

Investigation of the Novice TCSOL Teacher Identity Construction Via Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity

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Abstract:

This qualitative case study (N=3) investigates the identity construction of novice language teachers in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages (TCSOL) within Thailand. Framing teacher identity as a complex dynamic system, the study employs the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI) to explore how these teachers (re)define and (re)negotiate their identities. Data were collected via interviews and focus group discussions, using metaphors to prompt teachers to reflect on the questions. Analyzing novice teachers' beliefs, goals, self-perceptions, and perceived action possibilities across various role identities, the study finds all of them remain in a continuous 'learner' state and experience shifts from idealism to realism in professional views. The study highlights a misalignment between the current TCSOL practicum format and actual teaching practice, hindering professional development and identity construction. Novice TCSOL teacher identity is significantly influenced by social and political contexts and reinforced through organizing cultural activities. Three novice TCSOL teachers hold beliefs and goals extending beyond language teaching, emphasizing the mutual impact of personal behavior on national image and international relations. The paper calls on the Chinese academic community to increase its focus on empirical research on (TCSOL) teacher identities. This research contributes to addressing the gap in studies on teacher identity in regions such as Asia and explores the identity construction of transnational foreign language teachers beyond English.

Keywords: Novice TCSOL teachers; Teacher identity; DSMRI; Professional development


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INTRODUCTION

The broader context for the emergence of teachers teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages (TCSOL) is one of globalization and multilingualism. With China's increasing economic influence around the world, the number of Chinese language learners has risen, significantly boosting the demand for TCSOL teachers and diversifying their roles (Liu & Li, 2023; Sun et al., 2022). Taking Thailand as an example, data released by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council of China in 2019 indicate that over 17,000 Chinese volunteer teachers were teaching in more than 1,000 primary and secondary schools as well as higher education institutions across 73 provinces in Thailand (Chong Ewe & Min, 2021). To meet this global demand, the Centre for Language Exchange and Cooperation (CLEC, formerly known as Hanban/Confucius Institute Headquarters) recruits thousands of teachers annually as volunteers to teach Chinese at primary and secondary schools, or universities worldwide (Sun, 2021). Furthermore, the establishment of the 'Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF)' has taken on full responsibility for the branding and operation of Confucius Institutes (CIs; Xinhua News Agency, 2020). CLEC provides teaching materials and training services, while CIEF offers financial support for CIs (Liu, 2019; Starr, 2009). It is notable that perspectives on CIs vary, encompassing cultural diplomacy (Pan, 2013), soft power (Repnikova, 2022), national identity (Li & Xv, 2023), national image building (Hu et al., 2022), cross-border mergers and acquisitions (Wang et al., 2021). These diverse views, along with some negative media coverage, may lead TCSOL teachers to question their profession, diminishing their confidence in their careers (Ma & Gao, 2017).

According to the CLEC website, there are three main categories of TCSOL teachers, namely volunteer teachers, dispatched teachers, and full-time teachers, forming a hierarchical career development pathway. Consistent with Lefebvre et al. (2022), this study uses the term "novice" to refer to TCSOL teachers at the beginning of their professional careers. In this case, volunteer teachers are essentially novice TCSOL teachers, most of whom are graduate students. After accumulating at least two years of experience, volunteer teachers become eligible to take the dispatched teacher qualification exam, which is also open to teachers from primary, secondary, and higher education institutions in China. Full-time teachers are officially employed by Chinese universities and work on a rotational basis between domestic and overseas assignments. These three types of teachers differ in terms of responsibilities and compensation packages. As revealed in the literature, novice TCSOL teachers face potential challenges in adapting to new living and working environments, managing relationships with colleagues and students, and developing resources for actual teaching (Sun et al., 2022). Additionally, the dynamic power process of their dual identity as language instructors (i.e., Chinese) and language learners (i.e., Thai, in the case of this study) (Liu & Li, 2023), along with various potential emotional critical incidents they may encounter (Derakhshan & Nazari, 2023), can impact the construction of novice TCSOL teacher identity and their future commitment to this profession. According to Akkerman

and Meijer (2011), teacher identity is the pursuit of answering the questions, “Who am I as a teacher?” and “What kind of teacher do I want to become?”

Research has shown that teacher identity plays a key role in helping novice teachers transition from student to professional, supporting their learning and teaching practices (Beijaard et al., 2022; Schelling et al., 2021; Yazan, 2018). Furthermore, cultivating a strong teacher identity is essential for improving novice teachers’ well-being (Thomas & Beamchamp, 2011). Meanwhile, understanding the factors that influence and shape the processes of novice teacher identity formation can assist teacher educators and educational policymakers in making more effective decisions (Izadinia, 2013). As Kanno and Stuart (2011) suggest, the construction of teacher identity is indispensable in the learning process of novice second language teachers, and the academic community should further explore the development of teacher identity as a core component of teacher education knowledge. However, little focus has been directed toward the construction of TCSOL teachers’ identities (Han & Ji, 2021; Wang & Du, 2014). More research is needed to understand how novice TCSOL teachers construct their identities as overseas Chinese teachers (Liu & Li, 2023; Sun et al., 2022).

This study responds to the calls made by Izadinia (2013) and Olsen et al. (2022) for more research on teacher identity in regions such as Asia, since “applying teacher identity in new locations, also using the new contexts to grow teacher identity as a concept, will deepen and strengthen the field (Olsen et al., 2022, p.8).” In fact, identity crises in this region have had a negative impact on both teachers’ well-being and their teaching practices. For example, Wei (2021) highlights how major historical events, such as the Cultural Revolution, and China’s educational reform environment have led to conflicts between teachers’ imagined identities and external realities. In response to the well-being and pedagogical challenges arising from identity crises, teachers do not passively adapt; rather, they actively construct their ideal teacher identity within their own professional practice. As Wei (2021) states, “The contingent of ordinary teachers in China imagines the bright future of their profession in a rigid educational reality and seeks balance between the self and society with the help of this endless inner imagination.” (p. 9)

In this paper, we explore how novice TCSOL teachers view themselves in Thailand in light of the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI). This study aims to provide valuable implications and insights to guide schools/CIs and policymakers/CLEC in enhancing their support for the identity construction of novice TCSOL teachers in the Thai context. It is also hoped that more attention will be drawn to the construction process of teacher identities within the Chinese academic community. The following research questions underpinned this study:

RQ1: How do the novice TCSOL teachers view/identify themselves in the Thai environment?

RQ2: How does the formation and construction process of novice TCSOL teacher identity correspond to factors identified in existing research?

RQ3: What are the distinctive characteristics of novice TCSOL teacher identity?

LITERATURE REVIEW

(Novice) Language Teacher Identity

Researchers (e.g., Beijaard et al., 2004; Rodgers & Scott, 2008) have suggested that language teacher identity (LTI) is a multidimensional and dynamic concept, involving a complex and continuous developmental process influenced by both personal and social factors. Initially focused on linguistic identity, research on LTI has been shaped over time by sociocultural theory, communities of practice theory, and post-structuralism (Kayi-Aydar, 2019). Recent research (e.g., Sang, 2022) indicates that the development of the LTI is increasingly seen as an encompassing socialization process within teacher learning. Furthermore, LTIs have been explored in connection with various issues, such as practicum programme (Wang et al., 2021), social structure (Gu & Benson, 2014), transnational context (Han & Ji, 2021; Liu & Li, 2023), or institutional construction (Tsui, 2007), all of which are related to specific contexts. Specifically, Richards (2023) identifies three primary sources of LTI: past experience, teacher education, and language proficiency. For example, past experience encompasses a teacher's history as a student, their experiences within formal education, and their observations of other teachers and participation in classroom activities (Richards, 2023).

Novice teachers are typically individuals who are either in the process of completing their training, have only recently finished it, or are at the beginning stages of their teaching careers with limited professional experience (e.g. less than two years) (Gatbonton, 2008). As Farrell (2016) notes, novice teachers may encounter a range of challenges and experience transition shock as they embark on their teaching careers. These challenges include effective classroom management, differentiating instruction to meet the needs of diverse students, parent communication, limited interaction with colleagues, and insufficient supportive leadership. Often, these issues are accompanied by negative emotions such as isolation, anxiety, stress, and frustration, which are strongly linked to teacher attrition (Fantilli & McDougall, 2009; Farrell, 2016).

Given these considerable challenges and emotional strains, developing a strong teacher identity becomes critical for novice teachers (Izadinia, 2013). Although teacher identity lacks a fixed definition (Beijaard et al., 2004), recent research provides a useful reference by defining it as:

"Teachers' understandings and beliefs about themselves as teachers in relation to other multiple intersecting identities, shaped through ongoing goal-focused, agentic regulating

processes that facilitate the interpretation and re-interpretation of personal and professional experiences which are situated within multilayered, social-cultural-historical contexts” (Hong et al., 2024, p. 4).

This definition suggests that research on novice language teacher identity should emphasize three essential aspects: (1) understanding teacher identity as part of an ongoing, goal-oriented, agentic process; (2) recognizing teacher identity as one of multiple, intersecting identities shaped by socio-cultural-historical contexts; and (3) examining how teacher identity is negotiated within the standards and expectations of professional communities (Hong et al., 2024).

In empirical research, attention has been given both to how novice teachers construct their sociocultural identities through the interplay of cultural, institutional, and environmental factors (e.g., Chen et al., 2023; Kanno & Stuart, 2011), as well as to the role of individual characteristics in shaping novice teacher identity (e.g., Rogers, 2011; Ruohotie-Lyhty & Moate, 2016). For instance, based on grounded theory, Flores and Day (2006) examined the relationship between contexts and the identity formation of novice teachers through a multi-perspective approach. They found that personal and professional histories, pre-service training, school culture, and school leadership significantly impact novice teacher identity. Furthermore, they highlighted the benefits of incorporating teacher identity into teacher education programs and fostering partnerships between schools and higher education. Pillen et al. (2013) and Hong et al. (2018) explored the influence of tensions on novice teacher identity development. Despite using different methodologies (Pillen et al. employed a mixed-methods approach, while Hong et al. used qualitative research), both studies confirmed the negative impact of tensions on novice teachers’ professional growth and identity formation, emphasizing the role of teacher educators and schools in addressing these tensions. In a recent study, Nazari et al. (2023) proposed similar recommendations, arguing that “identity-based novice teacher development will provide a more helpful conceptualization for understanding and helping novices’ development” (p. 24). They further highlighted both commonalities (such as emotional labour, agency conflicts, and identity standard tensions) and differences (such as sense of belonging, future selves, and resistance) in the identity formation of novice teachers across one, two, and three years of experience, underscoring the inherent complexity of teacher identity construction (Kayi-Aydar, 2019).

Similar to current study, Han and Ji (2021) focused on the identity construction of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) teachers in the Australian context, pointing out that the formation and transformation of CFL teacher identities are profoundly shaped by their self-identification and integration within the community. They highlighted how cultural connectedness plays a critical role in aligning organizational attitudes with teachers’ relationships between self and others. The research also revealed that many CFL teachers in Australia struggle to experience a cohesive sense of self, which can complicate their identity

construction. This lack of communication and integration between the self and community members has led to crises in their professional positioning.

In conclusion, research on (novice) language teacher identity can draw on diverse theories and methods. Factors such as personal and professional histories, social, cultural, and historical contexts, individual characteristics, transnational settings, and emotional dimensions may all influence the construction of (novice) language teacher identities. These findings not only inform this study but also highlight the complexity of (novice) language teacher identity formation. Finally, the relative scarcity of studies on identity construction among TCSOL teachers in Thailand points to a potential contribution of this paper.

Metaphors and Teacher Identities

According to Kövecses (2010), metaphor refers to understanding one conceptual domain in terms of another, involving a target domain and a source domain. For example, in the metaphor “ARGUMENT IS WAR” ARGUMENT is the target domain, and WAR is the source domain (Kövecses, 2010). As Lakoff and Johnson (1980) noted, metaphor is not just a matter of language, but human thought processes and actions are largely metaphorical.

In teacher education, interest in teachers’ self-understanding and professional development through metaphors has grown significantly since Lakoff and Johnson (1980) published *Metaphors We Live By* (Zhu & Zhu, 2018). Studies originated from different countries or regions such as Canada (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011), China (Gao & Cui, 2021), New Zealand (Cobb, 2022), and Saudi Arabia (Alfayez, 2021), as well as other places. They have focused on teachers at different career stages (e.g., Erickson & Pinnegar, 2016) and across subjects. For example, Ma and Li (2017) employed metaphors to inquire about the views and aspirations of 68 pre-service TCSOL teachers, revealing themes such as professional competencies, student development, knowledge and culture dissemination. Most studies demonstrate metaphor’s effectiveness in researching teacher identity, with implications for policymakers, school leaders, and teachers themselves. Additionally, some researchers have integrated verbal metaphors with visual modes to explore teacher identity formation (e.g., Brandão, 2021; Cobb, 2022), using various theories or perspectives to analyse metaphors, which informs this research.

Metaphors offer a powerful means to delve into facets of teacher identity that are difficult to articulate (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011; Zhu et al., 2022). However, it is important to treat participants’ metaphors as indicative of notions sanctioned by them for public verbalization (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002). As Buchanan (2015) suggests, participants may offer metaphors that are attention-grabbing or emotionally appealing rather than expressing themselves straightforwardly, yet the metaphor-elicitation process itself has educational significance. Furthermore, it is essential for metaphor researchers to recognize the inherent subjectivity in interpretation (Armstrong et al., 2011).

Teachers’ metaphors should be seen as socially constructed cognitive tools, representing cognitive phenomena and a socio-cultural process interacting with various

socio-cultural conditions (de Guerrero & Villamil, 2002; Zhu & Zhu, 2018). This opens possibilities for integrating metaphors with the following theoretical framework (DSMRI).

METHOD

Theoretical Framework

The Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI) is a comprehensive and integrated metatheoretical framework developed by Kaplan and Garner (2017). Its objective is to capture the intricate interplay of content, structure, and process in the formation of identity within diverse social-cultural contexts. Specifically, DSMRI draws upon the Complex Dynamic Systems approach, integrating psychology, social psychology, symbolic interactionism, and social-cultural theory (Kaplan & Garner, 2017 p.13). DSMRI emphasizes that teacher identity is rooted in an individual's interpretation of the teacher role within their lived context (Garner & Kaplan, 2018).

According to Kaplan and Garner (2017, 2018), there are four central components in DSMRI which are conceptually constructed, highly interdependent, and partially overlapping (see Figure 1): (a) ontological and epistemological beliefs, which refers to the individual's knowledge they hold to be true about the world related to their role, and their perception of certainty, complexity, and the credibility of the sources of their ontological knowledge, along with the emotions linked to these beliefs. (b) Purpose and goals encompass the individual's knowledge and support of an overarching purpose for their role, as well as the emotions associated with these purposes and goals. Goals can vary along multiple dimensions, such as intrinsic and extrinsic goals, self-oriented and other-oriented goals, and proximal and distal goals. (c) Self-perceptions and Self-definitions encompass the individual's understanding of their personal and social attributes and characteristics that they deem relevant when assuming the role, along with the emotions associated with them. (d) Perceived action possibilities refer to the strategies and behaviours that individuals perceive as available to them to pursue their goals (purpose and goals) within their role. These perceptions are influenced by their interpretation of the situation (ontological and epistemological beliefs) and their understanding of themselves within that situation (self-perceptions and self-definitions).

The DSMRI emphasizes three comprehensive aspects of the role identity system: content—the quantity, type, and complexity of the elements, like knowledge, beliefs, goals, self-perceptions; structure—the degree of harmony, alignments, integration, and tension within and between components; process—the dynamic nature of change in the content and structure of the role identity components (Kaplan & Garner, 2017).

We observe that, in addition to works published by Kaplan and Garner, DSMRI has been applied by empirical researchers in diverse fields, including mathematics education (Heffernan & Newton, 2019), translation studies (Chen & Huang, 2022), and science teaching (Hathcock et al., 2020). For instance, Yang et al. (2021) used DSMRI to explore identity

development among three experienced English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in China, identifying a progression of identities at different career stages: companion in the early stage, motivator in the middle stage, and life coach in later years. Unlike studies that focus on experienced teachers, Wang et al. (2021) applied the DSMRI framework to examine the evolving identity construction of a novice Chinese EFL teacher across three phases: pre-practicum, practicum, and the first year of teaching. Their findings highlight dynamic shifts in the teacher's beliefs, goals, self-perceptions, and action possibilities, supporting DSMRI's utility for tracking professional growth and identity development among language teachers. This evidence supports our choice of DSMRI as the theoretical framework for this study.

Moreover, Varghese et al. (2005) and Olsen et al. (2022) advocate for openness to multiple theoretical perspectives to deepen our understanding of the processes and contexts of teacher identity. Accordingly, this study employs the DSMRI framework as a primary guide and use metaphors in interviews as a supportive method to facilitate participant reflection.

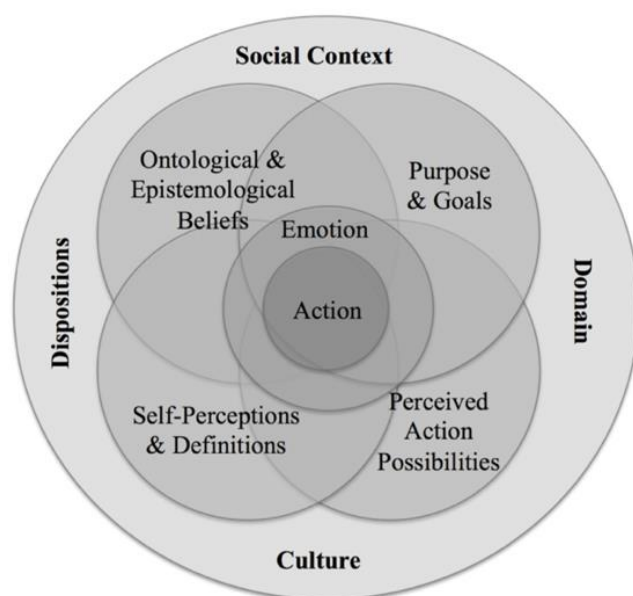


Figure 1. The Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI), Kaplan and Garner (2017)

Participants and Sampling

This one-year-long qualitative study employed the DSMRI framework to explore the identity construction of novice TCSOL teachers in Thailand. The study adopted a purposive sampling approach, as participants were selected based on predefined criteria: they had to be novice Chinese language teachers currently working in Thailand, with no restrictions on age, gender or school type. To facilitate recruitment, a call for participation was distributed via a WeChat group dedicated to Chinese teachers in Thailand. This method also exhibits characteristics of convenience sampling, as it relied on an accessible online community. Interested teachers could contact the authors for further inquiries. One limitation of this approach is self-selection bias, as participation was voluntary. Teachers who responded to

the recruitment message may have had a stronger interest in professional identity issues or been more willing to share their experiences. As a result, the sample may not fully represent all novice TCSOL teachers in Thailand.

Initially, five teachers expressed interest in participating. However, by the time consent forms were to be signed, two withdrew due to personal reasons. The final sample consisted of three participants: two female teachers (pseudonyms Lucy and Lily), and one male teacher (pseudonym James). They work in different cities in Thailand: Lucy at a Chinese school in the eastern province, Lily at a Confucius Institute in a prominent city, and James at a college in another large city. Therefore, their work environments, teaching materials, and students vary somewhat. Unlike TCSOL teachers working in Western countries, such as New Zealand (Sun et al., 2022), the three participants in this study do not have local full-time teachers supervising their classes. Table 1 presents the basic background information of the participants.

Table 1

Participants' Profiles

Name	Gender	Highest educational qualification	Teacher certificate	Working experience
Lucy	Female	B.A. TCSOL	No Certificates	She had contact with Russian exchange students during school practicum, with no other work experience
Lily	Female	B.A. TCSOL	TCSOL Certificate	She interned at a middle school in China, with no other work experience
James	Male	B.A. Logistics M.A. TCSOL	TCSOL Certificate & China's Teacher Qualification Certificate	He had interactions with international students from various countries during practicum at school, with no other work experience

Data Collection

This study conducted three interviews and one focus group discussion, with each interview lasting an average of 60 to 90 minutes. The first round comprised unstructured interviews, during which the first author introduced the participants to the purpose of the study and their rights. These interviews covered topics such as the participants' place of birth and upbringing, hobbies, family members, educational backgrounds, and learning experiences. The primary aim was to establish rapport, create a comfortable atmosphere, and gain preliminary insights into the participants' personal and professional backgrounds. This informal conversation helped foster a sincere, open, and friendly relationship between

the participants and the researchers, laying the foundation for the subsequent interviews. The second round of semi-structured interviews focused on the participants' educational experiences, their experiences working as TCSOL teachers in Thailand, and their future career plans. To encourage participants to think deeply about the interview topics, the researchers requested that participants use metaphors to respond to certain questions. For example, 'What metaphor would you use to describe yourself as a TCSOL teacher?' (Thomas & Beauchamp, 2011).

The focus group discussion was conducted by the former two authors and three participants. It mainly addressed the key points mentioned in the first two interviews, such as 'What makes you mention teaching Chinese and promoting Chinese culture first when talking about your responsibilities?' and 'Why do you all say that you represent the image of China?'. The final round of interviews took the form of a reporting-interview hybrid, where the first author presented the findings of the data analysis to each participant and solicited their opinions on the accuracy of these analyses. Concurrently, interviews were conducted with each participant to inquire about their recent work situations, aiming to uncover any new phenomena relevant to the research topic.

The first round of interviews took place in March 2023, shortly after the participants' first term had ended. At that time, they had been living and working in Thailand for approximately seven months. The second round of interviews occurred in September and October 2023, during the mid-term of their second contract. The focus group discussion took place in November 2023. The initial draft of this paper was completed in early 2024, and the third round of interviews commenced in mid-March 2024. At that time, the participants were approaching the end of their second term, marking another significant milestone in their professional development. All interviews and discussions were recorded. Due to geographical constraints, all data collection was conducted online. Participants voluntarily chose to use their native language (Chinese) for interviews, and transcription and translation were carried out collaboratively by the authors.

Ethical Considerations

This design and method were approved by the Ethics Committee of the Institute of Education at the University of Strathclyde (Approval Number: 290823). All participants signed consent forms before their participation, they voluntarily took part in the study, fully understanding their rights and responsibilities. For example, participants were informed that they had the right to refuse to answer or skip any interview questions, and they could withdraw from the study at any time without facing any consequences. Additionally, to protect participants' privacy, the researchers anonymized the participants (e.g., Lucy, Lily, James) and blurred any potentially identifying information, such as providing only general descriptions of their work locations (e.g., eastern provinces, large cities, well-known cities).

Data Analysis

This study employs DSMRI as the theoretical framework aiming to capture the intricate interactions among content, structure, and processes in the formation of identity for novice TCSOL teachers within the context of Thai sociocultural backgrounds (Kaplan & Garner, 2017). In practice, a deductive- inductive qualitative content analysis was conducted following the guidelines of Garner and Kaplan (2018) and the DSMRI Codebook (Kaplan & Garner, 2022). The key steps involve becoming familiar with the materials, annotating keywords and sentences, categorizing them into DSMRI content dimensions, discussing and confirming the categorizations, and repeating these steps until all materials are coded. Table 2 shows the examples of how these statements were coded.

We adhered to the advice of Miles et al. (2020) by conducting data analysis concurrently with data collection. Specifically, the first author transcribed participants' audio recordings into text, which was then cross-checked by the second author. After both authors agreed on the accuracy of the transcriptions, they individually conducted a meticulous reading of the transcription materials, highlighting words and sentences related to DSMRI content dimensions. Once the transcription materials for the first participant were fully coded, the two authors held meetings to cross-verify and discuss any discrepancies, continuing the discussion until a consensus was reached. This process was repeated for the materials of the second and third participants. The third author supervised the process, reviewed the English translation of the manuscripts, and provided feedback on revisions. The first round of interviews with the three participants yielded over 73,000 words of transcription material, resulting in a total of 288 text reference points based on the DSMRI content dimensions. The second round of interviews with the three participants yielded over 50,000 words of transcription material, resulting in a total of 160 text reference points. We initially conducted a comparative analysis of the content from the participant's first and second interviews, aiming to identify individual changes. Subsequently, we engaged in cross-case comparisons to identify commonalities and differences. We found that areas with greater discrepancies often involved sentences with multiple codes. These sentences may contain more nuanced information and thus require closer attention.

The work of Armstrong et al. (2011) and Gao and Cui (2021) provide valuable guidance for the metaphor analysis in this study. Armstrong et al. (2011) suggest that to enhance the credibility of metaphor analysis, researchers should intentionally incorporate triangulation into the research design and emphasize the importance of understanding social and cultural contexts when interpreting metaphors. Gao and Cui (2021) propose a four-step approach: identification, naming, grouping, and abstraction. Unlike studies such as Ma and Li (2017), which classify collected metaphors to extract themes, this paper views metaphors as an auxiliary tool that facilitates participants' reflective thinking during interviews. In our analysis, we consider potential comprehension challenges arising from

language, social, or cultural differences. Our process includes three main steps: identifying the metaphor, translating directly from Chinese to English, and providing contextual interpretation (see Table 3 for an example). As Yuan et al. (2022) noted, “our categorization of metaphors primarily reflects the identity orientations held by participants during the study” (p. 827).

In terms of establishing trustworthiness, in addition to conducting member checks for interview analysis and using a coding process to cross-check and discuss themes, we also paid close attention to translation issues in the excerpts presented in the findings section. To preserve the authenticity of the data and avoid any omissions of meaning or undue additions, we consistently reflected on our roles as researchers and conducted repeated checks of both the excerpts and their English translations. Additionally, we ensured content validity by aligning the interview questions with the study’s research objectives, ensuring that the data collected directly addressed the core research questions. Furthermore, the third author, who has extensive academic and research expertise, supervised all stages of the study to ensure adherence to academic standards and best practices.

Table 2

DSMRI Codebook Excerpts (More Examples See Garner & Kaplan, 2018).

DSMRI Dimensions	Operational Definition within Case	Teacher Role Examples
Self-definitions & self-perceptions	Statements about self, including personal characteristics, attributes, preferences, attitudes, emotions related to self, and how these relate to role	‘Working at the Confucius Institute perfectly fulfils my desire to be involved in foreign affairs’
Ontological & epistemological beliefs	Statements about the nature of the world and the knowledge that the teacher holds to be true, including the nature of the domain in which the teacher practices, and beliefs about the certainty, complexity, and source of knowledge and learning	‘I want to treat every student equally and do my best to have a good relationship with every student.’
Purpose and goals	Statements about the individual’s purpose and goals for teaching	‘But I would also say let them develop an interest and let them learn a little more.’
Perceived action possibilities	Statements about possibilities for activities related to the role, such as classroom practice, and the likelihood of, and contextual facilitators and inhibitors of, such actions	‘Last year it felt like I was just doing a monologue in class, while this year I’m trying to find ways to motivate the students and encourage everyone to stay engaged.’

RESULTS

The results of this study indicate that although the participants' 'role identity as learners' is consistently present, it shifts from 'learners as students' before entering practical teaching to 'learners as teachers' afterward, demonstrating a dynamic and dialogical relationship. Following the guidance of the DSMRI Codebook (Kaplan & Garner, 2022), the following section will begin with the participants' previous role identities, proceed to their current role identities, and end with future imagined role identities. This section will be structured around the content, structure, and processes of each role identity to illustrate the diversity, complexity, and dynamism of TCSOL teacher identity construction.

Participants' Previous Role Identities—Secondary School and University Students

All three participants mentioned their experiences with 'Zhong Kao' (the high school entrance examination), 'Gao Kao' (the college entrance examination), and university education as students. These experiences, along with their existing role identities, have shaped their self-perceptions, ontological and epistemological beliefs, purpose and goals, and action possibilities to some extent.

The Socio-cultural Context Is An Indispensable Control Parameter

In the cultural context of the Chinese education system, gaining admission to a reputable middle school and high school significantly increases the chances of entering a prestigious university. Consequently, Chinese society places great emphasis on the Zhong Kao and Gao Kao. The shared belief among schools, teachers, parents, and students is that 'hard work and diligent study lead to good results.' This phenomenon has historical roots. Chinese cultural traditions, such as Confucianism, value education highly, emphasizing that students should be diligent and respect their teachers. Teachers, in turn, are expected to be knowledgeable, morally upright, and dedicated to imparting knowledge to their students. This creates a teacher-centred tradition within the Chinese education system and consciously or unconsciously fosters an exam-oriented student role identity. This is evidenced in Lily's interview and Lucy's metaphor:

Lily: My impression of middle school teachers is that they were all particularly strict with me, both in terms of my grades and my behaviour.

Lucy: Students are blank paper. They will take on the shape of what and how we teach them. (When reflecting on her work in Thailand, Lucy used this phrase to emphasize the significant impact that teachers have on students in terms of knowledge, skills, and personal development.)

Alignment among Goals, Beliefs, and Action Possibilities

Due to their exam-oriented student role identity, the primary goal for the participants during this period was to achieve high scores, reflecting the alignment of goals, beliefs, and action possibilities in the DSMRI framework. However, participants had different self-

definitions, which reminds the authors to consider the potential impact of differences in gender, personality, and upbringing environments.

Lily: My grandmother was a high school teacher, and I have always enjoyed interacting with others. From primary school to high school, I attended a foreign language school where the teachers were excellent. I was eager to learn from them, especially because of the strong foreign language environment. This influenced my choice of major in college, making me more inclined towards international content.

Lucy: My grades from elementary to high school were not very good, and I barely got into college. However, at every stage, I encountered great teachers who helped me a lot.

The excerpts above reveal that teachers are significant others for the participants, their actions and ideologies have a profound impact on participants' possible future selves. Notably, positive role models inspire participants to emulate their teachers, while negative role models lead participants to avoid similar behaviours in their practice. This stems from the participants' reflections on their experiences in the role of students, bringing about a new understanding of the need to treat every student equally.

Lucy: My high school teacher paid special attention to students who performed well academically or had influential backgrounds while ignoring those who didn't.....From my high school teacher, I see the need to treat every student equally, not to see if his family is good or bad or what, or who has special care..... I want to treat every student equally and do my best to have a good relationship with every student.

Lily: From primary school to high school, I attended a foreign language school where the teachers were excellent. I was eager to learn from them, especially because of the strong foreign language environment. This influenced my choice of major in college, making me more inclined towards international content.

James: She (the teacher) has rich teaching experience, and her lectures are very clear. She has introduced many practical principles and ideas which are very easy to use, we just follow her methods, that's almost become a fixed pattern.

The Shifts in Goals, Action Possibilities, and Beliefs

Upon entering university, the participants still identified themselves as students, but their goals shifted from achieving high scores to becoming competent TCSOL teachers. Their actions evolved from merely absorbing knowledge to learning methods of imparting knowledge and skills. As their knowledge accumulated, they developed new perceptions of their future roles. Particularly, James, whose undergraduate major was in management and who pursued a master's degree in TCSOL, said:

I have a strong voice in this topic because I come from a cross-disciplinary background, and the education I received in TCSOL has been tremendously beneficial to my job. While I had some prior experience working with international students in China, it was more of an

after-school tutoring and didn't involve standing in front of a classroom, delivering lectures to a group of a dozen or more students. Especially, micro-teaching has been incredibly helpful.

In James's excerpt, he mentioned a potential factor that hinders the identity construction of novice TCSOL teachers: the form of the practicum. Both Lucy and James had practicums teaching Chinese to foreign students in China, whereas Lily's practicum involved teaching first-year students at a local school. These two forms of practicums differ significantly in terms of teaching targets, content, and social environment compared to the participants' actual work contexts. This disparity may require the participants to readjust their acquired experiences to adapt to their real jobs, likely diminishing their self-efficacy.

Lucy: During my practicum, I taught Russian exchange students, but it felt more like being a teaching assistant because a professional teacher was instructing them. My main responsibilities were individual tutoring, grading assignments, and helping them with their daily problems.

Lily: My university classified TCSOL as a teacher training program, which focused more on developing teaching skills. This made it easier for me to transition into a professional role..... The school where I interned placed a strong emphasis on grades, both parents and subject teachers were very concerned about rankings.

Despite some shortcomings, the TCSOL teacher education programme and practicums play an important role in the construction of teacher identities, especially in establishing goals and beliefs. The data show that 'teaching Chinese and spreading Chinese culture' is both the participants' goal and their belief. They believe that learners from different countries want to learn Chinese, and their role is to meet this demand, giving meaning to their role. These beliefs and goals are set by official documents and are continuously reinforced in the TCSOL teacher education system and training programs.

Lucy: (become a TCSOL teacher) I feel very honoured, and my responsibility is significant; we are not just teaching Chinese and culture but also representing the image of teachers and the Chinese people. In the place where I am, there are very few Chinese, the locals do not see me as an individual but as a representative of China.....This is related to our training, as each session emphasizes the importance of being mindful of our behaviour and actions.

From this perspective, the participants' self-perception is shaped by the sociopolitical context, imbuing their roles with significant and positive meanings that the participants are willing to embrace. This further underscores that, although the current practicum format provides valuable teaching experience, it does not perfectly align with TCSOL's goals.

Participants' Current Role Identities—Learners as Teachers

When the three participants conducted practical teaching in Thai classrooms, they were institutionally recognized as teachers. However, as they crossed boundaries, their professional development and identity construction experienced fluctuations. As novice TCSOL teachers, they had much to learn, such as the skills needed to impart knowledge to Thai students and how to interact with students and colleagues.

Supportive Social Context in Thailand

Although it was the first time for all three participants to teach outside of China, factors such as the respectful social atmosphere towards teachers in Thailand and the support from their colleagues helped them adapt to the new environment. The locals were friendly and the opportunities for tourism and cultural experiences made their lives vibrant, further deepening their affection for Thailand.

Lucy: Everyone (colleagues) took good care of me, especially when I got COVID, the school arranged for someone to deliver meals to me. The local shop owners often remind me to return home early, which makes me feel warm in my heart; The students here are very honest, even though some are not good at studying sometimes, even if they find one Thai Baht, they will hand it over to teachers.

Peripheral Domain and Conflicts between Beliefs and Actions

The schools where Lucy and James work do not place much emphasis on Chinese teaching, which prevents them from realizing their imagined roles as teachers and diminishes their motivation for self-learning. In contrast, Lily works at a Confucius Institute, leading to a different self-perception compared to the other two.

Lucy: My school told me not to assign Chinese homework to students because parents can't help with it, and there might be complaints if we do. Initially, I was very passionate about dedicating myself to Chinese education. Yes, I'm very enthusiastic about teaching Chinese. But after a while, I might start to slack off a bit and wonder how different this is from what I studied in university.

James: Later on, the school gave me a lot of translation work, and I ended up teaching very few Chinese classes. It feels like I'm not a Chinese teacher anymore but rather a translator.

Lily: We (at the Confucius Institute) have been very busy recently, besides teaching, we have two major events to organize..... During this process, I have met many experts and scholars, learned a lot from them, which has been very helpful for my personal growth.

Lucy and James' extracts show that strong negative emotions arise when beliefs, actions, and goals are not aligned, causing them to readjust their perceptions of themselves as TCSOL teachers; Lily's extract highlights another important finding, namely that by organising cultural activities, not only are they aligned with the goals of teacher education

programme and training, but that the experience and sense of achievement gained from holding the activities has increased her confidence in pursuing this profession.

Changes Reflect the Development of Identity

The sense of achievement Lily gained from organizing cultural activities strengthened her work behaviours. For Lucy and James, changes in their teaching behaviours were reflected in how they adapted the curriculum. Interestingly, Lucy insisted on following the textbook during the first semester, despite noticing that students were not performing well. In the second semester, she adapted the curriculum to address students' weaknesses. Conversely, James trimmed the teaching content in the first semester but reverted to following the textbook in the second semester. These changes in teaching behaviours are the result of participants' proactive reflection. Through practice, they learn how to improve teaching effectiveness to achieve their goals.

Lucy: The reason I didn't use the previous textbook from last semester is twofold. Firstly, that textbook wasn't suitable for the students. Secondly, when I taught them last semester, I noticed that they had weak foundations in areas like Pinyin and stroke order. So, this semester, my primary focus is to help them build a solid foundation.

James: this term I didn't make as many alterations to the course materials as I did last semester. Instead, I tried to stick with the original content..... In the past, I simply taught based on what I learned from textbooks, but now I make more adjustments based on experience. For instance, last year it felt like I was just doing a monologue in class, while this year I'm trying to find ways to motivate the students and encourage everyone to stay engaged.

James uses the Chinese proverbs 'crossing the river by feeling the stones' and 'a newborn calf is not afraid of a tiger' to describe his process of exploration and learning when he started practical work.

Critical incidents have altered the participants' beliefs and behaviours, leading to a redefinition of their self-perception. Lucy vividly recalls an incident related to classroom discipline. During one class, a student was talking, Lucy reminded him three times, using Chinese, English, and Thai languages. However, the student did not stop and instead imitated Lucy's way of speaking Thai. This made Lucy very angry, and she sought help from her Thai colleague in the neighbouring class. The Thai colleague then escorted the student out of the classroom, resulting in good discipline in that class afterward. Later on, that same student started to study, which deeply moved Lucy, and she actively helped him. This also corroborates Lucy's metaphor that 'Thai students are angels when they're out of class and devils when they're in class.'

For Lily and James, the policy documents from CLEC had a significant impact. According to CLEC's guidelines, Lily must be at least 26 to advance to a higher teaching level, but she has not yet met the age requirement. This forced her to reconsider her career

plans. James exhibited noticeable changes between the former two interviews. In the first interview, he expressed a strong determination to continue his career in TCSOL. However, during the second interview, he displayed obvious uncertainty, accompanied by intense negative emotions. This transformation was primarily triggered by the recruitment regulations for dispatched teachers had been changed. This change led to a sense of ‘crisis’ for James:

(When I saw the notice) it was a very anxious time, I told my mum (jokingly) that I didn't want to live, hahahahahahaha (laughter), I was really about to get depressed during that time. I need to consider finding a job in the future, I think the earlier you prepare for anything the better, it's not like if I ignore it, it will just disappear.

James's metaphors also provide evidence of this shift (see Table 3). The transition from ‘rice bowl’ to ‘brick mover’ shows that James's perception of the TCSOL profession has moved from idealistic to realistic. Lucy and Lily exemplified this change as well. The inconsistency between their beliefs, goals and their actions in practice prompted a change in their perceptions: Lucy initially believed in ‘treating every student equally and getting along with every student,’ but she later found that ‘this is very difficult to achieve.’ Similarly, Lily moved from wanting to continue her TCSOL career to reconsidering her career plans. This shift from idealism to realism also led to changes in participants' beliefs, goals, action possibilities, and self-perceptions, influencing their professionalism as teachers.

The excerpts above demonstrate that as novice teachers, the participants are learning in practice how to teach Chinese effectively (such as modifying teaching materials) and how to communicate with students (such as handling disciplinary issues). This process is accompanied by emotional fluctuations: when beliefs, goals, and self-perception align, participants experience positive emotions (like Lucy feeling moved when a previously disruptive student began studying seriously). Conversely, when there is a mismatch between beliefs, self-perception, and action possibilities, negative emotions arise (such as Lily and James feeling uncertain about their future career development).

Table 3

James's Metaphors

Metaphors	Literal Translation	Paraphrasing
教(jiāo) 中(Zhōng) 文(wén) 是(shì) 我(wǒ) 的(de) 饭(fàn) 碗(wǎn) , 我(wǒ) 要(yào) 把(bǎ) 饭(fàn) 碗(wǎn) 端(duān) 稳(wěn) 点(diǎn)	Teaching Chinese is my rice bowl, I should keep it steady.	The statement conveys that teaching Chinese is his livelihood, and it reflects his determination and effort to ensure the stability and success of his work.
年(nián) 轻(qīng) 的(de) 热(rè) 血(xuè) 铸(zhù) 就(jiù) 了(le) 国(guó) 际(jì) 中(zhōng) 文(wén) 教(jiào) 育(yù) 的(de) 长(Cháng) 城(chéng)	Young blood forges the Great Wall of international Chinese language education	In the interview, he used this statement not only to speak about the role of young people in the field of TCSOL but also with a tinge of pathos, pointing out its instability. This is an Internet buzzword, roughly similar in meaning to 'migrant worker.' James used it to describe his transition in feelings towards TCSOL from idealistic to realistic.
我(wǒ) 是(shì) 一(yí) 个(ge) 打(dǎ) 工(gōng) 人(rén) , 一(yí) 个(ge) 搬(bān) 砖(zhuān) 人(rén)	I am a labourer; I am a brick mover.	

Differences leading to changes in beliefs, goals, action possibilities and self-perceptions. These differences primarily arise from the contrast between the participants' personal experiences and the actual teaching context in Thailand. The differences are manifested in several ways: As students, the participants worked hard in school, focusing on academics and preparing for the Gaokao, whereas Thai students did not meet their expectations in terms of effort, and Thai schools prioritized activities over academics; The participants' classroom behaviour as students (e.g. following the teacher's instructions) contrasted with the classroom discipline issues they encountered with Thai students; The pressure observed in Chinese students (such as striving for high scores) differed from the lack of academic pressure among Thai students; There were differences between the skills participants learned in teacher education programs and the realities of teaching practice; The participants received information indicating a strong demand for Chinese language learning among foreign learners, which contrasted with the lack of emphasis placed on it by the institutions and students they were teaching.

These differences posed challenges for the participants, who used various strategies, such as colleague support and self-reflection, to address these issues. Through this process, their beliefs about teaching and the role of a teacher changed, as did their teaching goals, actions possibilities, and self-perceptions. One piece of evidence is the shift from idealism to realism in their perception of the TCSOL profession as mentioned above.

Lucy: In the beginning, I wholeheartedly dedicated myself to the cause of Chinese education. Yes, I was genuinely passionate about teaching Chinese. However, after some time, there might have been some lethargy. I realized that this wasn't exactly what I had studied in college... It's quite a bit different from what I first expected to become as a teacher, I never expected that I would become this type of figure.

Lily: Thai students are not in the habit of copying and memorising, you can't demand high grades from Thai students like you do with Chinese students, otherwise, it will only lead to the teacher becoming depressed.

James: Chinese class at this college is an elective. Sometimes when the school has activities or students have exams, the Chinese class gets cancelled.

Inadequate Thai Language Proficiency and Professional Competence Constrain Goals and Self-perceptions

Participants expressed that their inadequate Thai language skills caused inconveniences in their work, and combined with their limited professional capabilities, they felt their teaching performance did not align with the ideal image of a language teacher.

Lucy: I don't speak Thai well, so I don't have any contact with student's parents..... I have problems communicating with them (students) in Thai, so I type for them, use Google Translate, and tell them can't be late for my class.

Lily: I don't know how to speak Thai and can only use English as the medium of instruction. I worry that students might not understand, and the teaching outcomes might not meet my expectations. I also feel that my professional knowledge is not solid enough. For instance, if I am suddenly asked to explain a grammar clearly, I would be very hesitant.

Beliefs, Goals, Action Possibilities, and Self-perceptions which Beyond Teaching

Participants generally expressed that their words and actions represent not only themselves but also the image of Chinese teachers, Chinese people, and China as a whole. One of their goals is to dispel stereotypes about Chinese people and establish a new image of China. This is evidenced by their metaphors such as 'cultural ambassador,' 'bridge,' and 'change agent.' This aligns with the goals set by the Chinese educational authorities, instilling a sense of mission and honour in the participants, which empowers their professional development and identity construction. In the future, attention should be paid to the potential impact of negative reports about Confucius Institutes mentioned in the literature review on the participants.

Lucy: I think it is because our school is a Chinese school, that will be affected by the relationship between the two countries There are fewer Chinese on my side, when I walk down the street and people see me, they don't see me as an individual, they see Chinese teachers and China in me.

Lily: The work at the Confucius Institute is very diverse. It's not just about teaching Chinese; we also organize many large-scale cultural events. The Confucius Institute serves as a bridge for cultural exchange, and I am now in the role of an exporter.

James: Everyone around me is Thai, and they interpret my every word and action as representative of Chinese behaviour, so I'm extra cautious. I find this job to be incredibly meaningful. We not only enhance our professionalism in teaching, but at a deeper level, we're striving to reshape an image, showing them what contemporary Chinese people are like.

It can be seen that the relationships between the two countries might have emerged as influential factors in the formation of novice TCSOL teacher identity. When researchers inquired about the reasons behind this assertion during interviews, participants pointed out that although the relationships between the two countries may seem distant from their personal lives, they do impact their psychological states and behaviours. As James put it, good relations between the two nations would require more TCSOL teachers, which encourages him to excel and set a positive example for future teachers. Furthermore, James also mentioned that due to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, many TCSOL teachers were unable to continue working in their respective countries and had returned to China.

Consistent Belief and Goal—Students' Interest in Learning Chinese

All three participants consistently emphasized the importance of Thai students' interest in learning Chinese throughout the interviews. This emphasis may stem from the participants' reflections on their own experiences as students and the status of Chinese language in the local context. The institutions they work for do not necessarily expect or enforce a relatively formal and impersonal role for teachers in front of students.

Lucy: I want to treat every student equally and do my best to have a good relationship with every student, but that's not really how it works in teaching. But I would also say let them develop an interest and let them learn a little more.

Lily: I think that having an interest in learning a language is really important. First, you need to attract their interest, and then they can better accept the language. When they encounter difficulties in learning, they won't feel discouraged.

James: Ideally, regardless of the nationality or proficiency level of my students, I want to spark their interest in Chinese. What's important is cultivating their interest so that they all want to learn Chinese. I think if I can achieve that, then I've achieved my goal.

Participants' Future Imagined Role Identities

The three participants have different responses regarding whether they will continue working as a TCSOL teacher. Lucy has clearly stated that she will not work in Thailand for a third year, she hopes to return to China and find a job as a teacher or a civil servant. Lily, due to not meeting CLEC's age requirement, might first apply for a master's program in

Thailand, but she is unsure if she will continue in TCSOL after graduation. James expressed that he would like to continue working in TCSOL if possible. As of the time of submission, Lucy has returned to China, Lily is still working at the Confucius Institute, and James has applied to teach Chinese in South America.

This reflects the uncertainty novice TCSOL teachers face regarding their future career development, which may hinder identity construction and professional growth. A potential reason for this uncertainty, or even the decision to leave the profession, is the instability of TCSOL work due to the need to work in different countries. This instability is 'not aligned with the basic expectations of many Chinese people and is also subject to the influence of international relations (from James)'.

DISCUSSION

How do novice TCSOL teachers perceive or identify themselves within the Thai environment? How does the formation and construction process of novice TCSOL teacher identity correspond to factors identified in existing research?

The three participants believe their primary task is to teach Chinese language and culture to Thai students, emphasizing the importance of Thai students' interest in learning Chinese. They recognize themselves as novice TCSOL teachers, especially when encountering difficulties and feeling inadequate. Through continuous reflection on their prior experiences and current teaching practices, they learn and adjust their behaviours to achieve their goals. Notably, they perceive their actions as representing not only themselves but also the image of China and Chinese people. This sense of mission and responsibility motivates them to present their best selves to students and those around them, aiding their professional growth and identity formation.

According to DSMRI, participants' current role identities (e.g. novice TCSOL teachers) are inseparable from their past role identities (e.g. students) and future imagined role identities (e.g. master students or TCSOL teachers) (Kaplan & Garner, 2017). They reflect on and derive meaning from their previous role identity experiences, negotiating and reinterpreting them in interactions with others and the wider field (Pennington & Richards, 2016; Sachs, 2005). This demonstrates the interplay of identities-in-practice (Varghese et al., 2005; Wenger, 1998), identities-in-discourse (Fairclough, 2003; Trent, 2012), and identities-in-activities (Dang, 2013), proving the complexity of identity formation.

In this study, participants exhibit primary role identities such as TCSOL student role identity, Chinese teacher role identity, teacher-learner role identity, cultural disseminator role identity, and the identity of representing China and Chinese people, reflecting that identity development is emergent, continuous, non-linear, and contextualised. This indicates that the TCSOL teacher role identity itself constitutes an element within a multi-level hierarchical structure, which at the individual unit-of-analysis reflects a complex dynamic system comprising multiple role identities (Kaplan & Garner, 2017).

The beliefs, goals, action possibilities, and self-perceptions of novice TCSOL teachers are significantly influenced by social and political contexts (Lasky, 2005). This reflects the Chinese government's strong desire to promote contemporary China globally through Confucius Institutes and Chinese teachers. The study found that the lack of emphasis on Chinese language by overseas educational institutions or students can lead to negative emotions among novice TCSOL teachers (e.g., James). Considering that novice teachers might be shocked by the disparity between idealized teaching styles and real classroom situations, it suggests that teacher identity should be better integrated with existing TCSOL teacher education programs (e.g., Flum & Kaplan, 2012; Kanno & Stuart, 2011) to help novice teachers better cope with potential challenges.

Participants' perceptions of themselves are influenced not only by their past experiences, teacher education, and language proficiency (Richards, 2023) but also by their interactions and relationships with students, teaching institutions, and communities, as well as social, cultural, political, and historical forces (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). Teachers are not empty vessels (Kanno & Stuart, 2011) their understanding of relationships with others and their comprehension of social, cultural, political, and historical forces are crucial. In this process, teachers identify different ways to understand their experiences, reflecting the diverse developmental capacities of their self-concept, thereby influencing their understanding of their identities (Rodgers & Scott, 2008). From this point we see the possibility and necessity for individual teachers to participate as researchers in studies on teacher identity.

Izadinia (2013) and Olsen et al. (2022) call for enhanced research on teacher identity in developing regions such as Asia. They advocate for 'applying teacher identity in new locations, also using the new contexts to grow teacher identity as a concept, will deepen and strengthen the field.' This article emphasizes that when studying teacher identity in Asian regions (such as China and Thailand), cultural influences must not be overlooked (as highlighted in DSMRI). For instance, traditional Chinese culture emphasizes that students should be diligent and respectful towards teachers, while teachers should have authority and be held to high expectations (Ma & Gao, 2017). This cultural expectation contrasts with the experiences of novice TCSOL teachers in cross-cultural classroom settings, leading to a sense of uncertainty, ambiguity, and tension among the participants. Such uncertainty, ambiguity, or tension reflects instability factors that can act as system triggers in the process of role identity formation (Kaplan & Garner, 2017). Finally, the findings align with the transition cycle outlined by Adams et al. (1976), as cited by Meijer (2017).

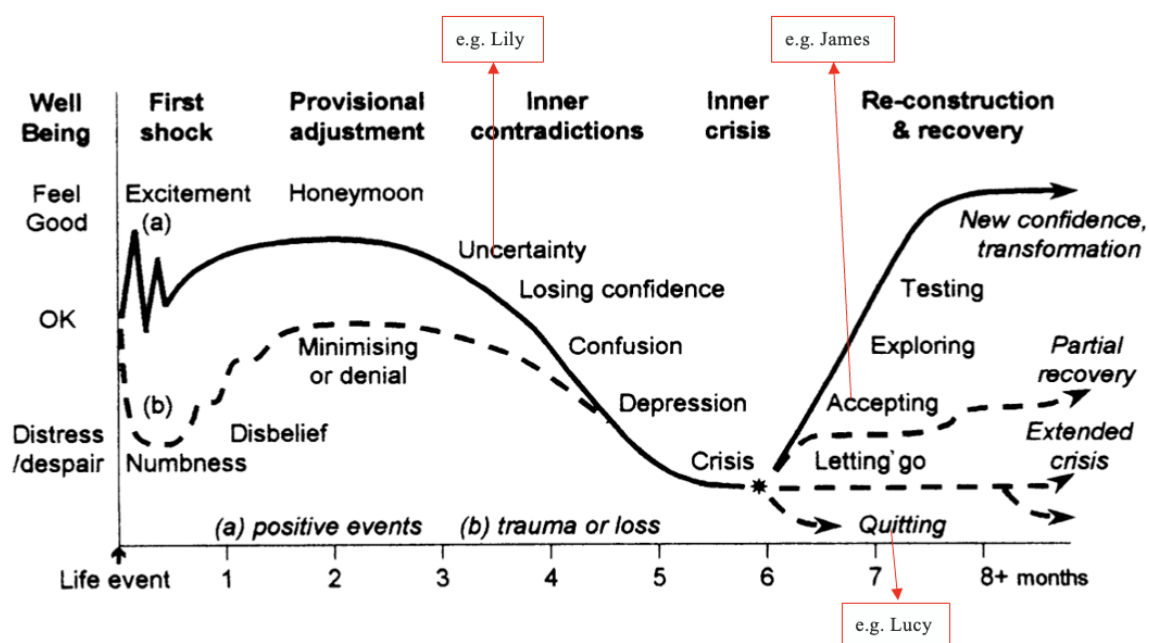


Figure 2. Phases and features of the transition cycle, Adams et al. (1976), cited by Meijer, 2017

What distinctive characteristics define novice TCSOL teacher identity at this stage?

Beyond merely focusing on the characteristics of novice TCSOL teacher identity construction, this research likes to emphasize the following points.

First, novice TCSOL teachers possess a strong sense of mission and responsibility, which is primarily cultivated through TCSOL teacher education programs. Many of their beliefs and goals extend beyond language teaching, highlighting the potential connections between international relations and individual psychology and behaviour. This demonstrates that teacher identity is influenced by social and political contexts (Lasky, 2005; Zhu & Zhu, 2018). Moreover, there is a significant discrepancy between the idealized scenarios described in TCSOL teacher education programs (e.g., strong demand for learning Chinese among foreign learners) and the teaching realities encountered by novice teachers (e.g., the marginalization of Chinese language instruction in local schools). This misalignment leads to transfer shock (Caspersen & Raaen, 2014), and the impact of cross-boundary experiences on new teachers' identity development has been increasingly recognized (e.g., Beauchamp & Thomas, 2011). To mitigate the negative effects of such shocks on novice TCSOL teachers' identity formation and professional development, our recommendations align with those of Kanno and Stuart (2011) and Richards (2023), advocating for the inclusion of identity-related content in existing TCSOL teacher education programs. This could help teachers develop an awareness of identity formation and strengthen their understanding of its ongoing evolution (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009).

Second, organizing cultural activities aligns with the objectives of TCSOL teacher education by reinforcing the consistency between individual and group behaviours within the TCSOL community, strengthening novice teachers' identification with the professional group. Additionally, positive emotions, such as the experiences and sense of achievement gained from these activities, contribute to the construction of novice TCSOL teachers' professional identity, demonstrating identity-in-activity (Dang, 2013; Karimi & Mofidi, 2019), an aspect that has been relatively underexplored in TCSOL teacher identity research. Therefore, in practice, TCSOL teacher education programs should emphasise the psychological and behavioural developments of novice teachers during cultural activities. Furthermore, integrating existing cultural activity cases into training can help cultivate and enhance the organizational and innovative abilities of novice TCSOL teachers in planning and implementing such activities.

Third, the significant role of practicum in the identity formation of pre-service and novice teachers has been widely acknowledged (e.g., Wang et al., 2021; Zhu et al., 2022). This study finds that the current practicum format for TCSOL teachers differs from their actual teaching practice, hindering professional development and identity construction. Improvements to the current internship format are needed, such as establishing reciprocal teacher education programs between countries (Xu & Connelly, 2022) to help more students experience overseas classrooms. These practices can enhance the 'language socialization' process of teachers (Sang, 2023), aiding in their identity formation.

Fourth, the three novice TCSOL teachers experienced a shift in their perception of teaching activities from naive and idealistic views to more realistic ones (Lindqvist et al., 2017), particularly after encountering critical incidents (Nazari & De Costa, 2022). Reflection on these experiences promotes personal and professional growth (Walkington, 2005). We advocate for novice TCSOL teachers to develop a habit of self-reflection, such as keeping a teaching reflection journal or recording reflective teaching videos. Furthermore, we suggest that CLEC establish a database to collect these reflective materials and encourage interested researchers to conduct studies based on this data. This would facilitate the identification of emerging challenges and the development of more effective recommendations for TCSOL teacher education and professional development.

Fifth, given challenges like limited Thai language proficiency, inadequate professional skills, and inappropriate teaching materials, it is essential to emphasize the importance of professional learning skills (e.g., Beijaard et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2022) for novice TCSOL teachers. Specifically, in addition to the aforementioned reflections, another essential professional learning skill is teacher agency. Becoming the agent of one's own development requires teachers to indicate how they see themselves as teachers (possessing a professional self-image) and to identify the key areas they need to learn in order to become competent teachers (Beijaard et al., 2022). Novice TCSOL teachers must learn to regulate and take responsibility for their own learning. In other words, when facing challenges such as Thai language proficiency or the applicability of teaching materials, TCSOL teachers can exercise

their agency to find appropriate solutions. The role of TCSOL teacher education programs and teacher identity development, therefore, is to cultivate teachers' awareness of their own agency, encourage them to take initiative, and provide necessary support measures to facilitate the implementation of their efforts.

Lastly, despite researchers (e.g., Yang et al., 2021) have called for long-term, large-scale studies on teacher identity, we recognise the importance of the diversity and individual agency within the teacher community, we advocate for more teachers to participate as researchers in studies on language teacher identity. This can be facilitated by creating open-source databases to collect real-life cases from teachers or by establishing online/offline teacher identity workshops (Beijaard et al., 2022).

We hope more attention will be drawn to the construction process of TCSOL teacher identities within the Chinese academic community, such as by launching journals focused on identity themes to promote empirical research on teacher identity in China (Asia). We also hope that educational institutions in Thailand will pay more attention to Chinese language teaching.

CONCLUSION

Framed within the Dynamic Systems Model of Role Identity (DSMRI), this paper investigates the experiences of three novice TCSOL teachers in Thailand, revealing that the 'role identity as learners' is consistently present. Chronologically, distinguishing between 'learner as a student' and 'learner as a teacher,' as well as the future imagined role identities, indicating identity development involves the formation and restructuring of relationships within and among role identities through intra- and interpersonal processes. These processes are mediated by socio-cognitive and cultural means and are shaped by the context as well as individual dispositions (Kaplan & Garner, 2017). The study uncovers that novice TCSOL teachers hold beliefs and goals beyond language teaching (e.g. representing an image of China), highlighting the influence of social and political contexts on teacher identity construction. This identity construction is further reinforced through holding cultural activities, emphasizing the importance of international relations and host country culture in TCSOL teacher identity research. The study has certain limitations, particularly the small sample size, which may restrict the broader applicability of the findings. Furthermore, the reliance on interviews for data collection and the relatively short timeframe might affect the robustness of the conclusions. Future research should address these limitations by conducting more extensive studies.

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Data Availability Declaration

Data Availability Upon Formal Request:

While the primary datasets utilized in this study are not publicly accessible due to certain constraints, they are available to researchers upon a formal request. The authors have emphasized maintaining the integrity of the data and its analytical rigor. To access the datasets or seek further clarifications, kindly reach out to the corresponding author. Our aim is to foster collaborative academic efforts while upholding the highest standards of research integrity.

Author Contributions

Multiple Authors with Distinct Roles:

Author Contributions:

Dr Ingeborg Birnie spearheaded the conceptualization, designed the research methodology, revised the manuscript for intellectual depth and supervised the entire project. Yu He and Shipeng Cui were responsible for the data collection, analysis, and interpretation, bringing analytical rigor to the study. Shipeng Cui took the lead in drafting the manuscript, ensuring its alignment with scholarly standards. All authors collaboratively discussed the results, provided critical insights, and contributed to the final manuscript. They have read, approved, and take joint accountability for the presented work's accuracy and integrity.

Author(s)' statements on ethics and conflict of interest

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