noddings, were *'concerned with their students' academic achievement, but, more importantly, they were interested in the development of fully moral person';* they had open dialogues with students,

dialogues that were enlightening, problem-solving and were *'marked by appropriate signs of reciprocity'*; they encouraged students to support each and to practice care in classrooms and revealed to a student an *'attainable image of himself that was lovelier than that manifested in his present act'* (Noddings,1988,p.222-224). The essential message from Noddings's definition of caring teachers is that teacher care is dealing with a relationship in which teachers attend students with love.

Chinese teachers' moral values/standards also include meanings where teachers devote attention and time both on students' learning and on other aspects of students' school lives. Teacher activities and practices for the better development of students are only part of Chinese teachers' views of values/standards. Professional conscience also includes other meanings, like teachers' being resilient under heavy workloads and giving a less thought on financial reward.

To summarize, there is no corresponding term from Western literature which is identical to Chinese teachers' self-developed moral values/standards identified in this research. However, all these terms—teachers' self-developed moral values/standards*, teaching as vocation, moral purpose, teacher care*—are similar in their heavy emphasis on teacher moral values and purposes.

7.1.3 Fluctuations in Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism

Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism fluctuated. While eight teachers in this research had remained dedicated to teaching by adhering to their self-developed values and standards, among the teachers, three of the least experienced were not as dedicated as they were now when they had begun teaching. A further six teachers, after years of teaching, ceased to see teaching as a profession.

For the three least experienced teachers, it was their lack of teaching that had affected their perceptions of being a teacher. They did not quite understand the deep dedication and efforts required in teaching in the beginning (see chapter four). As their experience of teaching had grown, however, they had become increasingly devoted in their work. For the six teachers who ceased to see teaching as a profession, it was mainly negative school influence and their experience of their declining social status that caused great disappointment and frustration in them.

The above discussions of the similarities and differences between Chinese teachers' self-developed moral values and standards—which are integral part of their sense of professionalism and which are developed from their professional conscience—and those in the West suggest that, despite of different social-cultural contexts, there are more similarities than differences between Chinese teachers' sense of professionalism and those in the West. The variations and fluctuation of professional conscience, as will be discussed below, have suggested that Chinese teachers' professionalism is largely *in-situ*

and have challenged the stereotypes of Chinese teachers which have been long established within the society.

7.2 Contributions to knowledge

The major contribution of this research to knowledge is essentially about the nature of Chinese teachers' professional conscience. This is identified as the core part of Chinese teachers' perceptions of professionalism in this study.

7.2.1 What is Chinese teachers' professional conscience?

'Professional conscience' in this research has been defined as *a set of inner-formed beliefs and standards which is influenced by social and educational (school) contexts as well as personal values through time.* It influences and is influenced by teaching practice. It may grow or diminish and is prone to fluctuate over time. In general, it is a synthesis of teachers' moral values and standards that affect Chinese teachers' perceptions and behaviours in teaching.

Professional conscience was a term which Chinese teachers constantly incorporated into their responses to questions to help explain how they understood teaching. Eight out of sixteen teachers in this research described their understanding of teaching as *'work of conscience'*. Whereas professionalism is a more generic term, understanding the nature of professional conscience helps to enrich the meanings of teacher professionalism as experienced by Chinese teachers.

7.2.2 Variations and fluctuations of teachers' professional conscience

Professional conscience varied among teachers

The strength of teachers' professional conscience varied. Among teachers claiming professional conscience, there were different understandings. These different understandings were manifested in different ways as illustrated in table 4.2. Each sub-theme was given weight in the form of plus (+) to suggest its relative strength and influence on teachers as shown in this table. The relative strength given to each sub-theme for each teacher varied according to their own specific conditions; the total numbers of sub-themes underlying each teacher's claim of teaching as work of conscience also varied. However, in general, more experienced teachers (including rural teachers and teachers had been teaching around ten years) tended to have richer understandings on the role of professional conscience in their working lives than that of teachers who only entered teaching after their Ed.M study. There were generally larger numbers of sub-themes involved in more experienced teachers' understandings than that of less experienced teachers.

Professional conscience fluctuated within individual teacher, to a greater or lesser extent

Teachers' professional conscience fluctuated, and this had already been discussed in the previous chapter in regard to both how and why it changed as well as whose professional conscience had changed. I argued there that teachers' professional conscience could grow, stay and diminish over time.

In their first few years of teaching, teachers' professional conscience grew with their deepened understandings on teaching. Their teaching experiences enriched the meanings of *teaching as work of conscience,* and these meanings had been internalized into teachers' understandings to further affect their working lives. After years of growth, five more experienced teachers' professional conscience stayed still. Professional conscience at this stage could be kept unchanged for numbers of years as reported by teachers in this research. However, there was another group of six teachers who had lost heart in teaching and never clearly referred to their professional conscience during interviews. These teachers had been negatively affected by various factors which gradually drained of their passion in teaching. In such cases, I argued that these teachers' professional conscience had decreased or diminished when in the past they were as dedicated and devoted as teachers with claims of professional conscience as discussed in Chapter five.

Fluctuations in teachers' professional conscience were found in teachers of different career stages in this research—teacher with teaching experiences less than 3 years, up to five years and around ten years. Teaching experience, though played a great part for the growth of professional conscience in less experienced teachers, it was not the only factor in causing changes for all teachers in this study. These changes resulted from combinations of factors and these could only be understood when each teacher's specific circumstances had been taken into consideration.

7.2.3 Causes and effects of fluctuations of professional conscience

The way that professional conscience fluctuated varied according to the force exerted by particular influence or combination of influences at particular times in particular circumstances

This study suggests that the development of individual teacher's professional conscience has been affected by various factors, especially Chinese social and cultural influences, local school contexts and teacher's personal histories. Over time, these factors have combined in different ways to have different degrees of influence on teachers' understanding on teaching and being a teacher. Those eight teachers, including both whose professional conscience had grown and had been sustained, talked more positively about factors affecting their professional lives; For the six teachers who complained and struggled in teaching, it was other negative aspects in their work—rather than their professional conscience—that seemed to have played a bigger part in affecting their thoughts and actions.

Because of the fluctuations in professional conscience, Chinese teacher professionalism, with professional conscience at its heart, is not only shaped by government policy. While there are government policies and initiatives—in this research, the nation-wide curriculum reform and Ed.M programme—aim to develop teaching profession, the effect of such policies on teachers, however, has been mediated by people on the ground by considering their own specific personal context.

This research, therefore, does not find that policy alone has affected teaching and teachers as a whole, but that teacher professionalism in China is highly situated. Fluctuations in teachers' professional conscience are subject both to the influence of broader social and school context and teachers' personal histories. Furthermore, Chinese teacher professionalism has carried with it teacher morals and values related to the influence of the characteristics of the broader Chinese social-cultural context and been manifested in situ in teachers' everyday school lives.

Fluctuations in professional conscience is likely to affect teachers' understandings, behaviors and passion in teaching

How teachers thought, felt about and how they behaved in teaching to a large extent corresponded to the state of their professional conscience—in times of its growth, of remaining stable and of diminishing.

With the growth of professional conscience, the least experienced teachers in this research had worked increasingly aligned with ways which were described by more experienced teachers, whose professional conscience had reached relative stability. Professional conscience had underpinned many of teachers' thoughts and actions. Some of the thoughts and actions, however, could not be understood by the less experienced teachers until they themselves had developed deeper understandings on reasons that teaching was believed as work of conscience. The growth of professional conscience, in this sense, was a process where the least experienced teachers gradually formed their ways of thinking and behaving by seeing teaching as a profession. However, most of teachers in this research believed there were not much changes in their professional conscience. Professional conscience in its stable state was like a

bottle of wine stored over years. The wine was seemingly unchanged in its form but its taste had nonetheless become richer with passing time. The relative stability of professional conscience did not imply it was static. In general, professional conscience in more experienced teachers involved richer meanings than that of least experienced teachers. The richer meanings were developed over time in such a salient way that teachers did not even notice it. Teachers' sustaining of their professional conscience was a manifestation of their long-term devotion. This sustainment was embodied by teachers' continuing passion in teaching, without which teachers were more likely to treat teaching merely as a job for making a living.

A passion for teaching was lacking in teachers whose professional conscience had diminished. These teachers, overwhelmed by the downside of their work, had undergone negative changes in their understanding in teaching and in being a teacher. Six teachers in this research stopped believing in teaching as a glorious profession and teachers as been respected by students and by the society. The absence in their claim to see teaching as work of conscience together with their serious disappointment and frustration, suggested a declining in their dedication in teaching. This dedication, on other hand, had been well demonstrated by teachers still clinging to their professional conscience.

7.2.4 How do fluctuations in teachers' professional conscience contribute to the understanding of teacher professionalism?

Fluctuations in professional conscience challenged the stereotypes of teachers in China

Several stereotypes of Chinese teachers have long been existing in Chinese society. Among them are teachers as 'silk worms', as 'candles', as 'diligent gardeners' and as 'engineers of the soul' (Chen, 2001; Tang & Li, 2012). The first three terms have all placed their emphasis on Chinese teachers' devotion and deep commitment in teaching. Being 'silk worms' and 'candles', teachers are believed to be willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of students; being 'diligent gardeners', teachers are depicted as those who are hard-working to take care of students for their growth. As for the last term—'engineers of the soul', it has particularly stressed on teachers' great influence in affecting students' mind and character.

These terms have distinguished teachers from other professionals, for hardly any other profession in China has been constantly compared as 'silk worms', 'candles', 'gardeners' and 'engineers of the soul'; these descriptions are not exclusive in use, but can either appear individually or be combined to depict teachers. Rooted in Chinese culture, passed down through generations, strengthened by mass media, these descriptions for teaches have become stereotypes of Chinese teachers. These stereotypes have reflected Chinese peoples' rather ideal and unified expectations for all those working in teaching profession.

It is not the purpose of this research to explore whether these stereotypes of teachers are more positive in affecting teachers' work, or they might be, to some extent, burdening teachers' lives with heavy expectations from the society. These stereotypes of Chinese teachers have been developed from and for teachers and have been largely agreed within the society. The findings of fluctuations in teachers' professional conscience, however, have challenged these stereotypes.

Chinese teachers' dedication has been closely connected to their professional conscience, for it was professional conscience that backed up their actions to do better and more. The fluctuations, however, suggested that not all Chinese teachers were likely to be as dedicated to teaching as they had been depicted by the stereotypes; and among those who were committed in work—those who had clear claims of professional conscience - the degree of dedication was not necessarily high from the beginning of their teaching. While the stereotypes depict all Chinese teachers as acting in the same expected ways, the real situation seems to be that Chinese teachers' professional lives and professional conscience and professionalism are fashioned and change more in situ than have previously been thought.

In general, findings of this research about Chinese teachers' professional conscience with its rich meanings, various influential factors and fluctuations, have contributed to a more nuanced understanding of Chinese teacher professionalism. The meanings of professional conscience suggest that, despite of huge social-cultural differences between China and the West, Chinese teachers' understandings of teaching share more similarities than differences with teachers from the West. However, Chinese teachers' sense of

professionalism, which is largely expressed through their professional conscience, is influenced more by broader social-cultural and local school contexts. Different aspects of teacher professionalism, therefore, will not necessarily undergone changes in the same time within a same context. Finally, the fluctuations in professional conscience suggest that Chinese teacher professionalism is rather in-situ and therefore cannot be oversimplified with certain stereotypes.

This research did not develop new theories of teacher professionalism nor propose a new approach to study teachers. In exploring teachers' work and lives, it identifies professional conscience as being at the heart of Chinese teachers' understanding of their professionalism. In this way, the research has made an original contribution to the understanding of the distinctiveness of Chinese teachers' work.

7.3 Implications and limitations of the present study

7.3.1 Implications

Professional conscience examined in this research provides implications for both the importance of helping teachers to keep their professional conscience and for the improvement of Chinese teacher education. *Teacher change,* on the other hand, gives implications on how to better facilitate teacher changes under government initiatives.

Helping teachers to sustain their professional conscience

This study has presented evidence, not only on the factors influencing Chinese teachers' professional conscience but also about how and why their professional conscience fluctuated. While the growth and stability of

professional conscience helped teachers maintain their devotion to teaching, its diminishment was closely associated with teachers' disappointment and frustration. Furthermore, this research suggests that, with the absence of professional conscience, teachers are more likely to see teaching as a plain job rather than a profession. The negative impact of its diminishment has raised the issue of helping teachers to keep their professional conscience.

For policymakers, to help nurture teachers' professional conscience, it is hoped that more actions could be taken to further strengthen respect for teachers in Chinese society. Chapter four presented evidence that student respect paid to teachers was one of the most important reasons contributing to teachers *'psychical reward'*. The *'psychical reward'* provided teachers with a sense of fulfilment, which helped to further build teachers' passion and dedication to teaching. To help maintain teachers' professional conscience, this research suggests that more action is expected by the government to raise people's awareness around teacher respect. While teacher respect has been retained as a tradition in Chinese society, for those who may share the same feelings as the teachers in this research regarding a declining teachers' social status, a revival of people's respect for teachers may help to reconstruct teachers' understanding of teaching and on being a teacher.

Furthermore, as five out of six teachers who failed to claim professional conscience had suffered from negative school influence (shown in table 5.2), it is of great importance to improve the quality of school leadership. It is suggested that more respect, care and support for teachers is needed from schools.

Evidenced by this research, a school that showed little respect for teachers can dispirit teachers by negatively affecting their understanding of and devotion to teaching. Working on the very frontline of teaching, teachers' voices shall be raised and their thoughts and opinions shall be considered, prior to any change and interruption to teaching. Those decisions reached among school leaders, by ignoring or even shutting out teachers' voices, will nevertheless be implemented by teachers; however, decisions made with more understanding and support from teachers, could be better accepted by and less disturbing for those who will be affected. Teachers cannot enjoy teaching when school is disturbing, because when enjoyment for teaching decreases, teachers' frustration tends to grow; with better respect for teachers in their teaching, it is hoped that teachers can strengthen, or for some, even regain their passion and devotion to teaching.

In terms of more care from schools, it might be mostly needed for teachers like XLH and ZXM. From 'H' area, where senior high school teachers had been working under enormous pressure to prepare students for CEE, these two teachers had been driven to the extreme and were feeling exhausted, both physically and mentally. School leaders in such cases paid too much attention to students' academic performance with little care being shown for teachers' well-being. Teachers are not robots who can keep working effortlessly under continuing commands; the exhaustion, physical and mental, resulting from teachers' long-term heavy workload, is by no means helpful for their ongoing teaching. It is therefore suggested that, instead of putting overwhelming requirements on teachers to work harder and harder, schools are expected to show more attention and care to teachers' physical and mental wellbeing. The

care from schools would be a relief for teachers, even though they still have to work under a heavy workload; this relief, however, shows teachers that they have been cared for by schools and their devotion has been observed and appreciated. Such care and recognition by schools of teachers as well as their work, may help sustain teachers' confidence in teaching before their passion has been drained of by highly demanding schools as evidenced by XLH and ZXM's cases.

Respect and care can be both seen as support from schools to help teachers sustain their professional conscience, under which teachers can keep their commitment to teaching with their own values and standards. While the importance of professional conscience provides implications for policymakers and school leaders, it also offers suggestions for the development of Chinese teacher education.

Implication for teacher education: Creating a better environment to develop teachers' professional conscience

It is interesting to note that while Chinese researchers believed teacher education shall play an important part in strengthening teacher morals, which was suggested by literature and by this research as being critical for teachers as professionals in China; teachers in this research, however, hardly believed their M.A. experience had made any influence on their professional conscience. The examination of teacher change in Chapter five presented evidence that, it was professional knowledge and skills acquired through their M.A. learning that affected teachers most obviously. Teacher moral values and inner standards, though, which were so vital for teachers as professionals, had seemingly almost disappeared from their learning during the two-year long M.A. education.

It is therefore suggested that, Chinese teacher education shall play a bigger part in helping nurture teachers' professional conscience when there has already been heavy emphasis on developing teachers' professional knowledge and skills. It is not to say that more lectures must be given to addressing teachers' moral values, for modules or lectures that cannot connect teachers to real school lives may not achieve their purpose (in this research it was teachers' study of the ongoing curriculum reform that had made the most obvious impact on teachers in their later teaching). Teacher education shall involve teachers in activities or discussions that are close enough to real-school lives. For instance, teachers can have discussions or debates on real-school stories concerning professional conscience and teachers are encouraged to regularly share their understanding of how they shall think or act as teachers, based on their own experiences or/and readings.

Chinese teacher education is currently conducted at Normal universities/ teacher colleges as well as at education schools at other universities. It is believed that there is a lack of tradition in emphasising the importance of teacher morals/values at other universities compared to Normal universities and teacher colleges, both of whose the primary focuses are on teacher preparation from the day they were established (Liu & Jiang, 2016). While it is not proper now to make a sweeping statement on which kind of university is doing a better job to prepare teachers, the importance and necessity of creating a better environment for the development of teachers' professional conscience is no different for all teacher education programmes taking place in all kinds of universities. For teachers in China who are expected

to be developed as professionals and for teachers as professionals, it is professional conscience that is at the heart of their professionalism.

Implication for curriculum reform: More needs to be done to facilitate teacher change

Compared to professional conscience which is stable in teachers, teachers' perceptions and actions closely associated with actual class teaching are more obviously affected by the curriculum reform implemented nationwide from 2001. Implementing curriculum reform was attributed by a number of teachers in this research as one of the most important reasons behind some of their changed understandings and/or actions in teaching. As evidenced by section 5.1, under the new curriculum the five teachers in this section had increasingly realized the necessity to let go the tight control they used to have in teaching, as they tried to better engage students while reflecting on their own roles in classrooms. Also in section 5.2 and 5.3, some, if not all of teachers had traced the reasons for their changes as to better appreciate and to know more about students after they returned from the M.A. programme, where the learning of the new curriculum occupied considerate significance. The curriculum reform, therefore, with one of its aims to alter Chinese school education by gradually changing the ways of teaching and learning, has partly realized its targets.

However, despite the important part the curriculum reform has played in teaching, still more needs to be done if more changes (which are in line with the reformed curriculum) are expected from teachers. Under the reform, there is a dilemma where teachers are caught between their understanding and agreement for the promoted ways of teaching and their actual teaching rooted

deeply in the past teaching tradition. The reform alone could not do the whole work to provoke changes in school education.

For a top-down reform like the new curriculum, the requirements for teachers and teaching cannot be fully achieved without strong support from both top authorities and from those in local levels. Without such support, the effects of the reform might eventually be mediated by grass-root teachers for various difficulties they have encountered in their attempts to follow the reform. It is therefore suggested that, if more support for teachers could be provided to accompany the reform, it is more likely that the reform will be achieved more smoothly and comprehensively.

7.3.2 Limitations of the study and recommendations for further studies

One of the biggest limitations of this research is its small sample — only sixteen school teachers were involved. These sixteen teachers all graduated from the same university as masters and they all worked in the same province. In terms of both numbers and location of participants, these sixteen teachers could by no means represent the vast number of Chinese teachers teaching in schools and/or areas that could be quite different from that of the teachers in this research. Furthermore, though teachers participated in this study varied in their experiences, the most experienced teachers had only taught around 10 years. Findings from the research, therefore, can hardly be applied to teachers with longer teaching experience due to the lack of evidence. The small sample in this research, therefore, posed questions around the 'applicability' of its finding to other teachers.

There are also limitations from a methodological perspective. In terms of data collection, the researcher only adopted semi-structured interviews as tools to collect data. The three rounds of interviews, each with its specific theme and purpose, provided the researcher with in-depth data on Chinese teachers' professional lives. However, with data generated only from interviews, the researcher can only study teachers based on their own words; it required great time and effort to carefully distinguish a *truth* from teacher bias.

Besides, there are several issues raised through the research process that are left unsolved for lack of evidence, which, probably is partly due to the limited number of participants. For instance, a direct connection between teachers' professional conscience and teacher change is not clearly seen from this research, despite that both of them have been influenced by some similar factors and that they have co-existed in teachers to make an impact on their working lives. What we can see from this research is that a claim of professional conscience appeared in the majority of teachers who had actively made changes in teaching, but was absent in all teachers who felt seriously frustrated in teaching.

As professional conscience is the sum of teachers' moral values and standards, it encourages teachers to work *'wholeheartedly'* and to work according to their best ability. Teachers with a clear awareness of professional conscience, therefore, might be more willing to make an effort to implement changes in teaching. An example is the teacher JZ, with a claim of professional conscience, who worked his best when he realised the importance of shaping students' *'right'* attitudes to life. He then initiated the change to help students develop positive life attitudes besides teaching academic knowledge. However,

this did not immediately imply that professional conscience was behind every teacher's change and that those who did not claim professional conscience did not make any effort in teaching. What we can say is that, for some teachers, the relative strength of professional conscience might have contributed to the extent to which they changed in addition to social/school/personal factors. The key issue here, then, is to what extent professional conscience mattered in affecting teacher change. This research suggests that some subtle connections might have existed between professional conscience and teacher change, and this connection could become one of the topics for further research

Closing statement

More than four years ago, when I embarked on this Ph.D journey, I hardly knew anything about Chinese teachers' working lives. Graduating from Ed.M as a teacher candidate, I was attracted to the idea of how learning experiences at university could affect teachers in their later school lives. This research, however, revealed to me aspects of teachers' lives more than I could have expected at the very beginning of my study.

This research has explored Chinese teacher professionalism by studying teachers with varied teaching and personal backgrounds. Three rounds of interviews revealed how some teachers with different backgrounds worked under the same understanding of *teaching as work of conscience.* Chinese teachers' professional conscience had greatly affected teachers' thoughts and behaviours in teaching. With professional conscience, teachers were more likely to persist under difficult teaching conditions, to adhere to their own moral values and standards and to appreciate their work with a sense of fulfilment. Professional conscience was subject to various influential factors in

its development. It can grow and diminish, but for most teachers claiming professional conscience in this research, it stayed stable over the years.

While professional conscience stayed stable, the majority of teachers in this research had undergone different changes, perceptually and behaviourally. Changes in teachers were the results of multiple factors and results of teacher change had been manifested in teachers' daily lives. There were no unified reasons responsible for teachers' different changes: even sharing similar teaching experiences and working under similar conditions, teachers changed differently; teachers' manifestations of their changes could not be generalised: even sharing the same patterns in their ways of change, each teacher manifested their change specifically with different students and in different school contexts.

With a limited number of participants and the limited period of a PhD study, small-scale research like this could not probe every issue raised during the research process. There are issues left unsolved and problems left for further research to explore. Though its limitations cannot be ignored, this study provides detailed analysis on the core of Chinese teacher professionalism — professional conscience. It contributes not only to a clearer meaning of teachers' professional conscience, but presents a more holistic picture of teachers' dedication and teachers' change against the background of ongoing curriculum reform in China.

With my PhD study drawing to its end, it becomes ever clearer that Chinese teacher professionalism is deeply embedded in Chinese culture and social context, that 'professional conscience' rather than 'moral purpose' (as in the West), is a key component, and that this is likely to be a key contributory

factor to teacher professionalism. Whilst the long-standing teacher respect tradition, the persisting and overwhelming influence of the College Entrance Examination (CEE) and curriculum reform have all played an important part in shaping Chinese teachers' understanding of their professionalism, it is the relative strength of their professional conscience that is the key factor in building and sustaining their commitment and professionalism.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Example of participant consent form

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project title …Professional Conscience and Teacher Change: And investigation into Chinese teacher professionalism

Researcher's name Qiuru Ma

Supervisor's name Professor. Qing Gu; Professor Christopher Day

- I have read the Participant Information Sheet and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential.
- I understand that I will be audiotaped / videotaped during the interview.
- I understand that electronic data will be safely stored only in the researcher's personal computer which has been protected by a password known only to the researcher; hard copy of forms or transcripts well be safely store in places where only the researcher have access to them.
- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Research Ethics Coordinator of the School of Education, University of Nottingham, if I wish to make a complaint relating to my involvement in the research.

Signed ……(Research participant)

Print name ……
Date……..……

Contact details

Researcher: qiuru.ma@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: qing.gu@nottingham.ac.uk.;
christopher.day@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Education Research Ethics Coordinator:
educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix 2: Example of participant information sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Aims of the project

This research hopes to explore Chinese teacher professionalism by studying a group of teacher graduates from Master of Education programme (Ed.M.). It is hoped that better understandings can be achieved in Chinese teachers' work and lives.

What will happen to participants

In this study, you will be asked some questions. There are three different groups of participants, including teachers with no teaching experiences before Ed.M., rural teachers who had taught three years in schools of less-developed areas and teachers who had around ten-years teaching experience before Ed.M. There will be three rounds of interviews for all participants, each interview is expected to last about one hour.

Confidentiality and security of information

The researcher will be the only one that has access to the participants' personal information, and the data collected will not contain any personal information about you except your answers to questions been asked. These data will only be used as raw materials for further analysing. All universities, schools and participants involve in this research will be anonymous and no one will be able to link the data you provide to the identifying information you have supplied (your name, address or email address) during interviews.

Participants' rights

You may decide to stop being a part of the research study at any time without explanation. You have the right to ask that any data you have supplied to that point be withdrawn or destroyed; You have the right to omit or refuse to answer or respond to any question that is asked of you; you have the right to ask questions about the procedures of interviews (unless answering these questions would interfere with the study's outcome). If you have any questions as a result of reading this information sheet, you should ask the researcher before the study begins.

Potential benefits and risks

There are no known benefits or risks for you in this study.

For further information

Qiuru Ma will be glad to answer your any question about this study at any time. You may contact her at qiuru.ma@nottingham.ac.uk

If you have any ethic issues in regarding to this research, you may contact the Research Ethics Coordinators in School of Education, University of Nottingham, at educationresearchethics@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Example of semi-structured interview schedule

(round one with teachers with no teaching experience before Ed.M.)

Teachers' understanding on teaching and being a teacher (check methodology)

1. Before you came into Ed.M., what kind of profession that you understood teaching was? And what kind of person that a teacher should be when s/he was working with students?

Teachers' thoughts on basic courses

2. Please describe some of the basic courses you had in Ed. M. What knowledge do you think you have learned from these courses? And to what extend do you think these courses have prepared you to become a teacher?
3. Is there any basic course that left you a deep impression and you find useful in terms of your current teaching?
    a) If there is, what is it and why useful?
    b) If there is not, why?

Teachers' thoughts on professional courses

4. Please describe some professional courses you had in Ed. M. What knowledge do you think you have learned from these courses? And to what extend do you think these courses have prepared you to become a teacher?
5. Is there any professional course that left you a deep impression and you find useful in terms of your current teaching?
    a) If there is, what is it and why useful?
    b) If there is not, why?

Teachers' thoughts on selective courses

6. Please describe some selective courses you had in Ed. M. What knowledge do you think you have learned from these courses? And to what extend do you think these courses have prepared you to become a teacher?

7. Is there any selective course that left you a deep impression and you find useful in terms of your current teaching?

a) If there is, what is it and why useful?

b) If there is not, why?

Knowledge that teachers acquired through Ed. M

8. What knowledge did you think students need to know before they become teachers?

9. What subject matter knowledge do you think you have acquired through Ed.M.? Do you find it useful，why and why not?

10. What general pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge do you think you have acquired through Ed.M.? Do you find it useful, why and why not?

11. What curriculum knowledge do you think you have acquired through Ed.M.? Do you find it useful, why and why not?

12. Have you acquired knowledge of learners/ of knowing yourself through Ed.M.? If you do, do you find this knowledge useful, why and why not?

13. Have you acquired knowledge about educational contexts or educational ends? If you do, do you find these knowledge useful, why and why not?

Skills that teachers acquired through Ed. M

14. What skills do you think students need to acquire before they start to teach?

15. Have you acquired the skill of class management and course planning through Ed.M.? Does these skill apply to your teaching now?

16. Do you have acquired the skill of how to communicate and work co-operatively with your students, with parents and with your colleagues? Does these skill apply to your teaching now?

17. Do you have acquired the skill of how to make assessment and evaluate? Does these skill apply to your teaching now?

18. Besides teaching skills, how much did you know about doing educational research before your graduation? And did you ever carry out any research when you were in universities?

Ethics that teachers developed through Ed. M.

19. What was your understanding of teachers' ethic and value before you came into Ed.M.? Does your experience in Ed. M has influenced your understanding on teachers ethic/value and in what way?

Teachers' thoughts on teaching practice

20. What did you do in schools and for how long?
21. How do you see your teaching practice helps in terms of its influence in shaping your understandings about teaching and teacher?

Appendix 4: Example of semi-structured interview schedule

(round one with experienced teachers)

Understanding on teaching and being a teacher (check methodology)

1. Before you came into Ed.M., based on your former teaching experience, what kind of profession that you thought teaching should be and what kind of person that a teacher should be when s/he was working with students? Has these understandings changed through Ed.M. and what caused the change?

Teachers' thoughts on basic courses

2. Please describe some of the basic courses you had in Ed. M.

   What knowledge you have learned from these courses relevant to your previous teaching experience? And how relevant?

3. Is there any basic course that left you a deep impression and you find useful in terms of your current teaching?

   a) If there is, what is it and why useful

   b) If there is not, why?

Teachers' thoughts on professional courses

4. Please describe some professional courses you had in Ed. M.

   What knowledge you have learned from these courses relevant to your previous teaching experience? And how relevant?

5. Is there any professional course that left you a deep impression and you find useful in terms of your current teaching?

   a) If there is, what is it and why useful?

   b) If there is not, why?

Teachers' thoughts on selective courses

6. Please describe some selective courses you had in Ed. M.

   What knowledge you have learned from these courses relevant to your previous teaching experience? And how relevant?

7. Is there any selective course that left you a deep impression and you find useful in terms of your current teaching?
    a) If there is, what is it and why useful?
    b) If there is not, why?

Knowledge and skill that teachers acquired through Ed. M

8. Before you came into Ed.M., what knowledge did you think you need most if you were continuing working as a teacher?
9. Do you think you have acquired this knowledge through Ed.M.? If not, why not?
10. What is the most useful knowledge that you have acquired and what is the least? And why least?
11. Before you came into Ed.M., what skills did you think you need most if you were continuing working as a teacher?
12. Do you think you have acquired this skill through Ed.M.? If not, why not?
13. What is the most useful skill that you have acquired and what is the least? And why least?
14. How much did you know about doing educational research before you came into Ed.M.? Does your experience in Ed.M. deepen your understandings on doing educational research and how

Ethics that teachers developed through Ed. M.

15. What was your understanding of teachers' ethics and value before you came into Ed.M.? Does your experience in Ed. M has influenced your understanding on teachers' ethics and value and in what way?
16. What values did you think teachers should uphold before you came into Ed.M.? Does your experience in Ed. M has influenced your understanding on teacher values and in what way?

General questions on teaching experience

17. Why did you come into teaching and have taught for how long before you started Ed.M.?
18. Why did you want to get an Ed.M. when you have already taught for years?
19. What has kept you in teaching? Do you see yourself still in teaching in the next five years? Why/why not?
20. What did you think you have benefited most as a teacher from Ed.M.?

Appendix 5: Example of semi-structured interview schedule

(round two with teachers with no teaching experience before Ed.M.)

First experience of being a teacher

1. Could you describe your general experiences of being a teacher in the first few months? Did you like your job and your school? Why/why not?

2. How did you define yourself as a teacher shortly after your coming into this school? What were your strengths and weaknesses? What would you like to improve most?

Understandings on teaching and teacher based on first few months of teaching

3. What kind of profession that you understood teaching was? And what kind of person that a teacher should be when s/he was working with students? Were these understandings different or similar to your previous understandings before graduation?
4. What challenges did you face when adjusting your role from a student to a teacher?
5. What knowledge and skills did you think you need most then for your teaching?

6. What was your understanding of teacher ethic and value after first few months of teaching? Was it different from your previous understandings before graduation? And what caused the difference**?**

Changes of perceptions and performance

7. What were your thoughts and expectations on teaching before you came to this school?
8. What were the thoughts and expectations shortly after you began to teach? If there was any change on your thoughts and expectation? If there was, what was it, why it happened and how have it influenced you?
9. What was the most difficult aspect in being a teacher when you first started to teach? Why and how did you handle it?

10. What was the most encouraging aspect? Why and how has it encouraged you?
11. Was the difficult or encouraging aspect different or similar to your previous perceptions of being a teacher? And to what extend were they different or similar?
12. Was there any change in your ways of teaching and interacting with students along with your changing perceptions within the first few months?

Related with Ed. M.

13. What did you think was the most relevant Ed.M. experience you had for the first few months of teaching? And how had it been relevant?
14. What knowledge acquired through Ed.M. that you found helpful for your teaching and why helpful?
15. What skills acquired through Ed.M. that you found helpful for your teaching and why helpful?
16. What value acquired through Ed.M. that you found helpful for your teaching and why helpful?

Teacher autonomy

17. Did you think you had any influence in deciding the content of a curriculum, or in choosing school text books?
18. Did you have the right to freely choose your teaching methods? What about deciding the content of examination (and what examination) and how to assess students' performance?
19. Can you make free decisions as to whether pupils should repeat a year or not long after you became a teacher?
20. Were there any other things that you can make free decision in terms of teaching?

School influence

21. How did you see your school as a working community when you first came?
22. Did you get any support when you started to teach? What kind of support

it was?

23. What support did you want? Was it different or similar to the support you received?

24. Did your school have any influence on your way of teaching and being a teacher? If there was, what was it and how did it influence you; if there was not any influence, why?

Appendix 6: Example of semi-structured interview schedule

(round two with experienced teachers)

General feeling of returning to teaching

1. Do you return to teach right after your graduation?
2. Could you describe your general feelings of returning to teaching?
3. What do you think is the biggest difference after your finishing Ed.M. in terms of your teaching and/or feeling related with teaching?
4. What challenges did you face when adjusting your role from a student to a teacher again?

Understandings on teaching and teacher right after graduation

5. After returning to teaching, were your understandings on teaching and on the role of being a teacher different or similar to your previous understandings while you were in Ed.M.? If different, why different?

Changes of perceptions and performance

6. What were your thoughts and expectations on teaching shortly after you came back? If these thoughts and expectations different or similar to those in your previous teaching? If different, why?

Related with Ed. M.

7. What did you think was the most relevant Ed.M. experience you had for the first few months of returning to teaching? And how has it been relevant?
8. What knowledge acquired through Ed.M. that you found helpful for your teaching and why helpful?
9. What skills acquired through Ed.M. that you found helpful for your teaching and why helpful?
10. What value acquired through Ed.M. that you found helpful for your teaching and why helpful?

Teacher autonomy

11. Did you think you had any influence in deciding the content of a curriculum, or in choosing school text books?
12. Did you have the right to freely choose your teaching methods? What about deciding the content of examination (and what examination) and how to assess students' performance?
13. Can you make free decisions as to whether pupils should repeat a year or not long after you became a teacher?
14. Were there any other things that you can make free decision in terms of teaching?

School influence

15. How did you see your school as a working community?
16. Did you get any support when you return to teach? What kind of support it was?
17. What support did you want? Was it different or similar to the support you received?
18. Did your school have any influence on your way of teaching and being a teacher? If there was, what was it and how did it influence you; if there was not any influence, why?

Appendix 7: Example of semi-structured interview schedule

(round three with teachers with no teaching experience before Ed.M.)

General evaluation of first years of teaching

1. How do you evaluate your experience throughout the first year of teaching?
2. What do you think is the most important experience you get through this academic year?

Understandings on teaching and teacher after one year of teaching

3. What is your understanding of making teaching as your career?
4. What do you think your strengths and weaknesses is as a teacher? What would you like to improve most?

Changes of perceptions and performance

5. Are there any changes of your perception on teaching and on the meaning of being a teacher after one year's teaching? If there are, what are the changes? Why they have happened? How these changes have influenced you?
6. Are there any changes on your way of teaching and interacting with students through this year? If there are, what are the changes and why they have happened?
7. Are there any changes on your believes of the values that teachers should uphold through this year? If there are, what are the changes and why they have happened?
8. What do you find is the most challenging aspect of being a teacher? Why?
9. What do you find is the most encouraging aspect of being a teacher? Why?

Related with Ed.M.

10. What do you think is the most relevant Ed.M. experience you have so far for your teaching? And how has it been relevant?
11. What knowledge acquired through Ed.M. that you find helpful for your teaching and why helpful?

12. What qualities and skills acquired through Ed.M. that you find helpful for your teaching and why helpful?
13. What value acquired through Ed.M. that you find helpful for your teaching and why helpful?

Autonomy

14. Do you think you have any influence in deciding the content of a curriculum, or in choosing school text books?
15. Do you have the right to freely choose your teaching methods? What about deciding the content of examination (and what examination) and how to assess students' performance?
16. Can you make free decisions as to whether pupils should repeat a year or not?
17. Are there any other things that you can make free decision in terms of teaching?

School influence

18. How do you see your school as a working community now?
19. Do you get any support for your teaching or for teachers' professional development from your school? What kind of support it is?
20. What support do you need most now? Is it different or similar to the support you have received?
21. Does your school have any influence on your way of teaching and being a teacher? If there is, what is it and how does it influence you; if there is not, why?

Appendix 8: Example of semi-structured interview schedule

(round three with experienced teachers)

Understandings on teaching and teacher based on current teaching

1. How do you understand teaching and being a teacher now? Is it different from your previous understandings when you have finished Ed.M.? What is the difference and why?
2. What do you think your strengths and weaknesses is as a teacher? What would you like to improve most?
3. What knowledge and skills do you think you need most now for your teaching?
4. What is your understanding of teacher ethic and value? Is it different from your previous understandings when you have finished Ed.M.? What is the difference and why?

Changes of perceptions and performance

5. Do your thoughts and expectations on teaching have changed since your graduation? If there is, what is it, why it has happened and how have it influenced you?
6. What do you think is the most difficult aspect in being a teacher now?
7. What do you think is the most encouraging aspect in being a teacher now?
8. Do you have a different understanding on teachers' continuing professional development when you have returned to teaching again? If there is, what is the understanding and why different?
9. Is there any change in your ways of teaching and interacting with students along with your changing perceptions?

Related with Ed. M.

10. What professional knowledge that you believe teachers must have now? What knowledge acquired through Ed.M. that you find helpful for your teaching and why helpful?

11. What professional skills that you believe teachers must have? What skills acquired through Ed.M. that you find helpful for your teaching and why helpful?
12. What is you understanding of teacher ethic and value? What value acquired through Ed.M. that you find helpful for your teaching and why helpful?

Autonomy

13. Do you think you have any influence in deciding the content of a curriculum, or in choosing school text books?
14. Do you have the right to freely choose your teaching methods? What about deciding the content of examination (and what examination) and how to assess students' performance?
15. Can you make free decisions as to whether pupils should repeat a year or not?
16. Are there any other things that you can make free decision in terms of teaching?

School influence

17. How do you see your school as a working community?
18. Do you get any support for your teaching or for teachers' professional development from schools? What kind of support it is?
19. What support do you need most now? Is it different or similar to the support you have received?
20. Does your school have any influence on your way of teaching and being a teacher? If there is, what is it and how does it influence you; If there is not, why