Teaching Controversial Issues in the JLL Classroom for Chinese Students

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Abstract

This paper discusses how teachers explore teaching controversial issues in the Japanese language classroom to Japanese language learner (JLL) or culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students who have different cultural and political backgrounds. Assuring educational opportunities with consideration of JLLs' background is important especially in this globalized world. Students who spent several years in their home countries had missed the earlier part of the culture in the host countries, and they do not internalize host culture fully. Lack of cultural knowledge or literacy would lead to inequality of attainment. The research was conducted in a Japanese language classroom for Chinese from People's Republic of China (ROC) newcomer students in a commercial night public high school in Japan.

This study examines how a Japanese teacher were aware of the cultural aspects of students, searched for appropriate methods to teach controversial issues. The research methods are participatory observations and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Through interaction with Chinese newcomer students, the Japanese teacher's cultural and political awareness and political correctness was induced as he observed what the students needed to know and experience. The teacher tried to infuse students with global awareness in his hybrid history embedded Japanese language class. The concept which were not relevant to the political status of the country of origin, neutrality between the country of origin and Japan, were explored during the lessons.

Keywords: controversial issues, Japanese language learner (JLL) students, culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students, culturally responsiveness, cultural literacy

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Introduction

Japanese population has been becoming more diverse than before. Since the end of the World War II, there have been "old comers" ethnic Chinese and ethnic Koreans in Japan. As "newcomers," Indo-Chinese refugees came to Japan from 1970s to the 1980s. War-displaced Japanese orphans or women in China came back to Japan from 1980s to 1990s and second and third generation were allowed to live in Japan.

With the implementation of the revised Immigration Control and Refugee Recognition Act in 1990, the South American of Japanese descent, especially Japanese-Brazilians, increased as foreign laborers, and their children started to emerge in Japanese public schools. The number of South Americans of Japanese descent had been increased until 2008 of bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers.

However Japanese public schools are still not ready for accepting and educating pupils/students with culturally and linguistically diverse background. The public schools in Japan are sometimes overwhelmed by the students who cannot speak Japanese and have different cultural background.

The number of foreign students who enroll in Japanese public schools (elementary, junior high, and high school) is 73,289 (Ministry of Education, Sports and Science, 2014). The number of Japanese language learners within the foreign students is 29,198 in 2014. Japanese JLLs are not included in the data above. The number of foreign high school students is 8,584 and the Japanese language learners 2,272 in 2014.

Japanese language learner (JLL) high school students need Japanese language and content to be able to participate fully in the classroom, and in the mainstream society in the future. However, on the high school level, students are sometimes regarded as almost competent in language and content as mainstream students because they passed the high school entrance exam. In reality, JLLs still face the challenges of language and cultural barriers and only a few enjoy school success.

Earlier studies have suggested that the major cause of underachievement was culture issues; cultural incongruences between home and school. In the 1960s, in the inner cities of the United States, underachievement of lower socio-economic status students were regarded as "culturally deprived," and lower economic status was thought to cause school failure. Nieto (1996) called the cultural incongruencies, cultural incompatibility, and cultural discontinuity as "deficit theories," and challenged the viewpoint of cultural inferiority in CLD students. Later in 1970s to 1980s, deficit theories declined, and "cultural differences" theories took the place.

After 1990s to present, "culturally responsive" or "culturally relevant" pedagogy has been considered as a new framework for teaching CLD students (Gay 2010, Ladson-Billings 1994, Nieto 1996, Villegas & Lucas, 2007). Villegas & Lucas (2007) defined "culturally responsiveness" as "more than just applying specialized teaching techniques." They stressed the significance of "the role of culture and language" and the possibility as "a coherent framework for professional development initiatives in schools."

This paper explores how teachers perceive the challenges of CLD students who missed earlier part of their lives as Japanese residents; Japanese culture and ideology, and how teachers explore content and materials about teaching controversial issues between Japanese and Chinese history which are relevant to the Chinese newcomer students living in Japan.

Research method

1. Participants:

A Japanese high school teacher and a Chinese speaking Japanese teacher. They both taught in a Japanese language class for Chinese-origin newcomer high school students; the classes are offered three times a week from 4:30 to 5:15 p.m. (50 minutes each) "before school," not after school because the school is a commercial night high school which starts at 5:30 p.m. The school is located in a suburban city in Kanto area near Tokyo. Students' age ranges from 15 to17, and one student, who missed high school education, is 23 year old. The Japanese language class is only for the 1st graders (grade 10), and class size is from 4 to 10 students each year.

2. Method:

Participatory observation of the Japanese language (studying Chinese characters and *hiragana*) classroom for 1st graders. The name of the class is called "Japanese and Chinese Culture Study." Semi-structured interview with a Japanese high school teacher (twice, 50 minutes each), a Chinese-speaking educator from Taiwan, Republic of China (once, 50 minutes).

Teaching controversial issues with CLDs in Japanese context

One of the author's friends used to recall on a history class during her elementary school days in the United States. "I felt I was bullied when my classmates pronounced 'Pearl Harbor' in front of me." It is controversial for teachers to teach historical units with CLDs in the same class.

As an international cooperation organization based in the UK, Oxfam (2006) defined "controversial issues" as "issues that are likely to be sensitive or controversial are those that have a political, social or personal impact and arouse feeling and/or deal with questions of value or belief." Teaching the themes such as holocaust, homophobia, and religion would be difficult and controversial when students related in the topic were in the same class (Strike & Soltis 1998, Mitchell, 2010, Short 2012, van Driel & Kahn 2012). After 9.11, teaching about Islamophobia has become an issue (Smyth 2012, Kawasaki 2011).

Japan and China has a long controversial historical relationships. Culturally responsive teachers should be sensitive to CLD students from China in the classroom. Recently, not only historical relationships, issues in current China, such as air pollution and food contamination, have become controversial issues. Around 2010, food safety issues became an object of public concern in Japan. There were news that both domestic and imported food contained undesirable materials which deceived consumers. Tsuji (2010) suggested several lesson plans to teachers who concerned bullying among children in the classroom. The lesson was classroom discussion on food safety. There were two newspaper articles; one was about agricultural chemical residues in vegetables imported from China, and another was mislabeling of food or food fraud in Japanese companies. Tsuji called this lesson a problem solving lesson which enabled students to overcome stereotypes and prejudices toward different cultures, and to have wider perspectives.

As a social studies teacher who taught CLD students, Minamiura (2013) divided three types of lessons for cultural understanding before and after students came to Japan.

	Aims of lessons	Content
1.	Understanding mainstream culture	Understanding Japanese society
2.	Understanding mainstream culture based on	
	home culture	country and understanding mainstream culture
3.	Interrelated understanding of both mainstream culture and home culture	Relating home culture and mainstream culture and promoting understanding on Japanese society

Table 1. Three types of social studies pedagogies for CLD students (based on p.42 Minamiura 2013)

Minamiura introduced a history lesson plan as #2 by Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sports (MEXT, 2007) for CLD students from Latin America whose native languages are Spanish or Portuguese. During 15th to 16th century was the Age of Exploration in Europe, and the Age of Civil War in Japan. It is meaningful for the Spanish or Portuguese speaking students to know that Spanish and Portuguese vocabularies were imported to Japan during the period.

Minamiura designed a history lesson plan for Chinese students at elementary school as #3. It was a lesson on Japanese mission to Sui China during 7th to 9th century; exploration of the reasons why this mission was successful in the eyes of the Japanese envoy Ono no Imoko and Chinese Emperor Yang.

Studying history of home country in relation to the history of host country would secure identities of CLD students and it would lead to deepen their understanding.

In quest of Japanese culture and history

In the X commercial night high school in Kanto district in Japan, the Japanese language class for newcomer students was initially taught by the Chinese-speaking educator from Taiwan alone because most of the newcomers at the school are from China. The Japanese teacher, who was originally a commercial teacher, started to teach Japanese culture in the class when the educator asked him to teach Japanese culture while he was patrolling around classes.

The educator became conscious of Chinese students' needs to learn Japanese culture from a mainstream teacher. The Japanese teacher was asked to join the class and elaborated on *samurai* history dramas and *hara-kiri*. Both educator and Chinese students were interested and asked him to teach regularly (Shimojima, 2014). He started to teach three times a week; two team-taught lessons on *kanji* Chinese characters with Chinese-speaking educator and a traditional single-teacher lesson on Japanese culture.

The Japanese language class mainly had 10th grade JLL Chinese students teaching basic *kanji* Chinese characters because Chinese characters in China and Japan were different in character and sound. As the main Japanese language teacher, Chinese-speaking teacher conducted bilingual lessons mainly in Japanese, used Chinese when students needed help. Chinese students solved the problems on characters, pronunciation, meanings and context used in the sentences.

The Japanese teacher elaborated on the meaning of the characters using gestures or illustrations. Students asked him questions in Japanese, and asked the bilingual teacher in Chinese when they did not understand well. Gradually the Japanese teacher realized that Chinese students were interested in learning about Japanese culture, and also wanted to understand the news on TV and newspapers.

As a commercial teacher at the commercial night high school, the Japanese teacher did not teach Japanese history as a content teacher, however, he studied history at university and well versed in history. He noticed that lack of knowledge on Japanese history and culture would hinder newcomer Chinese students to understand social studies, Japanese language arts and classics. One day a female

student asked the teacher that she should do to understand Japanese news on TV. If students do not understand what is going on in the host country, they would not have a better communication with their peers. The teacher suggested to her that she should watch a TV news program for children which were popular even among adults.

The Japanese teacher started to search for materials relevant to Chinese students. He recalled: "Teaching culture and history in the language class was a series of struggles and exploration." Later he explored themes on international relations between China, Japan, and other countries including East Asia and Europe.

Hybrid history embedded Japanese language lessons

Table 2. Lessons on East Asian history

Phase	Aims of Lessons	Content	Materials
1) 2009-2011	*Reading a Japanese map in relation to East Asia *Identifying the locations of China (Jilin Province), Russia, South and North	How China interfered in the division of the Korean Peninsula	*World map in Japanese *A song lyrics "Imjin River"
2) 2010-	*Understanding international relations during 19 th century:	*the Opium War during Qing dynasty	The <i>kanji</i> Chinese characters on the textbook
	China and England, Japan and England	*the cession of the Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula in 1842, being transferred to China in 1997	
3) 2010	*The relation between China and Japan *The definition of "democracy"	Senkaku Island Disputes	N.A.
4) 2011-	*Understanding the "reverse import" of Chinese characters from Japan to China *Chinese history of Qing Dynasty 17 th to 18 th century and Xinhai Revolution in 1911	The Chinese character meaning "communism" was imported from Japan	The <i>kanji</i> Chinese characters on the textbook

1) Teaching about Chinese interference in division of Korean Peninsula

The Japanese teacher designed a lesson on a political song by the Japanese artist group Folk Crusaders "*Imjin River*," which was released in Japan in 1967. The original song lyric was written by a poet in North Korea. The song is about the division of South and North Korea, and it was banned to sell because of the political consideration. In 2005, the song was used in the Japanese movie of Korean residents in Japan "*Patchigi*," and it came to be well-known (Shimojima 2014).

The teacher infused a language lesson with social studies. Geography: the aim of the lesson was to teach geographical location of Russia, South and North Korea together with China. History: division of Korean Peninsula and Chinese interference. The language lesson was rather a Language Arts lesson: reading a song lyrics of a political song, and interpretation of poet's intentions and emotions. During the lesson the teacher explained:

"From the North land to the South sky," this means that the writer wants to convey his feelings to the South. This phrase seems to express his frustration. "

2) Teaching about international relationships between China and England, Japan and England

The teacher taught Chinese students that Japan had learned a bitter lesson on Imperialism from the Opium war between China and England. The teacher recalled that he tried to teach the content in an "inoffensive, less controversial ways."

3) Teaching about "democracy," in a controversial situation

In 2010 the Senkaku Islands disputes occurred between Japan and China. Chinese Students were excited to talk with the Chinese-speaking educator, and asked her if they should join the political demonstration in Japan. Most of the students were from People's Republic of China (ROC), and the educator was from Taiwan, Republic of China (RC). The Japanese teacher recalled: "I was at a loss what to talk about." Then he talked to the students, "When there was a conflict between Japan and China, Japanese shops were attacked in China. How about in Japan? The reaction during conflict reflects the attitude of each country. Do you think Japanese are more democratic?" He insisted that people in each country should be on good terms even if two countries had conflicts.

The students had an opportunity to realize what it was to be "democratic" during the conversation with the Japanese teacher and the Chinese-speaking educator. Internalizing ideology and culture is a part of acculturation and socialization, and it is significant that their acculturation process is based on the hybrid "knowledge construction" (Banks 2012) between home country and host country.

4) Teaching about the "reverse import" of Chinese characters in political context

It is needless to say that Chinese characters were originally exported from China to Japan. During Meiji Restoration, after the feudal period ended in 19th century in Japan, it was an urgent mission to translate Western ideas and notions, however, there were few appropriate set of words in Japanese. As medical terms were already translated from Dutch, some words in daily commodities were imported and translated from Portuguese, researchers during Meiji period "invented" terms to describe new ideas or notions in international laws in English and other European languages.

The word "kyosan-shugi" was translated and invented from "communism." Later it was said that this term was exported to China.

Excerpts of the lesson on Chinese characters Dec.21, 2011. 4 boys (JT: Japanese teacher, S1: student 1)

JT: Do you now that *kanji* characters were imported from China to Japan, don't you? But you know what? There were some *kanji* characters which were exported to China.

S1: Oh, I don't know that.

JT: For example, you may know that there is a word "communism." China is a communist country. The words such as kyosan "communism" or shugi "policy" were born in Japan, and went to China. During 19^{th} century to 20^{th} century, up to 1950, China had been at war. Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Zedong.

Later in this lesson, the Japanese teacher posed a question: "Why do you think this character meaning communism was not invented in China?" He explained the reasons that the political situations were not stable during the period in China. He presumed that it was easier for China to import the word from Japan.

Phase	Aims of Lessons	Content	Materials
2010-	Understanding notions: Kenri ishiki "Right	Current Chinese issues about foreign affiliated company	A newspaper article from Japan Economic Newspapers
	consciousness"		

Table 3. Lessons on contemporary China

Teaching controversial issues using newspaper articles

June 28, 2010, 5 boys and 3 girls, a Japanese teacher (JT) and a Chinese-speaking Educator (CE)

JT: Today we are going to study about China on a newspaper article. *Japan Economic Newspaper*. Here it says "Editorial," where editors review news. Editorial in each newspapers has a unique character reflecting their policy on newspapers. (JT reads the article.) "In a Chinese foreign affiliated firm.... Editorial, *Taigu-kaizen* (improvement of labor condition), *Kenri-ishiki* (right consciousness).

CE: (Explains in Chinese)

JT: Do you understand? (JT & CE confirm the progress)

CE: *Chin-age* (wage increase). (CE explains in Chinese)

CE to JT: Up to now, students don't seem to understand. I will explain in Chinese. (Explains in Chinese.)

CE: Dekasegi (Expatriate workers.) (Explains in Chinese).

JT: *Onsha* (Your company, in a polite way).

CE: (Explains in Chinese). Someone else's company in a polite colloquial phrase. In written form, you have to write "Onchu." (CE writes on the blackboard) Yusen-jun-i (Priority).

JT: Up to now, China's target has been economic development, but now there are riots because of disparity.

CE: (Reading Chinese characters) "Hosei-gyo (Sewing business)." Now it is a major industry in Vietnam.

JT: "Right consciousness." Do you know what the Chinese government are afraid of? It is the political right consciousness. Chinese government will never allow people to have it. The government is afraid of labor unions because they might destroy communism.

CE: Do you understand what it means? If you grow up, you will understand. Working people can understand, but you still are students.

JT: It is said that there are one hundred million very rich people in China. How about the others?

B1: What happens if everyone becomes rich?

CE: (Answer in Chinese)

(Boys and girls give opinions in Chinese.)

CE: Now there are some rich villages in the farms, but women won't agree to get married easily. Chinese boys are worried about that when they are still very young.

JT: Good luck, and try harder, Chinese young men!

(The whole class talk about marriage both in Japanese and Chinese.)

It is difficult for JLL students who are in the process of learning *kanji* Chinese characters for 1st and 2nd grade of elementary school. However, according to Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985), "it is necessary for the learners to understand input which contains items that are slightly beyond the learners' present linguistic competence." Japanese language classes for secondary students often discourage students as the lessons offer them the contents that do not match the developmental stage of secondary students.

In this context, the Japanese teacher's effort in implementing economic and political notions in Japanese language class was meaningful. As the Chinese educator has knowledge on Business Japanese and experience in working for a Japanese company in both Taiwan and Japan, she included several vocabularies on business Japanese. She also elaborated on Chinese contemporary issues in economy and marriage.

Even though the ideas behind the vocabularies appeared on the newspaper article were difficult, the topic itself was relevant to students. The lesson and the article enabled students to look at their home country from outside their country.

Phase	Aims of Lessons	Content	Materials
2009-2011	Understanding Japanese spirits and culture	Chushin Gura "The Loyal 47 Ronin"	Materials taken from the internet sites

Table 4. Lesson on a famous incident in Japanese history

A lesson on The Loyal 47 Ronin

The Japanese teacher just explained the reason why he taught about the Loyal 47 *Ronin* because "it was December, December 14th." The day was when 47 *ronins* took a revenge on Kira, a *samurai* who was in charge of ceremonies as *hatamoto*, in the direct service of the Tokugawa shogunate of feudal Japan.

The teacher explained the main reason to choose The Loyal 47 Ronin to teach because "It is said that the story based on the real bloodshed was used as an occupation policy reference by the occupation forces after the war." He might have thought that knowing about the 47 *ronins* would be "cultural literacy every Japanese needs to know" (Hirsch 1988).

Discussion

In the Japanese language and culture lessons, the Japanese teacher taught international relations between China and Japan, South and North Korea, and England in historical context. In the *Imjin* River lesson, the teacher taught the controversial relationship between China and Korean Peninsula.

If the Chinese students did not have opportunities to learn this part of history in their home country, this experience would open doors to outside world. In the Opium War lesson, the teacher tried to teach the relationship not only China and England but also Japan and England, and the fact that Japan had learned from China.

The relationship between Japan and China, there are a lot of issues to cover, however, teaching the fact that Chinese characters were exported to Japan in the earlier period of history and the kanji Chinese characters were exported from Japan to China in 19th century would strengthen and develop identities of Chinese students growing up in Japan in terms of understanding both home and host countries.

Teaching controversial issues with CLDs and/or JLLs in the Japanese language classroom is different from teaching CLDs in the mainstream classroom which has peers of mainstream culture. However, in the classroom, it is not simple structure of a Japanese teacher and Chinese students. Chinese students are from different provinces, and the Chinese speaking educator is not from mainland China. Even though their background was different, students and the educator seemed to share same language and culture, and were interested in learning about Japanese language and culture.

The Japanese teacher and Chinese-speaking educator also shared common interest. In the commercial high school, the Japanese teacher taught commerce and computer as a content teacher for mainstream students, and the Chinese-speaking educator had worked in companies and she included business manners and *keigo* polite way of speaking especially at the office in her lesson. Reading a newspaper article on a Chinese company and work-related vocabularies was necessary for the students.

Dealing with the political ideology is a controversial matter. When the Japanese teacher taught the *kanji* Chinese character of *kyo-san shugi* (communism) and read a newspaper article about a Chinese company, labor union and right consciousness, he referred to Chinese government. He recalled that some students thought about Japan and China relationships without losing equilibrium and more flexible but other students were not.

Teaching "loyalty to master" in Japanese historical context in reading 47 *ronins* would be a new lesson for CLD students. The story based on the fact is controversial in different sense, whether it is desirable or not to revenge on the master's opponent. When the students learned about Japanese class system during feudal period, students told the teacher, "Oh, Japan also has a dark history."

Learning about Japanese history and culture, and learning about home history and culture in relation to Japan would transform students growing up in cultural transition.

Conclusion

In the globalized world, people get information much easier than before, and grasp what it is like to hear and pronounce foreign language. It is, however, difficult to internalize other cultures or ideologies different from their own home country.

Teachers at school tend to think teaching the language should be put utmost priority. In order for the newcomer CLD students to participate fully in Japanese society, teachers would need to realize that "culture matters" for students who are in the cultural transition in their formative years.

Students in this globalized world need new competencies. Fadel (2009) stressed the importance of 21st century skills that include knowledge, skills, and attitude or values. The teacher in this research aimed at teaching cultural literacy of Japanese culture and society, and the attitude of viewing the world neutrally and think critically with their own mind. The teachers in this study realized what was necessary for the CLD Chinese students and support and scaffold acculturation process in view of the new set of skills and values. The teacher empowered CLD Chinese students in

stressing the great value of Chinese influence over Japan by teaching that Japan as a nation respected China as a nation.

In Japanese course of study by the Ministry of Education advocates to foster "Japanese citizens" which do not include students with different nationalities or cultural backgrounds. There are no official curriculum in teaching controversial issues in social studies or other subjects, some culturally responsive teachers explore content and materials, devise lesson plans to maintain cultural identities of origin and acquire knowledge of mainstream culture. It is an urgent requirement to incorporate curriculum to teach culturally responsive content for students with CLD background.

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