2014

Teacher autonomy in a context of Chinese tertiary education: case studies of EFL teachers

Nana Long
Hong Kong Baptist University

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/etd_oa

Recommended Citation
https://repository.hkbu.edu.hk/etd_oa/103

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Electronic Theses and Dissertations at HKBU Institutional Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Open Access Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of HKBU Institutional Repository. For more information, please contact repository@hkbu.edu.hk.
Teacher Autonomy in a Context of Chinese Tertiary Education: Case Studies of EFL Teachers

LONG Nana

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Prof. Li Siu Cheung, Sandy
Hong Kong Baptist University
October 2014
DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis represents my own work which has been done after registration for the degree of PhD at Hong Kong Baptist University, and has not been previously included in a thesis or dissertation submitted to this or any other institution for a degree, diploma or other qualifications.

Signature:

Date: October 2014
Abstract

This thesis reports on a multiple case study of four EFL teachers’ long-term development of autonomy in a particular Chinese mainland university. Each teacher was selected as a holistic case because of their variations in dispositions, backgrounds, experiences, and trajectories of development. It addresses three major research questions: 1) How do the teachers control over the multiple aspects of their teacher work across time and contexts? 2) What are the major individual and contextual factors that facilitate and constrain the development of teacher autonomy? 3) How do teacher identities affect the development of teacher autonomy? The study adopted many narrative forms of data collection instruments, including (auto)biographies, interviews, casual conversations, questionnaire, complemented by classroom observations, staff meeting observations, and documents, in order to understand teacher autonomy from the lived experiences of the four teacher participants throughout their careers and lives.

By examining the concept of teacher autonomy through the lens of teacher identity, this study analyzed how four teacher participants exercised different degrees of autonomy at different stages of their teaching, research, and administrative roles. It provides a holistic picture of zigzagging pathways towards teacher autonomy across the whole course of their careers. It then discussed how the teachers’ autonomy was facilitated and constrained by contextual and individual factors across time.

Based on the findings, this study proposes a conceptual framework to illustrate the close relationship between teacher identity and teacher autonomy, and this relationship's dynamic and unstable nature across time and contexts. It also suggests there is an urgent need for teacher autonomy scholarship to broaden its scope by moving beyond language teaching and learning to more crucial aspects of language teachers’ daily work and to explore the development of teacher autonomy in a long-term process.
Acknowledgements

I would like to give my sincere gratitude to my two supervisors, Professor Sandy Li and Dr. Jing Huang, who kindly monitored the progress of my PhD study. They provided insightful comments for my thesis and encouraged me to address difficulties and obstacles. I also thank Dr. Jan Connelly, my principal supervisor in the first two years of my PhD study. She was always encouraging and considerate for both my study and life. She also kindly helped proofread the final version of this thesis.

Thanks go to Professor William Littlewood from the Language Center of Hong Kong Baptist University, and Professor Vicky Tam, Professor Hing Keung Ma, Professor Atara Sivan, Dr. Lisa Deng, Dr. Kelly Ku, Dr. Tat Heung Choi, Dr. Dennis Chan, and Dr. Ricky Lam from the Department of Education Studies of Hong Kong Baptist University. They all offered me help in one way or another during my PhD study. I would also like to express my gratitude to Professor Icy Lee from the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Dr. Andy Gao from the University of Hong Kong for their detailed and insightful comments for my thesis revision.

I thank the administrative staff at the General Office of Department of Education Studies, especially Ms. Fanny Wong, Ms. Amy Tam, Ms. Michelle Lee, Ms. Yanas Wong, and Ms. Felicia Low, for their kind assistance. I also thank the research fellows in my office - Ms. Aihua Hu, Mr. Zhixing Xu, Mr. Edmund Chan, Mr. Henry Chung, and Ms. Olufolake Orekoya - and all my friends in the former office DLB 719 - Phoebe, Sara, Ava, Fiona, Kanny, Wing, and Stanley - for their encouragement.

I give my heartfelt thanks to all the teacher participants who shared their life stories with me and allowed me to gain access to their language classrooms. Thanks also go out to the Dean of School of Foreign Languages of my working institution who allowed me to conduct this investigation, and all my colleagues who kindly participated in the participant sampling process.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude to my dear parents for their unceasing love and support. Many thanks are given to my sisters, brother, and brother-in-laws for their care and love.
Table of Contents

DECLARATION..................................................................................................................i
Abstract ..........................................................................................................................ii
Acknowledgements ........................................................................................................iii
Table of Contents .............................................................................................................iv
List of Tables .....................................................................................................................vii
Abbreviations ......................................................................................................................viii

Chapter 1 Introduction .......................................................................................................1
  1.1 Identification of the research problem ......................................................................1
  1.2 Background to the study .........................................................................................3
    1.2.1 English major programmes in China .................................................................3
    1.2.2 Recruitment and appraisal of EM teachers in China ............................................6
    1.2.3 EM teacher training and development in China .................................................8
  1.3 The researcher’s experiences as an EM teacher .......................................................10
  1.4 Research questions ..................................................................................................11
  1.5 Organization of the thesis .........................................................................................12

Chapter 2 Literature review ..............................................................................................13
  2.1 The concept of teacher autonomy ............................................................................13
    2.1.1 Conceptualizing teacher autonomy ....................................................................13
    2.1.2 The meaning of teacher autonomy in this study ...............................................17
      2.1.2.1 Understanding capacity .............................................................................17
      2.1.2.2 Understanding control ..............................................................................20
      2.1.2.3 Understanding the multiplicity of teacher work .......................................21
    2.1.3 Empirical studies on teacher autonomy ............................................................21
      2.1.3.1 Teacher autonomy in language teacher education contexts .......................22
      2.1.3.2 Teacher autonomy in naturalistic contexts ...............................................24
  2.2 The concept of teacher identity ................................................................................27
    2.2.1 Conceptualizing teacher identity .......................................................................28
    2.2.2 Empirical studies on teacher identity ...............................................................31
  2.3 The relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher identity ..........................34
  2.4 Chapter summary ....................................................................................................37

Chapter 3 Research design ..............................................................................................38
  3.1 Research method .....................................................................................................38
  3.2 Research context .....................................................................................................40
    3.2.1 Institutional context .........................................................................................40
    3.2.2 The context of School of Foreign Languages ....................................................46
  3.3 Teacher participant sampling ..................................................................................49
  3.4 Researcher’s role and ethics .....................................................................................53
  3.5 Data collection .........................................................................................................55
    3.5.1 (Auto)biographies ............................................................................................56
    3.5.2 Interviews and casual conversations ...................................................................57
    3.5.3 Observations of classroom teaching and staff meetings .....................................58
Chapter 7 Jacky’s story

7.1 Jacky’s teaching experiences
    7.1.1 Entering the teaching profession
    7.1.2 Renewed teaching after completing his MA study

7.2 Jacky’s research experiences

7.3 The impact of family on Jacky’s career development

Chapter 6 Daisy’s story

6.1 Becoming a Christian

6.2 Daisy’s teaching experiences
    6.2.1 Early experiences as an EM teacher: I was incapable
    6.2.2 Ongoing development in teaching
    6.2.3 Daisy’s changes in teaching after becoming a Christian

6.3 Daisy’s research experiences

6.4 Daisy’s experiences of undertaking administrative work

6.5 Daisy’s other aspects of work and life

6.6 Synopsis

Chapter 5 Snow’s story

5.1 Snow’s teaching experiences
    5.1.1 Teaching experiences before becoming an EM teacher
    5.1.2 Early experiences as an EM teacher
    5.1.3 Teaching experiences at the current working institution

5.2 Snow’s research experiences
    5.2.1 Beginning years of doing research
    5.2.2 Research experiences during PhD study
    5.2.3 Research experiences at current stage

5.3 Being a mother and career choices

5.4 Snow’s other aspects of teacher work

5.5 Synopsis

Chapter 4 Philip’s story

4.1 Philip’s teaching experiences
    4.1.1 Early teaching experiences
    4.1.2 Adaptation and stagnation
    4.1.3 Awakening in teaching

4.2 Philip’s experiences of being the Associate Head/Dean
    4.2.1 Taking charge of students’ postgraduate entrance examination
    4.2.2 Taking charge of English major programme reform

4.3 Philip’s research experiences

4.4 Philip’s other aspects of teacher work

4.5 Synopsis
List of Tables

Table 2.1 Dimensions of teacher autonomy (adapted from Smith, 2003, p. 4) ..........14
Table 3.1 Professional title promotion system at UA .............................................44
Table 3.2 Backgrounds of EM teachers at UA ....................................................50
Table 3.3 Background information of participants .............................................53
Table 3.4 Fieldwork schedule ........................................................................55
Table 3.5 Courses undertaken by the participants ............................................59
Table 8.1 The EM teachers’ efforts to develop students ......................................151
Table 8.2 Similarities and differences among the EM teachers in research ..........164

List of Figures

Figure 2.1 Components of a capacity to control teacher work ..........................18
Figure 2.2 A conceptual framework of teacher autonomy and teacher identities ....36
Figure 3.1 The proportions of teaching, research, and community service in UA’s promotion system ..........................................................44
Figure 4.1 Philip’s efforts for students’ NPEE preparation ..................................80
Figure 4.2 Factors taken into account for programme reform .............................83
Figure 4.3 Philip’s increasing responsibilities in his career ...............................90
Figure 5.1 Big changes in Snow’s career ..........................................................106
Figure 5.2 Snow’s increasing responsibilities in her career ..............................110
Figure 6.1 Daisy’s increasing responsibilities in her career .............................129
Figure 7.1 Jacky’s increasing responsibilities in his career ..............................142
Figure 8.1 Power relations in Philip’s administration work ..............................171
Figure 8.2 Interactions between the individual teacher and contexts ...............175
Abbreviations

AR Academic Registration
BA/TEFL Bachelor of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language
CCP Chinese Communist Party
EM teachers Teachers teaching English to English majors
FLT Advisory Committee The Foreign Language Teaching Advisory Committee under the Chinese Ministry of Education
HEI Higher education institution
MA Master of Arts
MOE Ministry of Education
NCEE National College Entrance Examination
NESs Native English speakers
NNESs Non-native English speakers
NPEE National Postgraduate Entrance Examination
TEFL Teaching English as a Foreign Language
Chapter 1 Introduction

This study explores the long-term development of teacher autonomy in the careers and lives of English language teachers in the tertiary education context of mainland China. Four teachers teaching English to English majors (‘EM teachers’ henceforth) participated in the study. In this chapter, I will identify the research problem and state the purpose of this study. I will then introduce the background to the study, list the research questions, and outline the organization of the whole thesis.

1.1 Identification of the research problem

Teacher autonomy has received increasing attention in second/foreign language education research since the 1990s. It reflects shifts in language teacher education and the role of language teachers in classroom teaching after the idea of learner autonomy was introduced into second/foreign language education in the late 1970s (Benson, 2001, 2011; Benson & Huang, 2008; Crandall, 2000).

In the field of teacher education, including language teacher education, the instrumental view of teachers as expert technicians is gradually replaced by the constructivist view of teachers as self-directed learners, reflective practitioners, and transformative intellectuals who strive for both educational advancement and personal transformation. Language teachers are hence viewed as autonomous teachers who know “not only how to teach but also how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula, and textbooks” (Kumaravadivelu, 2003, p. 33). As the legitimacy of teacher autonomy is recognized in language teacher education, it is suggested that more bottom-up models should be provided for teachers to encourage self-directed, collaborative, and inquiry based learning (Johnson, 2009; Richards, 2003; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Roberts, 1998).
The other source of the idea of teacher autonomy relates to the teacher’s crucial role in fostering learner autonomy in language education contexts. In his article “Learning as dialogue: The dependence of learner autonomy on teacher autonomy”, Little (1995) introduced the concept of teacher autonomy into language education for the reason that in formal educational contexts principles of learner autonomy cannot be successfully implemented without teachers “having a strong sense of personal responsibility for their teaching, exercising, via continuous reflection and analysis, the highest possible degree of affective and cognitive control of the teaching process, and exploiting the freedom that this confers” (p. 179). In this sense, teacher autonomy, as the precondition of learner autonomy, should be highly valued by language teachers as well as institutions (Jiménez Raya, Lamb, & Vieira, 2007; Jiménez Raya & Sercu, 2007; Lamb & Reinders, 2008; Little, 2007; Nakata, 2011).

Although the significance of teacher autonomy has been highlighted in both teacher education and language teaching contexts, its meaning is still being disputed by researchers. According to Benson and Huang (2008), the teacher education literature tends to equate teacher autonomy with professional freedom while second/foreign language education attempts to incorporate more elements into the concept of teacher autonomy such as self-directed professional development and the teacher’s commitment to fostering learner autonomy. Moreover, as noted by Benson, (2002), “autonomy can never be the outcome of a single, short-term intervention” (p. 10). More efforts should be made to explore it in a long-term process (Benson, 2007; see also Chuk, 2010). Relevant research is scant in second/foreign language education. These issues are the major concerns of this study. On the whole, the purpose of the study is to gain an in-depth understanding of teacher autonomy in the career-long experiences of language teachers.
1.2 Background to the study

Since this study is targeted at EM teachers\(^1\) in the tertiary education context of China, I will introduce the contextual background of this particular group of teachers in this section. The history of English major undergraduate programmes is introduced with an emphasis on the challenges facing EM teachers in teaching. Constraints in the recruitment and appraisal systems and teacher training and development models adopted by most Chinese mainland universities are then highlighted.

1.2.1 English major programmes in China

Since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, English major undergraduate programmes have gone through three phases – reformulation and initial development (1949-1965), serious setbacks (1966-1977), and restoration and all-round reform (1978-present) (Hu, 2009, p. 163; see also Dai, 2008).

In the beginning phase, the number of English major undergraduate programmes was only 9 because of China’s intense political and diplomatic relationship with English-speaking countries. The total number grew to 74 after China re-established diplomatic relationships with these countries in the 1960s. During the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), almost all Chinese people were involved in violent class struggle. Influenced by the revolution, English major undergraduate programmes stopped running. This situation did not change until the restoration of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE) in 1977. Stepping into the 21\(^{st}\) century, English was given unprecedented prominence across the country as China’s unique role in the context of economic globalization became more and more pronounced (Zheng & Davison, 2008, p. 3). Following

---

\(^1\) EM teachers differ from college English teachers (daxueyìngyu jiaoshi) in that the former teach both proficiency courses and theory-based and advanced-English courses (e.g., English linguistics, British literature, American literature, etc.) (English Team of FLT Advisory Committee, 2000), while the latter teach English to non-English majors as a language proficiency course (Department of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education, 2007).
this trend, English major programmes developed rapidly. There are currently over 2,500 English major undergraduate programmes (including *benke* and *zhuanke* programmes\(^2\)) in China (Wang & Liu, 2010).

According to the regulation of the Ministry of Education (MOE), the Foreign Language Teaching Advisory Committee (‘FLT Advisory Committee’ henceforth) and higher education institutions (HEIs) share the responsibility of running English major programmes. At present, all programmes follow the guideline of the *National English Major Curriculum* (2000) (‘EM Curriculum’ henceforth), which was stipulated by the FLT Advisory Committee based on the *Curriculum for English Majors at the Foundation Phase* (1988) and *Curriculum for English Majors at the Advanced Phase* (1990). The *EM Curriculum* was promulgated in response to China’s emergence as an international country along with the globalization trend and the use of English as a global language of communication in global contexts. It changed the teaching goal from developing proficient English talents to developing composite-type talents\(^3\) (*fuhexing rencai*) (see Chang, 2012).

As noted by the *EM Curriculum*, in the first two years of education (the foundation phase), emphasis is placed on students’ language skills, and thus the major courses focus on English listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation; in the last two years (the advanced phase), the emphasis shifts to

---

\(^2\) In mainland China, *zhuanke* and *benke* are two types of higher education at the undergraduate level. They differ in the type of education offered, length, and qualification. *Zhuanke* education, which normally lasts three years, focuses on specialized knowledge of the subject area and hence has a vocational orientation. *Benke* education, which normally lasts four to five years, focuses on the general knowledge of the subject area in a systematic way and the ability to conduct practical work and research work in the subject area. *Zhuanke* graduates are conferred a qualification while *benke* graduates are conferred a qualification and a bachelor’s degree. There are programmes for *zhuanke* graduates to receive a further two-year-long *benke* education and obtain *benke* qualification and the bachelor’s degree (Yu, Stith, Liu, & Chen, 2010).

\(^3\) The *National English Major Curriculum* (2000) pointed out that the new millennium not only needed talents in foreign languages and literature, but also composite-type foreign language talents with both foreign language proficiency and expertise in fields such as diplomacy, business and trade, journalism, and law. However, there have been debates about what type of foreign language majors should be developed ever since the promulgation of this curriculum. Some English major undergraduate programmes insist on focusing on students’ language skills and knowledge about English language and literature, while some produce composite programmes which integrate a foreign language with another discipline or another foreign language. Due to the composite nature of undergraduate programmes, new departments or schools have also been established with names such as the School of Business English, the School of International Journalism, etc. (Dai & Zhang, 2007; Hu, 2008).
knowledge of the English major and relative interdisciplinary knowledge, including English literature, American literature, English linguistics, and so on. The *EM Curriculum* suggests that the traditional teacher-centered teaching approach should be replaced by student-centered teaching approaches in order to achieve the goal of developing composite-type talents who have high-level English proficiency as well as critical thinking and independent learning ability.

In 2010, the Chinese central government issued the *National Plan for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)*, which set the goal of becoming a country with rich human resources by 2020 and placed quality education in a high position. In the new-round of educational reform, EM teachers meet the challenge of developing high-quality English talents from the aspects of knowledge, ability, and qualities.

Teacher autonomy seems extremely important for EM teachers in these educational reforms. First, EM teachers' limited professional knowledge and the current examination-oriented educational system adopted by China make it difficult to put learner-centered classroom teaching into practice (Dai, 2008; Shu, 2004). Second, EM teachers are confronted with debates on how to construct and develop English major programmes. Some intellectuals advocate composite programmes. However, due to limited time span and shortage of teachers in both English and a second discipline, composite programmes have already experienced practical difficulties in educating composite-type talents. Some other intellectuals insist on focusing on language learning itself, holding that language learning should be part of liberal education (Gao, 2009, p. 67). Third, perhaps due to the large number of English majors, they gradually fall out of favor in the job market in recent years (Cheng, 2013; Zhuang, 2010). Under this circumstance, EM teachers are supposed to reform teaching to help students gain more effective learning outcomes.

Apart from the *EM Curriculum*, the FLT Advisory Committee is expected to develop standards for EM teachers and their teaching, establish necessary EM
teacher training and development systems, organize teacher research activities, reform and evaluate English major undergraduate programmes, and so on (MOE, 2007, 2013). However, no big changes have taken place in these areas (Cheng & Sun, 2010; Dai, 2008; Gao & Li, 2007). The current situation is that all English major programmes are mainly run by HEIs instead of the FLT Advisory Committee. In the next section, I will introduce how most Chinese HEIs recruit and appraise EM teachers.

1.2.2 Recruitment and appraisal of EM teachers in China

After the restoration of NCEE in 1977, China was confronted with a shortage of EM teachers. In the 1990s, there was a greater need for EM teachers due to the fact that there was an increasing number of English major undergraduate programmes and an increasing student intake. A noticeable phenomenon at this time was that many institutions recruited new teachers who had just completed their undergraduate study and allowed them to teach without any specialized training (Dai, 2008, p. 193). In recent years, many institutions have much higher criteria for prospective teachers, requiring them to have a master’s degree or even doctoral degrees in relevant fields. Nonetheless, neither the authorities that govern HEIs nor HEIs have specific criteria for deciding on what qualifies a person to be an EM teacher. Gao and Li (2007) and Dai (2008) both point out it is an enduring problem which makes it impossible to ensure the quality of teaching.

With regard to teacher appraisal, the Higher Education Law of People’s Republic of China pays little attention to disciplinary differences. It states four requirements for all higher education teachers in Article 47:

1) A college teacher must have a college teacher’s credentials;
2) A college teacher must have a systematic command of basic theories in a

---

4 In China, the higher education administrative system operates at two levels. At the first level, the State Council and the Ministry of Education are responsible for the central administration of all education institutions. At the second level, the Ministry of Education, central ministries and commissions, provincial and municipal governments are responsible for direct administration of the institutions affiliated to them (Zhou, 2006, p. 52; see also Cheng, 1998).
particular field of study;
3) A college teacher must have a teaching and research ability commensurate with a professional title;
4) A college teacher must have the experience of teaching a course or courses for a prescribed number of teaching hours as appropriate to his or her professional title. (Zhou, 2006, p. 74)

In many HEIs all teachers have to fulfill more or less the same requirements, too. Due to the centralized education system of mainland China, requirements for teachers at public HEIs are greatly influenced by governments’ assessment criteria for HEIs. HEIs are mainly assessed and ranked based on the number of research grants and awards gained from the educational administrative departments of the central government and provincial governments (Wang, 2007) and the number of publications (books and journal articles) in core publishers (Xu, 2014). HEIs normally convert the pressure of winning grants and awards and publishing to academics by highlighting these aspects in the teacher promotion system. This overemphasis on research outcomes may lead to teachers’ indifference to teaching, teaching reforms, and professional development (Dai, 2008, p. 243-244).

Academic corruption is viewed as one of the serious problems brought about by the teacher promotion system practiced by many Chinese HEIs (Li, 2007; Ngok, 2008; Wang & Chen, 2007; Wu & Jia, 2007; Yang, 2005; Zhao & Zhu, 2010). This is because government departments monopolize all public academic resources and dominate the evaluation and assessments of academic activities (Ngok, 2008, p. 559). In many cases, the chance of winning grants and awards is increased, and in some cases even determined, by the social connections between officials of government administrative departments and universities and academics (Ngok, 2008; Yang, 2005).

In regard to publications, Chinese academics in the field of social sciences and humanities still publish most of their work in Chinese journals (Flowerdew &

5 According to the Higher Education Law of People's Republic of China, teachers’ professional titles are classified into four levels ~ Assistant Teacher, Lecturer, Associate Professor, and Professor.
Li, 2009; Shi, 2002). Wang (2007) points out that the publishing spaces of Chinese academic journals cannot meet the large demand for publishing from academics. As a result, publishing agencies, which provide a service for publishing channels, are put into the ‘frontline position’ (Xia & Feng, p. 102). They charge authors high service fees and publication fees. As far as foreign language journals are concerned, the limited number of key foreign language journals is out of proportion with the large number of foreign language teachers in mainland China (Xu, 2014, p. 248). Most of these journals neither have review boards nor employ a full blind review system and hence social connections play a significant role in determining the publication of articles in these journals (Shi, Wang, & Xu, 2005). The book publication market is distorted too. According to Wu and Jia (2007), it has been an ‘open secret’ that academics afford the payment of the number of their own books that get published (p. 70).

From the above introduction, it can be seen that EM teachers are greatly constrained by their working institutions and the unfavorable academic atmosphere of mainland China. Teacher autonomy is crucial for them to get around the constraints. In the next section, I will introduce the major top-down teacher training and development approaches for Chinese EM teachers to see whether they are assisted to manage these constraints.

1.2.3 EM teacher training and development in China

China has experienced a shortage of English teachers since the 1970s. To solve this problem, MOE stipulated the University English Teacher Training Plan from 1980 to 1983 and assigned 16 institutions the task of training EM teachers. Collaborating with experts from the USA, the UK, Canada and Australia, these institutions helped EM teachers develop basic understandings and knowledge of literature, linguistics and foreign language teaching methodology and practice their reading, writing, and speaking skills. Afterwards ten institutions established training centers for foreign language teachers. With the increasing demand of
HEIs for teachers’ higher academic degrees and the increasing number of Master programmes, especially part-time ones, most in-service teachers chose to attend Master programmes instead of training centers.

In recent years, some publishers, in particular Beijing Foreign Teaching and Research Press and Shanghai Foreign Education Press\(^6\), organize workshops on teaching and research for foreign language teachers. HEIs are encouraged to collaborate with these organizations. Teachers are also encouraged to apply for workshops personally. Besides, since 2008, the FLT Advisory Committee has started teacher training programmes for EM teachers (Feng, 2012). However, only a small number of outstanding EM teachers have the opportunity of participating in these programmes (Dai, 2010).

Besides, the central government in collaboration with each province and institution has developed a series of teacher development projects without giving attention to disciplinary differences. These projects are criticized to constrain teacher autonomy to a large extent. Researchers use terms like ‘teacher alienation phenomenon’ (Bao, 2007), ‘false development’ (Li, 2010) and ‘being developed’ (Wang, 2011) to describe the phenomenon that teachers develop themselves by blindly meeting the requirements set by higher authorities and fail to make real improvements.

Apart from top-down models of teacher training and development, research on in-service EFL teachers’ professional development in the Chinese tertiary education context is still limited, especially empirical studies (Wen & Ren, 2010). Working in the Chinese educational and institutional context which is replete with constraints, teacher autonomy is critically important for EM teachers to sustain motivation and efforts to strive for continued professional development.

\(^6\) The following are the official websites of the teacher training and development programmes: http://teacher.heep.cn/ and http://www.sinoflt.com/swpx/swpx/index.jsp.
1.3 The researcher’s experiences as an EM teacher

My attention to the idea of teacher autonomy derived from my own working experience as an EM teacher at a Chinese mainland university. Holding a Bachelor’s degree in English language and a Master’s degree in applied linguistics, I was recruited by a university in 2007. Working for four years at this university, my role could be likened to that of Cinderella in that I received little attention and care from the university. I struggle for autonomy for the benefit of my professional development and my students’ development.

There were many constraints for my teaching at the commencement: no pre-service training, no teacher voice in course arrangement, scarce sources, little support from the department. Although I was allowed to conduct teaching freely inside the classroom, I had no idea how to teach. I voluntarily observed colleagues’ teaching and discussed teaching issues with them. To my disappointment, their teaching was quite boring as the teachers talked in the whole lesson, even though most of them were conscientious. Reluctant to follow them, I exercised autonomy to define my role in developing students’ language skills, autonomous learning ability, and sustaining their motivation. Conducting teaching as an isolated activity, I gradually found that I had little energy to further develop my teaching, although students provided quite positive feedback for my teaching.

As a university teacher, I was encouraged and required to conduct research activities after my recruitment. As a form of support for new staff, the university sponsored me with a small amount of money to be the principal investigator of a research project. It was an opportunity to develop my research competence, but it was totally out of my expectation that there were so many obstacles on this research journey. Young teachers like me almost had no opportunities for attending conferences, seminars, or workshops to learn to conduct research. When I completed my research articles, I met great difficulty in getting them published. The cruel reality told me that only money and human relationship could help me publish articles.
My experience indicates that both teaching and research were isolated activities for me, and perhaps for many tertiary teachers in China. It relied on my own efforts to seek development within the constrained environment. On the other hand, I actively sought this PhD study opportunity for further development. Therefore, it was my own experiences that motivated me to conduct research on teacher autonomy and then to disseminate the idea of autonomy to institutions and EFL teachers.

1.4 Research questions

After identifying the research problem on teacher autonomy and introducing the contextual constraints for Chinese EM teachers, this section presents the research questions of this study. The following three questions are to be addressed:

1) How do the EM teachers control over the multiple aspects of their teacher work across time and contexts?
2) What are the major individual and contextual factors that facilitate and constrain the development of teacher autonomy?
3) How do teacher identities affect the development of teacher autonomy?

The first two questions intend to identify the characteristics of teacher autonomy in a long-term process and the crucial factors that affect its development. As a key linking concept between sociocultural theory and the theory of autonomy, identity is argued to be closely related with autonomy (Benson, 2007; Benson & Cooker, 2013; Chik, 2007; Huang, 2009, 2013; Huang & Benson, 2013; Murray, Gao, & Lamb, 2011). Given this, the third research question seeks to contribute to current understanding of teacher autonomy through the lens of teacher identity and of the relationship between the two concepts.
1.5 Organization of the thesis

This PhD thesis consists of nine chapters. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature of teacher autonomy and teacher identity in order to help gain a holistic understanding of the two concepts and detect the research gaps. Chapter 3 introduces the research methodology, which is inclusive of a detailed description of the research context, research participants, research methods, data collection, and data analysis process. Ethical considerations are also outlined. In order to examine teacher autonomy in the career experiences of the teacher participants, Chapters 4 to 7 describe four case study stories. Chapter 8 reports on the case analysis results and discusses them to answer the three research questions. The last chapter highlights the contributions and limitations of this study and provides the implications of the research findings for language teachers, teacher educators, institutions, and future research.
Chapter 2 Literature review

This study intends to examine teacher autonomy through the lens of teacher identity. In this chapter, I review the relevant literature of teacher autonomy and teacher identity respectively and then propose a conceptual linkage between the two concepts to guide this study.

2.1 The concept of teacher autonomy

As introduced in 1.1, the origins of teacher autonomy in language education can be traced to two major sources – general teacher education and second/foreign language education. These two major sources position the concept of teacher autonomy in second/foreign language education somewhat different from how it is viewed in teacher education. In the following sections, I will discuss how teacher autonomy is conceptualized in the literature of second/foreign language education, how it is defined in this study, and how past research informs the present study.

2.1.1 Conceptualizing teacher autonomy

The concept of teacher autonomy has been under scrutiny in diverse ways. To date even a universally accepted definition remains elusive. Smith (2003) notes that contributions to the definition of teacher autonomy tend to advocate one aspect to the exclusion of others, including teachers’ right to freedom from control (Benson, 2000), teachers’ capacity to engage in self-directed teaching (Little, 1995; Tort-Moloney, 1997), teachers’ “control over educational settings by mediating between constraints and ideals” (Vieira, 2003, p. 222), and teachers’ autonomy as learners (Smith, 2000; Savage, 2000).

On the basis of previous discussions of teacher autonomy, especially McGrath’s (2000) interpretation of teacher autonomy as “self-directed professional development” and “freedom from control by others” (pp. 100-101),
and Aoki’s (2002) suggestion that teacher autonomy involves “the capacity, freedom, and/or responsibility to make choices concerning one’s own teaching” (p. 111), Smith (2003) provides a “catch-all framework of teacher autonomy” (Huang, 2005, p. 205) which attempts to capture different possible dimensions of teachers’ teaching and their own learning (see Table 2.1).

### Table 2.1 Dimensions of teacher autonomy (adapted from Smith, 2003, p. 4)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In relation to professional action:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Self-directed professional action (=‘Self-directed teaching’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Capacity for self-directed professional action (=‘Teacher autonomy (I)’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Freedom from control over professional action (=‘Teacher autonomy (II)’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In relation to professional development:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>D. Self-directed professional development (=‘Self-directed teacher-learning’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Capacity for self-directed professional development (=‘Teacher-learner autonomy (I)’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Freedom from control over professional development (=‘Teacher-learner autonomy (II)’)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In line with Benson (1997), Smith (2003) mentions that B and E refer to the technical/psychological dimension and C and F refer to the political dimension of autonomy. The sociocultural dimension (Oxford, 2003), however, is not explicitly noted. Smith further points out that in order to promote learner autonomy teachers may need to have (1) a capacity for self-directed teaching (Teacher autonomy (I)); (2) freedom from control over their teaching (Teacher autonomy (II)); and (3) a capacity for self-directed teacher-learning (Teacher-learner autonomy (I)). In this way he builds possible links between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy, although his focus is still on teachers themselves (i.e., they should develop their autonomy as teachers and learners) rather than explicitly incorporating the fostering of learner autonomy into one aspect of teacher autonomy.

Building on the various definitions and interpretations concerning teacher autonomy, Huang (2005) shows his preference by defining teacher autonomy in a concise way as being “teachers’ willingness, capacity and freedom to take control
of their own teaching and learning” (p. 206). He notes that the three dimensions - ‘willingness’, ‘capacity’, and ‘freedom’ - roughly correspond to the social-motivational, technical-psychological, and political-critical perspectives of teacher autonomy; ‘teaching’ and ‘learning’ correspond to teachers’ two interrelated domains of life: the domain of teaching and the domain of teacher-learning. To make the sociocultural perspective of teacher autonomy more explicit, Chuk (2010) extends Huang’s (2005) definition so that it becomes “teachers’ willingness, capacity, and freedom to take control of their teaching and teacher-learning while collaborating with others across contexts” (pp. 59-60). This interpretation emphasizes that teachers are not isolated, but that they interact with others within their communities.

Apart from the multidimensionality of teacher autonomy, many researchers in second/foreign language education tend to emphasize the relationship between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy in the conceptualization of teacher autonomy. A key reason for this tendency is that teacher autonomy was introduced into second/foreign language education by researchers who were primarily interested in learner autonomy. For these researchers, the above definitions are conceived of as being problematic “in the light of the practice of learner autonomy” (Aoki, 2002, p. 111). In their definitions of teacher autonomy, they place an emphasis on the interconnectedness between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. For example, Thavenius (1999) defines teacher autonomy as “the teacher’s ability and willingness to help learners take responsibility for their own learning” (p. 160). He, however, overlooks the teacher’s autonomy for self-directed professional development. Nakata (2011) suggests that teacher autonomy embrace “teaching autonomy (the act of supporting student autonomy) as well as professional autonomy (the characteristics of the teacher feeling/acting professionally autonomous)” (p. 901). This conceptualization emphasizes both the teacher’s commitment to fostering learner autonomy and his/her engagement in professional development. Nevertheless, his study is mainly concerned with
teachers’ readiness for promoting learner autonomy without sparing much space for the discussion of teachers’ professional autonomy. Jiménez Raya et al. (2007) contend that both learner autonomy and teacher autonomy entail a democratic view of education in the European context, that is, education as (inter)personal empowerment and social transformation (p. 1). They view autonomy as “a collective, ideological interest that calls for a collective, ideological struggle” (Vieira, 2009, p. 17). In order to emphasize the similar nature of learner and teacher autonomy and their interdependence in school contexts, they suggest that the two concepts should be both understood as the “competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environments (Jiménez Raya et al., 2007, p. 1).

In contrast, some researchers point out that teacher autonomy may not have a logically necessary connection with the teacher’s commitment to fostering learner autonomy in their teaching practices (Benson, 2011; Shaw, 2008; Smith & Erdoğan, 2008). For these researchers, it is more appropriate to define teacher autonomy independently of learner autonomy. First, as noted by Little (2000, p. 45), language teachers may not have a clear idea of what it means to be an autonomous learner. Second, language teachers may lack a commitment to the idea of learner autonomy. Third, building a close relationship between learner autonomy and teacher autonomy tends to exclude the possibility of developing learner autonomy through learners’ own out-of-class learning.

As can be seen from the above review of the conceptualizations of teacher autonomy in the literature of second/foreign language education, two main issues are under debate: 1) whether we should emphasize one dimension or multiple dimensions of teacher autonomy; and 2) whether teacher autonomy should incorporate the idea of learner autonomy. Besides, most conceptualizations of teacher autonomy seem to be confined to the aspects of language teaching and teacher learning. Other aspects such as research, administration, and community service have not been specified, although they also occupy significant positions in
many language teachers’ professional careers and lives, in particular those who work within tertiary education contexts (Borg, 2007, 2009, 2010; Henkel, 2000; Marsh & Hattie, 2002). Attention to the multiplicity of teacher work and the complex interactions among these aspects may contribute to a better understanding of the concept of teacher autonomy. Therefore, the scope of teacher autonomy needs to be further expanded. The next section will provide a working definition of teacher autonomy by taking into consideration the multidimensionality of teacher autonomy, its relationship with learner autonomy, and the multiple aspects of teacher work.

2.1.2 The meaning of teacher autonomy in this study

Based on the literature reviewed in 2.1.1, I define the concept of teacher autonomy as the teacher’s capacity to take control of his/her work in this study. In order to state the standpoint of this study concerning the disputes of teacher autonomy, the meanings of ‘capacity’, ‘control’, and ‘work’ will be clarified respectively.

2.1.2.1 Understanding capacity

Capacity specifies “what a person has the potential to do”, rather than what s/he actually does (Huang & Benson, 2013, p. 8). This potential is displayed as the person exercises his/her autonomy. Huang (2005) and Huang and Benson (2013) suggest that there are three major components of a capacity to control teacher work: ability, willingness, and freedom. They are in correspondence with the technical-psychological, motivational, and political dimensions of autonomy. The sociocultural dimension of autonomy (Chuk, 2010; Oxford, 2003), however, is not explicitly signified by the stated components of ‘capacity’. In order to emphasize the dynamic interaction between the teacher and sociocultural contexts, I add ‘interdependence’ as another major component of ‘capacity’.
Figure 2.1 Components of a capacity to control teacher work

Figure 2.1 exemplifies the interrelationship between the four components of ‘capacity’ – ability, willingness, freedom, and interdependence and hence calls for the importance of investigating the multiple perspectives of teacher autonomy instead of one perspective. I will first explain each of these four components and then discuss their interrelationship.

Ability refers to the teacher’s knowledge base as well as critical awareness and reflection. For example, according to Freeman (1989), the knowledge base of teaching should be made up of knowledge of teaching (the what of teaching) and skills of teaching (the how of teaching) (p. 31). Knowledge is comprised of theoretical knowledge, including theories and concepts about the target language and language teaching and learning, and practical knowledge, including knowledge of the teacher self, teaching goals, teaching tasks, students, contexts, and strategies to cope with teaching and learning problems (Burns & Richards, 2009; Freeman & Johnson, 1998; Kumaravadivelu, 2012; Richards, 1998; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Shulman, 1987). Skills incorporate presenting materials, planning lessons, managing the classroom, organizing communication activities, correcting students’ errors, analyzing pedagogical problems, developing strategies, and so on (Freeman, 1989; Richards, 1998; Shulman, 1987). Language teachers
need to critically reflect upon their knowledge base continuously so as to develop a strong awareness of the need for further development (Little, 1995, p. 179). It is noticeable that the knowledge base of tertiary EM teachers cannot be confined to teaching as they are assigned many other responsibilities, in particular research.

Willingness refers to the level of the teacher’s motivation to control his/her work. Huang and Benson (2013) note that the teacher’s willingness is normally “informed by particular purposes” (p. 8). This study concurs with this idea. Apart from that, teacher burnout is assumed to be suffered by many teachers (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Barduhn, 2002; Cheng, 2005; Kyriacou, 1987, 2001; Maslach, 1982; Vandenberghe & Huberman, 1999) during certain periods of their careers. As stated by Chang (2009, p. 195), “when exhaustion replaces feeling energized, cynicism replaces being hopeful and being involved, and ineffectiveness replaces feeling efficacious”, teachers may feel reluctant to take control of their work. Therefore, the development of teacher autonomy requires sustained motivation.

Freedom allows room for the teacher to think and act. Benson and Huang (2008) note that “professional freedom should not simply be ‘granted’” (p. 431). This statement is reasonable in that teachers may cherish and claim freedom only on the condition that they perceive its value. Otherwise, even if they are granted freedom, they may not be able to make good use of it.

Interdependence places an emphasis on the teacher’s interaction with others, especially more capable others. Informed by sociocultural theory, this study holds that it is important for teachers to engage in ‘communities of practice’ (Wenger, 1998) to collaborate and negotiate with more capable others who share the same professional goals. These forms of social interaction are expected to trigger critical awareness and reflection and contribute to teacher development.

In summary, ability and willingness focus on the individual perspective of teacher autonomy (technical-psychological and motivational) while freedom and interdependence focus on the social perspective of teacher autonomy (political
and sociocultural). The interaction between the individual and social perspectives needs to be highlighted as they mutually influence each other. Teachers are unable to assert professional freedom without having a strong knowledge base and strong motivation. Likewise, they may be incompetent and reluctant to take control of their work if they lack freedom and communication with others. Teachers are likely to exercise the highest degree of autonomy when they are technically, psychologically, motivationally, politically, and socioculturally ready.

2.1.2.2 Understanding control

Huang and Benson (2013) define control as “the power to make choices and decisions and act on them” (p. 8). In his discussion of learner autonomy, Benson (2011) identifies three dimensions of control over language learning – learning managements, cognitive processes and learning content. The meaning of control in teacher autonomy remains vague in literature.

Current understanding of teacher autonomy focuses on the way in which the teacher responds to constraints. Benson (2010), Benson and Huang (2008), Jiménez Raya et al. (2007), and Lamb (2000) explain the teacher’s control as finding and creating spaces to manoeuvre within constraints. Vieira understands it as mediation “between constraints and ideals” (2003, p. 222) and “shortening the distance between reality and ideals through opening up possibilities” (2007, p.27).

These ideas are in accordance with the concept of agency, which is defined as “the capability of the individual to make a difference to a pre-existing state of affairs or course or events” (Giddens, 1984, p.14). The “pre-existing stage of affairs or course or events” can be viewed as the teacher’s working conditions which may be facilitating or constraining; “the capability of the individual to make a difference” means “conscious efforts by the teacher” (Ollerhead, 2010, p. 609) to create working conditions that allow room for his/her discretion (Benson, 2010, p. 263). In other words, the exercise of teacher agency should have a transformative potential.
If control over teacher work implies teacher agency, then the key component of ‘control’ should be ‘change’ because only through change can teachers seek ongoing professional development. In any working context, teachers need to intentionally change themselves or the working conditions through professional actions. It is not necessary a “radical change” (Vieira, 2007). Minor changes may also play a significant role in teacher development.

2.1.2.3 Understanding the multiplicity of teacher work

This study recognizes the multiple responsibilities of EM teachers in the Chinese tertiary educational context. As introduced in 1.2.2, research is accorded more importance than teaching in the Chinese tertiary education context. Influenced by the system, EM teachers may place teaching and research in different positions and hence exercise different degrees of autonomy on them. Therefore, this study suggests investigating teacher autonomy from the perspective of how teachers take control of multiple aspects of work simultaneously. This angle may help gain more insights into teacher autonomy.

In summary, I highlight the multidimensionality of teacher autonomy, including the technical-psychological, motivational, political, and sociocultural dimensions and the multiplicity of teacher work in this study. To capture manifestations of teacher autonomy, I focus on whether teachers intentionally change themselves or the context. Although I recognize the potential value of learner autonomy as a goal of teaching, I do not intentionally build a logical relationship between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy. Whether they have any relevance or not is dependent on the research findings.

2.1.3 Empirical studies on teacher autonomy

In the literature of second/foreign language education, empirical studies on teacher autonomy have mainly touched on two points: one is concerned with how teacher autonomy can be developed through the intervention of teacher education;
and the other is the exploration into the developmental process of teacher autonomy inside the reality of teachers’ work and life.

2.1.3.1 Teacher autonomy in language teacher education contexts

Little (1995) argues that “language teachers are more likely to succeed in promoting learner autonomy if their own education has encouraged them to be autonomous” (p. 180). Based on this premise, the field of second/foreign language teacher education has experimented with different methods in the previous 15 years or so to assist pre-service and/or in-service teachers to challenge their attitudes, beliefs, knowledge, and teaching practices as well as their particular education contexts. Special attention is normally paid to critical reflection, collaborative teamwork, and action research in teacher education programmes (Genc, 2010; Kennedy & Pinter, 2007; Vieira, 1999, 2003). An autonomous teacher is always considered as a critically reflective teacher who is able to adopt a critical attitude towards knowledge, self, and the world and to make informed decisions about his/her teaching and learning; collaborative team research is assumed to (re)construct pedagogical knowledge and school practices; action research can be understood as “enquiry-based research conducted by practitioners that involves a process of examining current practices, implementing new practices, and evaluating the results, leading to an improvement in teaching practice that benefits both students and teachers” (Flamini & Jiménez Raya, 2007, p. 107).

The two teacher development projects in Portugal - Pedagogy for Autonomy project and GT-PA (‘Grupo de Trabalho - Pedagogia para a Autonomia’ which means ‘Working Group on Pedagogy for Autonomy’) (see Vieira, 1999, 2003) - are good examples of how reflective teaching, collaboration, and action research can be utilized to foster teacher autonomy and then learner autonomy. The two projects discard the traditional divorcing of schools and universities, and give primacy to school-university partnerships that make it possible for school teachers
and university researchers/teacher educators to understand and foster teacher autonomy and learner autonomy through collaborative inquiries.

Vieira (2003) provides an example of how four EFL teacher trainees were helped by two supervisors to develop small-scale action-research projects in EFL classes. At the beginning stage, the teacher trainees found it difficult to implement pedagogy for autonomy in their classes because they lacked the ability to address the constraints (a strong focus on grammar and a structural approach to teaching) imposed by coursebook materials. To support experience and reflection with regard to the quality of materials and learning task, the two supervisors developed two descriptive instruments named ‘Grid for the Analysis of Foreign Language Learning Tasks’ and ‘Observation Schedule for the Implementation of Foreign Language Learning Tasks’ requiring the student teachers to analyze and evaluate the tasks in their materials, and then improve the tasks, try them out, and reflect on the implementation. The student teachers learned to adopt a critical attitude towards traditional pedagogy, and became more capable of designing materials and tasks that aligned with their own pedagogical purposes. Their belief in autonomy as a pedagogical goal was reinforced with their growing sense of self-direction and self-fulfillment.

Moreira and Ribeiro’s (2009) two case studies - one in initial kindergarten teacher education and the other in a Master’s programme on foreign language teaching - are other good examples illustrating the promotion of teacher autonomy through critical reflection and collaboration and the differences between pre-service teachers and in-service teachers. In their research, collaborative supervision journals were used as an approach to develop professional autonomy. Journals functioned as reflective narratives of experience to (re)construct educational knowledge; the collaborative inquiry dimension aimed at fostering social and professional critical awareness. Evidence showed that teachers’ professional autonomy was developed via reflective collaborative writing: for beginning teachers, their professional practical knowledge was enhanced with an
increased awareness of their observation competence, pedagogical action, and the importance of support and stimulation from supervisors; experienced teachers’ reflections focused more on the political aspect of teaching so that their professional critical knowledge developed in this programme.

The above attempts made by language teacher education programmes highlight the important role of reflection, collaboration with more capable others (peers and teacher educators), and action research for the development of teacher autonomy. However, these short-term interventions can hardly ensure the long-term development of teacher autonomy, which necessitates the exploration of exactly how language teachers develop their autonomy in everyday work and life to illuminate autonomy research and second/foreign language education. The next section will introduce the few empirical studies on teacher autonomy inside language teachers’ naturalistic working contexts.

2.1.3.2 Teacher autonomy in naturalistic contexts

In spite of the importance of exploring teacher autonomy within the context of its natural occurrence, this type of study is rare in the literature. Three representative studies will be introduced in this section to show how important it is to pay attention to teachers’ autonomy in real work and life: 1) Chuk’s (2010) empirical study of EFL student teachers’ long-term autonomous development in Hong Kong; 2) Benson’s (2010) case study of teacher autonomy of Hong Kong secondary school language teachers; and 3) Huang’s (2010) narrative inquiry of teacher autonomy.

Chuk’s (2010) longitudinal study investigated the development of four EFL student teachers’ learner autonomy and teacher autonomy dating back to their primary education, spanning their secondary and tertiary education and their overseas immersion semester in multiple settings. She adopted the ‘kaleidoscopic strategy’ (see Benson, 2009) by investigating different perspectives of autonomy with an attempt to portray a holistic picture of her participant student teachers’
journeys of autonomous learning and teaching over time. She also charted the student teachers’ long-term development by tracking the dynamic interplay between self-control on the part of the student teachers and other control within multiple settings over time. Using multiple sources of data such as semi-structured interviews, teaching portfolios, reflective journals and lesson observations, she found the construct of autonomy was highly context-specific, domain-specific and idiosyncratic. She identified their shared patterns of autonomous EFL teaching, which she named ‘autonomy on trial’, ‘autonomy in retreat’, ‘autonomy in bud’, and ‘autonomy in blossom’ respectively. The student teachers’ developing resilience and reflective ability played a significant role in the uneven process of autonomous development. With the intention of reflecting the fluctuating nature of autonomy, Chuk developed an integrated theoretical framework in the form of a complex irregular tornado to represent the autonomous development pathway of student teachers’ learning and teaching. In her study, she regarded student teachers’ learner autonomy and teacher autonomy as two alternative phases of a single activity, both of which were embedded within the development of their personal autonomy.

In Benson’s (2010) multiple-case study of four secondary school English teachers from four different schools in Hong Kong, the gap between teacher education courses and teachers’ day-to-day practice of teaching is exposed. Benson set out to detect the structural and internal constraints on teacher autonomy, and the ways in which teachers found spaces to exercise their discretion within constrained school contexts by means of semi-structured interview. The key constraining forces were found to be ‘Schemes of Work’ (schools’ in-house materials prescribing what teachers should do, with topics, materials and tasks specified) and school-based supervision and surveillance mechanisms. In reality, the extent to which these forces constrained teacher autonomy was mediated by local factors such as students’ overall proficiency level, the leadership of the School by the Principal and the English Panel Chair,
and internal factors such as teacher identities that were constructed over time. There is also evidence of how these Hong Kong secondary school teachers found and created spaces for autonomy. For example, instead of simply carrying out the tasks specified in the ‘Schemes of Work’, they interpreted the requirements and redesigned tasks based on students’ abilities and needs. Some teachers also expanded spaces for alternative activities when they had finished the required tasks. Benson concluded that the extent to which teachers could find and create spaces for autonomy partly depended on their varied school contexts, and partly depended on their biography and identities constructed over time.

Taking quite a different angle from the above two empirical studies, Huang’s (2010) work examines the relationship between teacher identity, teacher agency, and teacher autonomy by scrutinizing his twenty-year teaching experiences in mainland China in narrative form. He roughly divides his teaching experience into three phases: 1) leisure life and blurring identity, 2) establishment of teacher identity, and 3) development of professional ability and teacher autonomy. In the first phase, he didn’t make use of his sufficient free time to seek personal and professional development because he didn’t have a clear idea of his identity as a teacher; in the second phase, he took up the opportunity to go to Singapore to pursue postgraduate study, and it was this experience that helped promote his professional ability which then drove him to gain a much clearer view of what kind of teacher he wanted to be; in the third phase, he made his own decision to obtain his Master’s degree and PhD degree, and then exercised his agency to join in various international conferences, publish papers in domestic and international journals, and participate in ‘communities of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998). Within this last phase he identified himself as not simply a university teacher, but also a good researcher.

Huang uses Benson’s (2010) ‘multi-control’ model to illustrate autonomy from self-control, other control, and no control. In his case, he was capable of finding and creating spaces for autonomy and development in the dynamic
interplay between self-control and other control (his institution’s requirements, teaching materials, teaching methods, institution’s control over teachers’ professional development, etc.). With regard to the relationship between teacher identity, teacher agency, and teacher autonomy, he proposes that the development of teacher autonomy relies on teacher identity and teacher agency, and in turn, the development of teacher autonomy could also enhance teacher identity and agency.

The above three empirical studies examine teacher autonomy as a natural attribute of language teachers. It is afforded and constrained by different learning and working conditions and hence its developmental process is characterized by dynamics and discursiveness. Moreover, it is proven to have a close relationship with teacher identity. These three studies call for further in-depth research on the long-term development of teacher autonomy and the relationship between teacher identity and teacher autonomy. The purpose of this study is to contribute to teacher autonomy research from these perspectives.

2.2 The concept of teacher identity

Recent literature regards identity as an important analytic tool for research in education because it allows a dynamic approach to conceptualize the relationship between the individual and the world (see Gee, 2001). Drawing on the developments of identity research in social science, researchers in education reject the early modernist conceptions of identity or subjectivity advocated by Descartes, Rousseau, and Kant, for whom the self is centered, self-conscious, self-consistent, self-transcendental, and immune to physiological, social, and historical influences. Instead, they place emphasis on the postmodern/poststructuralist view of identity - multiple, shifting, in conflict, and crucially related to educational, social, cultural, and political contexts.

In the field of education studies, identity began to be used as an analytic lens to understand teachers and their teaching in the 1990s (see Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004). Varghese, Morgan, Johnston,
and Johnson (2005) note that we need to understand language teachers if we want to understand language teaching and learning, and in order to understand teachers, we need to know “the professional, cultural, political, and individual identities which they claim or which are assigned to them” (p. 22). Teacher identity, in particular teacher professional identity, pertains to how teachers see themselves as they continuously interpret and reinterpret their interaction with the context. It is often regarded as being important for teachers’ self-efficacy, commitment, and development, especially when they cope with educational changes and implement innovations in teaching practices (Beijaard, Verloop & Vermunt, 2000, p. 750). In this section, I will first introduce how the concept of teacher identity is conceptualized in educational research and language education and then review relevant empirical studies in second/foreign language education contexts.

2.2.1 Conceptualizing teacher identity

The concept of identity focuses on the person from a social perspective (Wenger, 1998, p. 145). It is a “relational phenomenon” (Beijaard et al., 2004, p. 108) involving similarities and differences between ourselves and others (Danielewicz, 2001; Watson, 2006). Identity has different meanings in the literature. For example, Gee (2001) understands it as “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’ in a given context” (p. 99). He sketches out four ways to view identity: 1) nature-identity (a state developed from forces in nature); 2) institution-identity (a position authorized by authorities within institutions); 3) discourse-identity (an individual trait recognized in discourse/dialogue of/with ‘rational’ groups); and 4) affinity-identity (experiences shared in the practice of ‘affinity groups’) (Gee, 2001, p. 100).

Gee (2001) offers a model to learn how an individual is recognized by others within given contexts, while Weedon (1987), who prefers to use the term ‘subjectivity’ rather than ‘identity’, tends to focus on how the individual’s own feeling of his/her position in the world. She defines subjectivity as “the conscious
and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relationship to the world” (Weedon, 1987, p. 32). A more comprehensive understanding of identity which integrates the two perspectives together can be found in Beijaard (1995) who defines it as “who or what someone is, the various meanings someone can attach to oneself or the meanings attributed to oneself by others” (p. 282). In Murray and Christison (2011), identity is seen as “the view that individuals have of themselves and of their place(s) in the world in the past, now, and in the future” (p. 5). It emphasizes both the relational and dynamic nature of identity. Alternatively following Buzzelli and Johnston (2002), Varghese et al. (2005) use different terms to explain different perspectives of identity, such as ‘assigned identity’ which means “the identity imposed on by others” and ‘claimed identity’ which means “the identity or identities one acknowledges or claims for oneself” (p. 23).

Benson, Barkhuizen, Bodycott, and Brown (2013) question the debates on whether identity refers to how people see and represent themselves or how they are seen and represented by others, noting that they “centre on false dichotomies” because the concept of identity itself “legitimately refers to several facets of our relations to our selves and the world, involving both the ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ self, the self and others, and the individual and the social” (p. 18).

Apart from the definition of identity, identity formation/construction has been another central issue of identity research. It has been more or less agreed that identity formation is “an ongoing process” (Beijaard et al., 2000, p. 750) and “can never be ultimately completed” (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 3) because identities are dynamic, multiple, complex, and they are not only constructed, reconstructed, reformed, or dissolved at given time or space, but also develop as the individual exercises agency to change the social context s/he is in.

In the field of general education, teacher professional identity is defined as “how teachers see themselves based on their interpretations of their continuing interaction with their context” (Canrinus, Helms-Lorenz, Beijaard, Buitink, &
Hofman, 2011, p. 594), or “the way that teachers, both individually and collectively, view and understand themselves as teachers” (Mockler, 2011, p. 518). A more specific definition can be found in Beijaard (1995) and Beijaard et al. (2000) in which teachers’ professional identity is defined on the basis of three distinctive categories: the subject one teaches, the teacher’s relationship with students, and the teacher’s role or role conception. In correspondence “teachers derive their professional identity from (mostly combinations of) the ways they see themselves as subject matter experts, pedagogical experts, and didactical experts” (Beijaard et al., 2000, p. 751).

It is true that teacher identities are directly linked to the teaching profession itself and teachers may share one or more professional identities, especially ‘assigned’ identities. They may also have their distinctive identities which have a lot to do with the values they hold, their emotions, personal experiences past and current, and many other internal factors. Therefore, it is more appropriate to view teacher identity from the duality of the personal dimension as well as the professional dimension (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Day, Kington, Stobart, & Sammons, 2006) rather than confining it to the single perspective of professional identity, although there is an inextricable linkage between the two dimensions and sometimes there is no clear-cut distinction between them.

In fact, teacher identity is even more complex as it is not only a construct based on teachers’ personal and professional experiences and their beliefs and values of what kind of a teacher they should be and they hope to be, but is influenced by the changing personal, educational, social and political circumstances. Mockler (2011, p. 521) points out three domains which work together to impact on the formation of teacher identity - personal experience (teachers’ personal lives outside of the professional realm), professional context (education contexts where we find career histories, professional learning and development experience), and the external political environment (discourses, attitudes and understandings surrounding education that exist external to the
Within these three domains, teachers may perceive multi-faceted teacher identities, which, in harmony or in conflict, undergo constructions across time and space and work together to affect teachers’ “efficacy and professional development as well as their ability and willingness to cope with educational change and to implement innovations in their own teaching practice” (Beijaard et al., 2000, p. 750).

Since this study understands the participants’ experiences from their own perspectives, it gives close attention to teacher identity from their descriptions of experiences. Therefore, in the current study, teacher identity is defined as the teacher’s understanding of his/her places in the world spanning the past, present, and future. Prominent personal and professional identities, which strongly influence teacher decisions and actions, are all the concerns of this study. In this study, teacher identities will be examined through narratives, that is, what teachers say about themselves and their relations with others. It is assumed that each individual EM teacher constructed multiple teacher identities in his/her career and life and each identity is subjected to change across time and contexts. This study places an emphasis on how changing teacher identities affect the exercise of teacher autonomy at different stages of the EM teachers’ careers and lives.

### 2.2.2 Empirical studies on teacher identity

In applied linguistics and second/foreign language education, the key areas of research on teacher identity are: 1) the sociocultural identities of language teachers, in particular non-native English-speaking teachers in TESOL (Duff & Uchida, 1997; Johnson, 1992; Liu, 1999; Pavlenko, 2003; Varghese et al., 2005); 2) the construction of teacher identities through language and discourse (Clarke, 2008; Kanno & Stuart, 2011; Kiernan, 2010; Trent, 2011; Trent & Gao, 2009; Tsui, 2007).

Research on the identities of non-native English-speaking teachers - student teachers in TESOL programmes or in-service TESOL teachers - is often related to
culture, power, and status. The dichotomy of native English speakers (NESs) and non-native English speakers (NNESs) is regarded as “power driven, identity laden, and confidence affecting” (Liu, 1999, p. 86). The social identities – NESs and NNESs – are not the major concern of this study as it is conducted in the Chinese educational context where most EM teachers are NNESs.

Apart from language teachers’ social identities, the complexity of teacher identity formation is investigated from different perspectives, including their in-class practices (Richards, 2006), biographies, and the co-construction of teacher identities and context. This study focuses on the latter two perspectives.

Trent (2011) investigated six pre-service English teachers in a teacher education programme discourse in Hong Kong. Examining their identity formation through ‘identity-in-practice’ and ‘identity-in-discourse’, he focused on their teaching practices on one hand, and their language and subject positions within the teaching discourse in Hong Kong schools on the other hand. The findings showed that the trajectory of their identity formation relied on the influence of their teachers in the past, their perception of current teaching practices in Hong Kong schools, and their imagination of their possible identities in the future such as ‘inspiring teachers’; through discourse these pre-service teachers were confronted with the antagonism between ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ teacher, and in this situation they placed a premium on attaining the identity of ‘modern’ teacher. Trent holds the view that this antagonism must be addressed because it may lead to antagonistic relationships between student teachers and more experienced teachers when they occupy full-time teaching positions. He suggests that teacher education programmes guide pre-service teachers to explore educational discourses and question different identities so as to help them overcome antagonism.

Trent and Gao (2009) found the similar antagonism between the ‘claimed’ and ‘ideal’ identities of second-career English language teachers and the ‘imposed identities’ endorsed by Hong Kong schools. These teachers chose
‘non-participation’ (Wenger, 1998) as a strategy to cope with the diverse and sometimes antagonistic meanings and practices they encountered in the process of identity formation. The form of ‘non-participation’ in this study included the second-career teachers’ recognition of the limits to their ability to negotiate with others over established teaching and learning practices. Their colleagues and school managers often had limited involvement in their classroom practices. The teachers were not positioned as full participants in the school community. However, they were allowed spaces to exercise their agency and to work towards the type of teacher they wanted to be. Trent and Gao (2009) warned that if peripherality or marginality removed this space and solely required these teachers to conform to the imposed teacher identities and traditional teaching practices, it might lead to negative career experience and made it difficult to retain their career decisions.

The emphasis of the above research is on how individual teachers construct their identities within constrained contexts. However, the collective and collaborative dimensions of teacher identity formation, and the co-construction of teacher identity and community are underplayed. Adams and Marshall (1996) view identity development as a transactional process in that an “individual’s personal or social identity not only is shaped, in part, by the living systems around the individual but the individual’s identity can shape and change the nature of these living systems” (p. 432).

Clarke (2008) made an attempt to fill in the gap in the literature. In his examination of a cohort of student teachers in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), he not only showed how the language teachers’ identities were shaped by the power of discourse and community, but also provided evidence on how community was co-constructed through their mutual engagement in the joint enterprise of learning to teach: the teachers worked together on common tasks, constructed new forms of knowledge together, shared experiences, aims, hopes, fears and dreams (Clarke, 2008, p. 88). Although they met difficulties and
constraints when connecting with wider communities such as schools, they were still able to reconstruct these communities by introducing new artefacts or teaching practices.

In summary, past research on teacher identity mainly focuses on its construction within different sociocultural, institutional, and classroom contexts and its positive and negative effects on teachers’ professional actions or exercise of teacher autonomy. In this sense, teacher identity is a useful lens to examine the concept of teacher autonomy. However, little research is conducted on the construction of teacher identity in a long-term process and how teacher identity changes affect the development of teacher autonomy in this process. This study views both teacher identity and teacher autonomy as processes and examines their manifestations in the teacher participants’ career-long experiences.

2.3 The relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher identity

Having reviewed the literature of teacher autonomy and teacher identity, the following common characteristics between the two concepts can be summarized:

1) They are both concerned with the individual and the social;
2) They are both dynamic in that they change across time and contexts and hence should be both viewed as processes;
3) The degrees and multidimensionality of teacher autonomy seem to bear certain relationship with the multiplicity of teacher identity.

Judging from these common characteristics, it is reasonable to state that the concepts of teacher autonomy and teacher identity are interrelated. I will further explain why and how I connect them in this study.

Huang (2013) unveils the problem of current theory of autonomy in second/foreign language education. He highlights that most research focuses on either the personal/individual or the social aspect of autonomy instead of the interaction between the two (Huang, 2013, p. 73). Among the multiple dimensions of teacher autonomy (see 2.1.1 and 2.1.2), the technical-psychological and
motivational dimensions place an emphasis on the individual while the political and sociocultural dimensions place an emphasis on the social. Most research is inclined to highlight one dimension and ignore others. This study contends that the four dimensions mutually influence each other. They are equally important and should be investigated collectively. In order to examine the interaction between the individual and social aspects of teacher autonomy, I adopt the concept of teacher identity as a lens.

In this study, identity is assumed to help address the individual-context paradox in autonomy research. Unlike the concept of autonomy, identity is both individual and social (Beijaard et al., 2004; Benson et al., 2013; Schempp, Sparkes, & Templin, 1999). Connecting the two concepts may contribute to an in-depth understanding of autonomy and the interrelationship between the two concepts. In line with Chik (2007), I argue that identity plays a navigating role for autonomy. Her study demonstrated that the formation of a well-grounded learner identity motivated one learner to take good control of learning, whereas with a relatively frustrated learning identity, another learner failed to do so. Different from her study, I attempt to investigate identity and autonomy in a long-term process. I propose that the teacher’s multiple identities change across time and contexts and they strongly affect the development of teacher autonomy. Figure 2.2 shows the conceptual framework which is to be used to analyze data in this study. It exemplifies the juxtaposition of multiple identities and its influence on the development of teacher autonomy.
Figure 2.2 illustrates the importance of time and context on the formation of multiple identities (Teacher identity 1, 2, 3, and others), that is, the dynamics of teacher autonomy. The teacher and the context are connected by a left right arrow due to their co-constructing relationship. The multiple identities develop across time and contexts. They may influence each other and occupy different positions in the teacher’s conception of the self. Normally there is a core identity playing a dominant role in influencing the teacher’s exercise of autonomy. I highlight “Teacher identity 2” to give an example of core identity. Influenced by these identities, the teacher exercises different degrees of autonomy on diverse aspects of teacher work. The figure indicates a two-way arrow connecting identities and autonomy to show their reciprocal influence on each other. The dotted lines between the two-way arrows mean that they affect rather than decide the change of each other. The up and down arrows symbolize the discursiveness and fluctuation of teacher autonomy in a long term.
2.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has discussed the concepts of teacher autonomy and teacher identity adopted in this study and their relationship. Teacher autonomy is viewed from multiple dimensions and the teacher’s control over multiple aspects of work. The teacher’s intentional change of the self or context is interpreted as a crucial manifestation of teacher control. The concept of teacher identity is adopted to examine teacher autonomy because it views the individual teacher from a social perspective. It not only helps understand the teacher participants’ changing identities as they interact with changing contexts, but also helps examine how the different identities affect the long-term development of teacher autonomy. In Chapter 3 I will introduce the research design including the research methodology which allows investigating teachers’ experiences from their own perspectives and the whole procedure of this study.
Chapter 3 Research design

In this chapter, I first introduce the case study research method adopted by the study. I then describe in detail the context of the institution where the case study participants work and the participant sampling process. In the following sections, I introduce the researcher’s role in the whole process, followed by the ethical concerns, the data collection, processing, and analysis procedures. At the end of this chapter, I discuss the trustworthiness of this study.

3.1 Research method

The study employed a qualitative case study methodology. Merriam (2009) notes that “the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case” (p. 40). A case is a “bounded system” (Smith, 1978) or “an integrated system” (Stake, 1995), which means it has physical and/or temporal boundaries (Nunan & Baily, 2010, p. 161). As this study aimed to explore the long-term development of teacher autonomy through holistic and detailed analyses of individual EM teachers and their learning, working, and living contexts which comprised bounded systems, it is best defined as a case study research.

This qualitative case study draws from the theoretical field of postmodernism. It recognizes that truth is relative and reality is “multiple, contradictory, and changing” (Hood, 2009, p. 68). Therefore, it was designed to examine teacher autonomy from the teacher participants’ own perspectives. It was an expectation that in order to understand the lived experiences of the EM teachers, case studies would be composed from the narratives of the teachers’ real-life contexts. Case studies are attractive in that they have “a high degree of completeness, depth of analysis, and readability” and have the potential to generate new hypotheses or build theories (Duff, 2008, p. 43). Concurring with these advantages, this study used multiple methods of data collection for thick
descriptions of each case and for the purpose of enhancing the trustworthiness of results. It also attempted to build a conceptual framework based on the unique experiences of the case study participants. Moreover, this study was able to provide developmental evidence by investigating the career-long experiences of EM teachers.

This study was designed as a multiple case study. All cases were instruments to facilitate deeper understandings of teacher autonomy (Stake, 1995). Selecting more than one case increases “the sense of representativeness of, or variation among, cases” (Duff, 2008, p. 36) and makes the analytic conclusions more powerful than those from a single case (Yin, 2014, p. 64). Duff (2008) suggests that “four to six focal participants” may be appropriate for a multiple case study. Four EM teachers, Philip, Snow, Daisy, and Jacky, from the same institutional context, were selected in this study (The selection process is presented in 3.3). Each teacher was selected as a holistic case because of the expectation that there would be variations of disposition, background, experience, and trajectory of development. Whilst they shared the same working conditions, their attitudes, values, and conceptions were also expected to vary from one another.

The value of case study methodology is sometimes questioned because of what some believe to be an issue of the findings having the inability to be generalized to other populations. Yin (2014) contends that case studies are “generalizable to theoretical propositions and not to populations or universes” (p. 21). By differentiating between intrinsic case study and instrumental case study, Stake (2000) points out that an intrinsic case study is undertaken primarily because the researcher is interested in the particular case itself, whereas an instrumental case study examines the particular case “to provide insight into an issue or redraw a generalization” (p. 237). According to Stake, instrumental case studies have the potential to make theoretical generalizations. Merriam (2009) explains that readers or users of the qualitative case study determine the extent to
which the findings can be applied to their contexts (p. 226). The obligation of the researcher is to provide thick descriptions of research contexts and participants to enable readers or users to make decisions.

The major purpose of this study is to gain an in-depth understanding of the long-term development of teacher autonomy rather than attempting to create findings that are generalizable to all teachers. The concept of autonomy recognizes the uniqueness of individuals and contexts and thus allows different interpretations (Sinclair, 2000). Nevertheless, several attempts were made to increase the possibility of transferability of the findings. It has provided thick descriptions of the research context and participants for readers and researchers to seek insights. It has paid attention to participant variations (e.g. length of time in the profession, education background, gender, experiences), with the intention to increase the possibility of generalization to teachers in similar situations.

### 3.2 Research context

A detailed account of the research context is offered here. A thick description of the institutional context as well as the Departmental/School context where the case study participants worked is deemed important in this study for two main reasons. First, it may give readers a sense of “being there” (Stake, 1995, p. 63) and deepen their understanding of the EM teachers’ behaviors and actions within this particular context. Second, it may help other researchers and teachers interested in teacher autonomy see a process they could reenact in order to judge whether their settings share similar situations.

#### 3.2.1 Institutional context

The institution in which the study was carried out is the workplace of the teacher participants. I call it University A (“UA” henceforth, pseudonym) in this research. The decision to select this research setting was driven by the five factors - feasibility, familiarity, accessibility, time, and costs (Hatch, 2002; Walford, 2001).
UA has a unique history, culture and set of politics; and its English major undergraduate programme also has a thirteen-year-long history, involving the employment of teachers who have different qualifications, backgrounds, and experiences, thus making it a possible site to collect rich data. Another reason for the choice of site was its ease of access. As an academic staff member of UA, I was prompted to select this institution as the research site because I am quite familiar with the institution and the EM teachers. UA not only provided an ideal opportunity for exploring the concept of teacher autonomy, but also saved time and expense.

UA is a non-prestigious 7 comprehensive 8 university, located in a medium-sized city in the east of mainland China. Both the city and the university were at the stage of seeking development to meet the challenge of the rapidly changing and developing society. UA, founded in 1971, was originally a Teachers’ College whose task was to educate prospective teachers. At that time, it only offered zhuanke programmes. In 2000 it developed into a comprehensive university and began to offer benke programmes with the approval of the MOE. This was a big leap for the institution.

At the time of investigation, UA had 23,000 full-time students and over 1,700 staff (about 1,200 academic staff and 500 administrative staff). It offered 62 benke programmes leading to Bachelor’s Degree and Double Degrees covering various disciplines. In order to seek further development and to be more and more widely recognized, UA was paying special attention to the construction of a comprehensive campus site (extending the campus area, building new buildings, installing advanced facilities, etc.), developing excellent teaching teams, building distinctive benke programmes and distinguished teacher projects, and applying for

7 In China, prestigious universities refer to those that are directly administered by the MOE and some central ministries. “985” and “211” institutions are generally considered to be the most prestigious ones. Non-prestigious universities are the others that are administered by provincial and municipal governments (Yu, Stith, Liu, & Chen, 2010).
8 Higher education institutions in China are categorized into comprehensive universities which cover almost all disciplines, multidisciplinary universities (such as natural sciences and technology, finance and economics, etc.), and single-disciplinary universities (such as agriculture, forestry, art, etc.) (Gu, Li, & Wang, 2009, p. 28).
teaching and research projects sponsored by the provincial government and the central government. All these developments were believed to help the institution gain both grants and a good fame, which would in turn become advantageous conditions to attract students and academics with high prestige and doctoral degrees. In recent years, in order to support the development of the university, UA was in urgent need of ‘high-level talents (gaocengci rencai)’, meaning those who have doctoral degrees or strong research records such as academicians (yuanshi) from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and Chinese Academy of Engineering, Changjiang scholars\(^9\), PhD supervisors, etc.

Like all other public HEIs of mainland China, UA has been administered by government bodies ever since its establishment. It is a provincial HEI\(^{10}\) (shengshu gaoxiao) which is supervised by the State Council via MOE as its executive body and controlled by the provincial government via its education department. Prior to 2012, the municipal government, instead of the provincial government, was its major governing and funding authority. As a higher authority, the provincial government supervised it and appointed its leadership. Since 2012, it has been mainly controlled by the provincial government. Correspondingly UA has been receiving much more funding and resources than ever before.

Like all other HEIs of mainland China, within the university, UA is managed by the principal responsibility system under the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership. The central administration committee includes the president, six vice presidents, CCP secretary and vice secretary. The president is appointed by the provincial government and assumes full responsibility for the university’s teaching, research, and administrative work under the leadership and support of the CCP committee. The president is assisted by many administrative departments, which handle affairs such as teaching, research, personnel, CCP

---

\(^9\) The Changjiang Scholars Award Programme was set up in 1998 jointly by the central government and the Li Ka Shing Foundation to honor and support experts to engage in frontier research (Zhou, 2006, p. 78).

\(^{10}\) The public HEIs affiliated with the MOE and other central ministries are called central HEIs (zhongyang gaoxiao); those affiliated with provincial governments and municipal governments are called provincial HEIs (shengshu gaoxiao).
membership, etc. UA consists of twenty-two academic units, including twenty schools and two centers which are responsible for teaching politics and college English to all students respectively. Although these academic units have their own internal administration structures to manage teaching, research, and student affairs, they need to defer to the decisions of the university leadership and administrative departments.

At UA, evaluation on academic and administrative staff is primarily in the mechanism for determining the promotion of teachers via professional titles. Promotion is the main incentive for most staff as it has a direct impact on their salary, status, competitiveness in applying for research grants, and so on. Staff members are allowed to apply for promotion only on the condition that they have held an assigned title for a minimum of five years. The quotas for promotion are allocated by the provincial government. Since there are no quota limits for lecturers, the promotion system states low requirements for teachers seeking promotion from Assistant Teachers to Lecturers. In contrast, because of limited quotas, it stipulates quite strict and high criteria for the promotion to the levels of Associate Professor and Professor. According to the statistics provided by UA, about 70% and 24% of its academic staff are facing competition for the academic ranks of Associate Professor and Professor.

The professional title promotion system of UA is sophisticated. First, the candidate’s performance in teaching, research, and community service is scored by related administrative departments according to the promotion system’s regulations (see Table 3.1 for detailed components in each aspect and Figure 3.1 for the proportions of each aspect takes up in the system). All candidates are ranked based on the overall scores they earn. Second, the review committee, which is normally comprised of the Deans of all schools (all department heads in the past), behind closed doors, review candidates’ files and vote for the candidates they favor. The final decision is made based on the number of votes a candidate gains from the committee. It has been a hidden rule that prospective candidates
must pay close attention to personal relationships with committee members, because social connections (guanxi) are one of the keys to success in the competition.

Figure 3.1 shows that research takes up the largest proportion in the promotion system. Each candidate seeking promotion to Associate Professor or Professor is supposed to submit ten representative research outcomes, in forms of successfully applied projects or publications, in maximum. For example, UA recognizes three levels of research projects: 1) those granted by the nation-level organizations and funds (such as the National Natural Science Foundation of China, National Planning Office of Social Science and Philosophy, etc.), 2) those

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(including annual teaching hours, number of courses, student evaluation results);</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher research* and scientific research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(including projects, publications, and awards)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Administrative work;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>head teacher;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervising students to attend important contests;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>committee member of academic organizations;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>awards received from community service</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Professional title promotion system at UA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teaching</th>
<th>Research</th>
<th>Community service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teaching tasks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including annual teaching hours, number of courses, student evaluation results);</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher research* and scientific research</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(including projects, publications, and awards)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative work;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>head teacher;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supervising students to attend important contests;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>committee member of academic organizations;</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>awards received from community service</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Teacher research means applied research that is concerned with teaching and learning. At UA, teacher research is overseen by Academic Registry (AR), and scientific research is charged by the Scientific Research Department.

Figure 3.1 The proportions of teaching, research, and community service in UA’s promotion system
granted by province-level organizations and the State Council ministries and commissions (such as the MOE), and 3) those granted by the education departments and commissions of provincial and municipal governments. If an academic staff can successfully apply for a project from the three levels of organizations, s/he can earn the scores of 20, 10, and 4 respectively. The system categorizes domestic presses into four levels (‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, and ‘D’) and journals into six levels (‘A’, ‘B’, ‘C’, ‘D’, ‘E’, and ‘F’). Each level is assigned different scores. In recent years, competitive candidates have been expected to have one published book and several publications on core journals listed in the following: the Chinese Science Citation Index (CSCI), the Chinese Social Science Citation Index (CSSCI), the Science Citation Index (SCI), the Social Science Citation Index (SSCI), and the Engineering Index (EI).

In addition to research, candidates’ performances in teaching and community service are also assessed by the committee. These two aspects make up a small proportion of the promotion categories. Related requirements for these aspects are not strict. Compared with research, there is no big gap amongst candidates in respect to these two aspects. As long as the staff member has completed the required teaching hours, taught at least two courses, received positive evaluation from students, and made a contribution to the university and community in related fields, s/he will have fulfilled the requirements for these aspects.

In spite of the heavy weight of research in the promotion system, UA does not provide sufficient support for the academic staff to do research. It only awards bonuses to those who have gained high-level projects or produced high-level publications. Its financial support for university projects normally ranges from RMB 2,000 to 3,000. Research activities such as symposiums and workshops inside the campus are scarce. The academic staff members who hold the professional titles of Associate Professor and Professor have the priority to attend conferences outside the university.
The description of UA in this section indicates that it is a dynamic rather than a static entity which makes changes under the pressure of broader educational, sociocultural, and political contexts. Due to its great dependence on the government, the university development plan and teacher evaluation system are the outcomes of its interaction with government bodies. In the next section, I will describe the context of the School of Foreign Languages where EM teachers work for a deeper understanding of the working conditions of the teacher participants.

3.2.2 The context of School of Foreign Languages

As a grassroots teaching and research unit of UA, the School of Foreign Languages was founded in early 2013. It was composed of four departments and one center: Department of English, Department of Business English, Department of Japanese, and Center of Experiments and Tests. It had about 800 students coming from 26 provinces and autonomous regions across China and 52 staff including 33 non-native English teachers, 2 native English teachers, 9 Japanese teachers, 1 Russian teacher, and 7 administrative officers and assistants. The School has developed out of the former Department of Foreign Languages. The leadership has not changed much. The former Department Head, three Associate Heads, CCP secretary and associate secretary directly shifted to become the present Dean, Associate Deans, CCP secretary and associate secretary of the School. Each department/center appointed department heads and associate heads. As the School was newly established, the administrative power remained in the hands of the former leadership instead of transferring to the new department heads and associate heads. The Dean has taken full responsibility for all the administrative affairs within the School. The three Associate Deans assist the Dean by taking charge of specific aspects of administrative work. The CCP secretary and associate secretary support the Dean in governing the School and administer CCP member and Communist Youth League affairs.
Before the establishment of the School, all the academic staff were allocated across seven teaching-research sectors (\textit{jiaoyanshi}): comprehensive English, literature, linguistics, business English, translation, English teacher education, and Japanese. Each sector had a Director and/or an Associate Director in charge of the members’ teaching and research activities. The sectors and Directors were in a large sense nominal as there were neither physical places nor financial and personnel support for them. These organizations were dismissed in 2013 as all the teachers were divided into departments.

Among all the sub-units of the School, the Department of English had the longest history and had the largest number of students and teachers. It had been offering the TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) programme, a three-year \textit{zhuanke} programme, ever since 1980 and the English major programme, a four-year \textit{benke} programme, since 2001. The \textit{zhuanke} programme prepares students to be future English teachers while the \textit{benke} programme does not. The \textit{benke} programme is run based on the \textit{EM Curriculum (2000)} designed by FLT Advisory Committee, where the first two years focuses on students’ language proficiency and the last two years places more emphasis on disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge. The curriculum of the \textit{zhuanke} programme is also based on the \textit{EM Curriculum}. However, it mainly focuses on proficiency courses.

The 33 EM teachers teach both \textit{zhuanke} and \textit{benke} students. Their coursework is directly arranged by the Dean. They can also select their preferred courses in advance. In addition to teaching, the EM teachers all supervise students’ graduation paper writing and support their teaching practicums. Some play the role of head teachers (\textit{banzhuren}) whose responsibility is to take charge of students’ learning and living affairs. Some voluntarily mentor students who enter English contests.

A noteworthy phenomenon is that most teachers have no workstation or office. Only the leaders and administrative staff have offices. There is only one
common room for all the teachers where they can take a rest, meet students, and store personal belongings. Many teachers like to stay in the reading room where there are tables, sofas, and chairs to take a rest and the latest academic journals and newspapers to read.

The leadership of the School of Foreign Languages used to show little care for teachers’ development, especially their professional title promotion. In recent years, the university ranked all Departments/Schools at the end of each year based on the total number of high-level teaching and research projects and publications of their staff. It also urged them to develop the staff’s professional titles and academic degrees and recruit ‘high-level talents’. Confronted with the top-down pressure, the leadership gave more attention to the staff’s development in these aspects. Seeing that more than 70% of the staff held low-level professional titles (Lecturers and Assistant Teachers) and almost all of them only held Bachelor’s degrees and Master’s degrees, the Dean emphasized the importance of professional title promotion and doctoral study in almost every staff meeting. Most staff were not highly motivated because of the difficulty of meeting the high teacher promotion criteria of UA and passing the national doctoral entrance examination. Under these circumstances, the Dean adopted some strategies to stimulate professional development. For example, in order to encourage the staff to apply for projects, he always analyzed the challenges and opportunities for them. He forced each staff member to publish or write at least one research article each year, otherwise, they would be fined according to the professional titles they held. Normally each Associate Professor or Professor would be fined RMB 200 and each Lecturer or Assistant Teacher would be fined RMB 100. He also organized special meetings to afford each staff the opportunity to talk about their research and development plans. Nevertheless, the Department/School seldom supported staff to attend conferences, symposiums, workshops or provide necessary guidance and mentoring in relation to their research activities.
The primary intention of this study was to examine how teacher autonomy was afforded and constrained within the particular working context of language teachers. Therefore, it is of great importance to understand the working conditions of the EM teacher participants before launching into the narratives of their professional trajectories. In this section, I have provided a historical overview of UA and the School of Foreign Languages, which reveals the opportunities and constraints of the EM teacher participants’ working context. In the next section, I will introduce the teacher participant sampling process for a deeper understanding of the information of the EM teachers at the School of Foreign Languages and the particularities of the selected teacher participants.

3.3 Teacher participant sampling

This study was designed as a multiple case study. The cases were instrumental in that they led to a better understanding of the concept of teacher autonomy. Stake (1995, p. 6) suggests that “balance and variety” and “opportunity to learn” are important when selecting cases. Following this principle, I paid attention to the similarities and variations among the EM teachers at the School of Foreign Languages. In this section, I introduce the backgrounds of all EM teachers, the participant sampling process that was employed, and information about the selected participants.

As mentioned in 3.2.2, at the time of this study there are 33 EM teachers at the School of Foreign Languages. Table 3.2 roughly divides them into three groups according to the different phases in which they were recruited by UA. The three groups of EM teachers presented with variations in their backgrounds, qualifications, experiences, and length of time in the career. I used purposeful sampling to pick “information-rich” (Patton, 1987, p. 58) cases from each group. The first selection criterion was that the teachers who were to be prospective informants needed to be hospitable to the inquiry of this study (Stake, 1995, p. 4). They needed to be willing to participate in the study and share their life stories
and be both critical and reflective in relation to their experiences. The second criterion was that they needed to be in some respects representative of a larger population (Gerring, 2007, p. 145). Selecting representative cases from each group allows for variations and provides conditions for an intensive investigation and analysis of data.

Table 3.2 Backgrounds of EM teachers at UA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of teachers</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic degree</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Ten received zhuanke</td>
<td>(Two received zhuanke</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>education and then</td>
<td>education and then</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>obtained the bachelor’s</td>
<td>obtained the bachelor’s</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>degree by attending</td>
<td>degree by attending</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>top-up benke programmes)</td>
<td>top-up benke programmes)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA (Part-time)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA (Full-time)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PhD</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrative posts</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: BA: Bachelor of Arts; MA: Master of Arts; PhD: Doctor of Philosophy

As shown in Table 3.2, the six teachers recruited by UA from 1980-1991 commenced their teaching professions as soon as they graduated from the university. They were born throughout the 1950s and 1960s and enrolled in BA/TEFL (Bachelor of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language) programmes between 1977 and 1982, the early years of China’s restoration of NCEE. Due to the limited quotas for enrollment at that critical time in 1980, competition was so intense that the examination success rate was only 4.5 % (Hayhoe, 1991, p. 130). They received free university education. In addition, the
government supported their daily expenses and assigned them employment upon graduation. Although they only had a Bachelor’s degree, they held high academic titles. Currently, two hold the positions of Dean and Associate Dean; one was once the CCP secretary of the former Department of Foreign Languages; all the others were once directors of teaching-research sections.

By contrast, the qualifications of the EM teachers recruited from 1992 to 2005 were not so satisfactory. Most of them were born in the 1970s. They first attended zhuanke TEFL programmes and then benke TEFL programmes by taking top-up examinations (zhuanshengben kaoshi). They were enrolled as self-financing students who paid all the expenses at university. Their language proficiency, knowledge base, and teaching ability varied. As required by UA, all the academic staff recruited after 1990 must obtain a Master’s degree. Most of these teachers chose part-time MA programmes because they could easily get enrolled, spend a much longer time to graduate than full-time students (some teachers spent around nine years doing their Master’s study), and the requirements for part-time Master students were not so strict as those for full-time students. They began to learn to do research in order to fulfill the MA programmes’ requirement of completing the Master thesis. However, most of them did not engage in research after obtaining the Master’s degree. Table 3.2 shows that most teachers are Lecturers. Confronted with UA’s promotion system, they are struggling to be promoted to Associate Professors. Five are newly appointed Associate Department Heads. Some others have played the role of Directors and Associate Directors of teaching-research sectors in the past.

Between 2006 and 2008, UA developed the employment system which required that applicants must have a Master’s degree or higher. The School recruited seven new academic staff upon their graduation from full-time MA programmes and one who has a PhD degree. From 2009 onwards, UA mainly recruited ‘high-level talents’. In spite of the preferential treatment it offers for PhD qualified employees, UA is not competitive enough to attract highly qualified
experts in the field of English or related fields. It only recruited one staff member who had a PhD degree in 2010. The two EM teachers who have a PhD were appointed the Associate Dean and Department Head respectively.

After gaining the permission of the gatekeeper, the Dean of the School of Foreign Languages, in late December, 2012, in my researcher role I began to contact the EM teachers and conduct one-on-one interviews with them. Throughout January, 2013, twenty-three EM teachers were interviewed. The interviews were unstructured, as opposed to being structured, as my purpose was to listen to the life stories of the teachers instead of asking specific questions at this stage. The whole interview processes were audiotaped with teachers’ consents so that they could be referred to later on for the selection of prospective case study participants.

Bearing in mind that “not all cases will work out well” (Stake, 1995, p. 7). I selected seven participants after careful consideration and negotiation with some of the interviewees. Each signed an informed consent form (see Appendix 1), which consisted of two parts - the basic information about the research and their consent to participate in the investigation. I also gave them a brief oral introduction so that they were fully informed. In this PhD thesis, I report the four most informative and representative cases. Table 3.3 lists the background information of the final four case study teacher participants.

The four EM teacher participants, Philip, Snow, Daisy, and Jacky (pseudonyms), work at the same institution, but have different education qualifications and working experiences. They were recruited by UA in 1991, 1998, 2004, and 2010 respectively. Daisy and Jacky joined UA as soon as each had completed their undergraduate study. Philip worked in another university for four years before joining UA. Snow, who has a PhD degree, was employed by UA in 2010 as a ‘high-level talent’. Before joining UA she had been employed in three educational institutions. I did not intentionally select the EM teachers assuming administrative posts. Snow and Jacky did not hold administrative posts when they
were selected as participants. Neither did they manage any administrative work during this investigation. Nonetheless, it is a noticeable phenomenon that academics holding administrative posts in Chinese HEIs. The detailed narratives of the four participants are presented in Chapters 4 to 7.

Table 3.3 Background information of participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher participants</th>
<th>Years of working</th>
<th>Degrees earned</th>
<th>Professional title</th>
<th>Administrative posts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Associate Professor (2002- )</td>
<td>Associate Dean of School of Foreign Languages (2013- present); Associate Head of Department of Foreign Languages (2004-2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>PhD; MA; BA</td>
<td>Associate Professor (2004- )</td>
<td>Head of Department of English (2013-present)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>MA; BA</td>
<td>Lecturer (2004- )</td>
<td>Associate Director of comprehensive English teaching-research sector (2009-2012); Director of extensive reading teaching-research sector (2006-2009)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacky</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>MA; BA</td>
<td>Lecturer (2009- )</td>
<td>Associate Head of Department of English (2013-present)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.4 Researcher’s role and ethics

In this qualitative case study, as the researcher, I played many roles. First, as a researcher, I was the “primary instrument of data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 52). When collecting data, I tried to “be enmeshed in the study” instead of being “a disinterested, objective observer” (Hood, 2009, p. 71). I was conscious of my “verbal and nonverbal behavior” (Glesne, 2006, p. 46) and made efforts to avoid negative impacts on the participants. Furthermore, I developed the habit of reflecting on each field visit I made to the research site, which helped determine whether I had collected rich enough information and plan what else I
needed to learn in the next visit.

In addition, I took up the mental position of a learner. As an academic staff member of UA and the colleague of the participants, I was aware of possible bias towards both the university and the participants, and was mindful of the importance of investigating the multiple realities from the participants’ perspectives. Taking on a learner identity positioned me to behave as one who listened carefully to the participants’ stories, concerns, and expectations and observed their teaching attentively, and as an inquirer who was eager to know more information about their experiences. My learner perspective was expected to give the participants “a sense of importance and specialness” (Glesne, 2006, p. 143) and encourage them to open up their lives to me.

As this study involved human subjects, I attached great importance to ethical issues (Creswell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). First, the teacher participants consented to participate in this study after being informed of the nature of the study and the research agenda. I not only expressed my intention orally, but also specified it clearly in the informed consent form. Second, I promised to report the research fully, honestly and with integrity. In order to avoid personal bias and misinterpretations, I frequently discussed with the participants and asked them to review my collected data and interpretations. Third, in order to protect the privacy of the participants and their working institution, I used pseudonyms and confidentially maintained all the gathered data. Fourth, I tried my best to build a good and trusting relationship with all the participants. This study involved personal and private issues and political issues that teachers under normal circumstances might be reluctant to reveal. Having established a good relationship helped them feel less pressured and less reluctant to disclose private and sensitive information. My efforts included 1) giving them full respect by seeking their consent before each field visit and cherishing all their opinions; 2) sharing my personal experiences at the end of interview to develop mutual understanding with them; and 3) using incentives (e.g., gifts, dinners, etc.) at each stage of my
fieldwork to reward the participants for their time and participation.

### 3.5 Data collection

Qualitative case study research relies on multiple instruments to collect data. In this study, this ensured that the multiple facets of teacher autonomy could be explored (Baxter & Jack, 2008, p. 544). With the intention of gaining an in-depth understanding of the long-term development of teacher autonomy, I adopted multiple methods to collect narrative forms of data – teacher (auto)biographies, interviews, casual conversations, and open-ended questionnaire. They proved to be powerful data sources to study the participants’ past and present experiences. In addition, I conducted observations, collected documents, and kept a research journal to assist descriptions and interpretations of the cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3.4 Fieldwork schedule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Timeline</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 8–20, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 28–Aug. 15, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 4–28, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apr. 22–May 5, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 14–27, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 3–17, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1–15, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Every Tuesday from March to July, 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4 displays the data collection process which lasted from January to July, 2013. In fact, I maintained contact with the participants, seeking information...
and requesting their involvement in member checks throughout the whole process of data analysis and thesis writing. In what follows, I introduce each data collection method.

3.5.1 (Auto)biographies

(Auto)biographical research “seeks to understand the changing experiences and outlooks of individuals in their daily lives, what they see as important, and how to provide interpretations of the accounts they give of their past, present and future” (Roberts, 2002, p. 1). The value of this approach lies not only in the life stories told by the teacher participants, but also in the “meaningful selves, identities, and realities” (Chase, 2011, p. 421) underlying the stories. So I adopted teacher (auto)biographies as one of the key data collection instruments in this study with the intention to tap into the teacher participants’ life stories to capture the pathways of their development of autonomy with an emphasis on the technical-psychological, motivational, political, and sociocultural dimensions.

I first interviewed these participants about their working histories to instigate their recollections. I then encouraged each of them to write a detailed autobiography of their working experiences. Philip and Daisy agreed to do this. As a researcher in intercultural communication, Jacky had written his own cultural story before he took part in this study and he was glad to share it with me. But he and Snow asked me to write the biographies because of the tightness of their time. They all agreed to attend a follow-up interview to review the details of their life stories by reading their own biographies, answer further questions raised by me, and make revisions to the biographies. It was painstaking work to write the autobiographies and biographies in the chronological order due to the complexity of life histories. It took different lengths of time to complete the reviewing of the (auto)biographies due to having to account for the availability of each teacher participant. The final version of each autobiography and biography was based on frequent member checks and revisions.
3.5.2 Interviews and casual conversations

Interviews are useful instruments to help find out “those things we cannot directly observe” like ‘feelings’, ‘thoughts’, ‘intentions’, ‘past events’ and so on (Patton, 1990, p. 196). Merriam (1998) claims that interviewing is “the best technique to use when conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals” (p. 72). In this study, two rounds of semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with the first one focusing on the working experience of each participant and the second one focusing on the participants’ encounters in the first half of the semester (See Appendix 2 & 3). This was because semi-structured interviews allowed me to ask follow-up questions to probe further on the issues I was interested in and enabled the interviewees to openly and flexibly express themselves.

Before conducting these formal interviews, I first contacted each participant informing them of the purpose of the interviews and the approximate time needed, and negotiating the time and place to meet. We often chose quiet places like an office, a classroom, or my home to conduct the interviews so that the participants could feel comfortable to share information. To preserve the interviewing data for analysis, I audiotaped all the interviews with the participants’ consents and took notes during the interviews to record the key points.

In addition, informal interviews and casual conversations were also important data collection tools in my study. Although the two rounds of formal interviews produced quite meaningful data, they still in some sense constrained the participants as they were prescheduled and audiotaped. Therefore, I often made use of the time on the research site talking with them casually. These conversations normally happened before and after classroom observations and Department/School staff meetings or when we came across in the common staff room or library. After each conversation I would write down as much as I could remember.
During all the interviews and conversations, I was guided by two principles -‘rapport’ and ‘neutrality’. According to Patton (1990), rapport “is a stance vis-à-vis the person being interviewed” and neutrality “is a stance vis-à-vis the content of what that person says” (p. 317). Being friendly and respectful to the participants, I hoped they could be good ‘informants’ rather than ‘respondents’ of my questions. Although we were colleagues and I knew the research context and some of their backgrounds, I seldom expressed my judgments or arguments, but fully listened to the participants’ personal feelings and thoughts.

3.5.3 Observations of classroom teaching and staff meetings

Different from (auto)biographies and interviews which rely on the participants’ recollections and interpretations, observations offer “a firsthand encounter with the phenomenon of interest” (Merriam, 1998, p. 94) and “may provide more objective information related to the research topic” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006, p. 46). Therefore, I conducted observations to gain additional information about the research participants. During my fieldwork, I observed the participants’ classroom teaching, staff meetings which were held every Tuesday afternoon, and other activities concerning the participants’ daily work experiences. I mainly took notes on the research site to record what happened to each teacher participant, what s/he did in that particular situation, and the broad ideas and themes that emerged during my observations.

Classroom observations were useful in helping me learn about the participants’ teaching styles, teacher knowledge, teaching methodologies, and teaching attitudes, especially the teachers’ attention to student autonomy in their everyday teaching practices. Over the period of the field visits, most participants taught two courses targeting different cohorts of English majors during the semester (See Table 3.5). This provided a favorable condition to investigate their knowledge of different subject matters and their teaching approaches towards different groups of students.
Table 3.5 Courses undertaken by the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Target students (class size)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>British literature</td>
<td>Year 3 EMs (56Ss &amp; 60Ss)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>Comprehensive English</td>
<td>Year 1 EMs (28Ss)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English linguistics</td>
<td>Year 3 EMs (60Ss)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Extensive reading</td>
<td>Year 1 zhuanke EMs (28Ss)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American literature</td>
<td>Year 3 EMs (56Ss &amp; 60Ss)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacky</td>
<td>Advanced English\textsuperscript{11}</td>
<td>Year 3 EMs (28Ss)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>Year 3 EMs (56Ss &amp; 60Ss)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: EMs refer to English majors; Ss refer to students

I tried to be an ‘outsider’ when conducting classroom observations as my purpose was to observe the participants’ ‘natural’ behaviors inside the classroom. So I went to the classrooms before the prescribed time, sat at the back, and did not participate in any classroom activities. Following Merriam (1998), I kept records of the following elements within the classroom settings:

1) The physical settings: I noted down the physical condition of each classroom and the facilities installed to further ask for the participants’ opinions.

2) The teacher participants: I noted down their teaching contents, pedagogical structures, behaviors, interactions with students, classroom activities, etc.

3) The students: I paid attention to students’ responses, performance, and behaviors.

4) My reflections: I quickly wrote down my reflections on the observed events.

All the participants were glad to let me observe their teaching for the first time, but when I asked for another observation on the same class, some were a bit reluctant. Seeing that a second observation might help gain a more in-depth understanding of the participants in the aspect of teaching, I negotiated with them by stating the importance of the observation. Most consented in the end.

\textsuperscript{11} Advanced English is a language proficiency course for third- and fourth-year English majors. It focuses on reading, grammar, rhetoric, and writing.
The Department/School of Foreign Languages held weekly staff meetings every Tuesday afternoon. Normally the leaders announced the latest policies and activities of the university and the Department/School and discussed important issues with the staff. I attended these meetings as an ‘insider’ because the Department/School leaders always considered me as a staff member, asked me to show my opinions and invited me to attend some small-size meetings. I took these opportunities to note down the up-to-date news of the university and the Department/School to further investigate the impact these events had on the participants. Through these meetings I also observed or learned from the leaders how active the participants were in the university and Department/School activities and noted down some of the participants’ speeches in the meetings.

During my fieldwork, some of the participants also took on some other activities that allowed me to make further observations. These additional activities mainly included meeting students, attending seminars and symposiums, applying for research projects and awards, and participating in special meetings, etc. The nature of these activities and the participants’ behaviors were my observation foci.

3.5.4 Documents

Documents collected in this study included the curriculum schedule, notices issued by the Academic Registry (AR) on the upcoming teaching and learning activities, students’ online evaluations on the participants, resumes of the participants, their blog/microblogs and photos. I designed a questionnaire, which included the questions that needed the participants’ careful consideration at the final stage of the fieldwork (See Appendix 4). These sources played different roles in this study. The curriculum schedule provided me with the information on the participants’ courses, target students, venues, and class time; the notices from AR informed the upcoming events for teachers and students; students’ evaluations helped me learn more about students’ general feedback on the participants’ teaching; resumes provided background information of the participants including
their educational backgrounds, working experiences, publications, and community services; some participants liked to post blog/microblogs which provided another layer of information about their work, life, and thoughts.

3.5.5 Research journal

I kept a research journal during the whole process of my PhD study. When doing fieldwork, I noted down my increasing knowledge, new ideas, reflections, and plans in the journal. It played an important role in guiding my fieldwork and data analysis.

When collecting the above data sources, different languages were used in different cases. Teacher autobiographies, interviews and casual conversations, and questionnaires all used Chinese since it is the participants’ native language and it was expected that they would feel more relaxed and comfortable to express themselves in Chinese. Some teachers used English to answer my questions in their biographies. I personally used English when keeping field notes and my research journal.

3.6 Data processing and analysis

As introduced in 3.5, I collected a vast array of qualitative data during fieldwork. Organization of these data was critical for analysis and retrieval. In order to facilitate the process of storing, organizing, and analyzing data, I utilized NVivo, a powerful computer-assisted software which 1) stored the variety of data sources I collected, 2) allowed me to classify, edit, and code the imported materials and retrieve data conveniently, 3) displayed all the information that was assigned the same code and the relations among codes, and 4) had the function of creating memos to record my reflections and developing models to build conceptual framework.

I imported all collected data into NVivo and organized them by participant. Within the folder of each participant, I further organized data by type -
(auto)biography, interviews (including audio files and verbatim transcriptions), casual conversations, classroom observations, questionnaire answers, field notes, and memos. Since observations and field notes were handwritten and casual conversations were in my head, I converted them into textual forms in NVivo as soon as I ended each field trip. In addition, I created a separate folder containing information of UA and the School of Foreign Languages.

I adopted both deductive and inductive strategies in analyzing data. As noted in 2.4, this study aimed to explore the development of teacher autonomy through the lens of teacher identity. Current theories of teacher autonomy and teacher identity gave me a sense of direction in the data analysis process. For example, the concept of teacher identity places an emphasis on how the individual teacher relates the self to the context (see 2.3). I paid prime attention to the multiple teacher identities of each teacher, their changes, and the influence of a changing context(s). I also used the construction and reconstruction of teacher identities to navigate the multiple dimensions of teacher autonomy – technical-psychological, motivational, political, and sociocultural (see 2.1.2). The conceptual framework provided in 2.3 played a crucial role in guiding the data analysis process.

Apart from the deductive strategy, I adopted an inductive analytic strategy for two reasons. First, the long-term development of teacher autonomy and the relationship between autonomy and identity are under-researched in the field of second/foreign language education. Second, both the teacher participants and the research context had unique characteristics. It was difficult to anticipate what themes, patterns, or relationships would emerge from the dataset (Hatch, 2002, p. 161). Based on this premise, I also interpreted the data from the ground up and gave attention to important categories emerging from them instead of adopting those from the existing theories of autonomy. The inductive approach made it possible to “expand and generalize theories” (Yin, 2014, p. 21).
As suggested by Merriam (2009), the best choice to manage the overwhelming amount of qualitative data is “simultaneous data collection and analysis” (p. 171). I completed a rough preliminary data analysis after each field visit and then more intensive analysis when the fieldwork was over. Both within-case analysis and cross-case analysis (Merriam, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2006) were carried out across the whole process. The preliminary analysis work included developing a “rudimentary coding scheme” (Glesne, 2006, p. 149) and memo writing (Glesne, 2006; Yin, 2014). With participant stories in mind, I read through the newly collected raw data after each field visit, coded them with an emphasis on time, place, the participants’ assigned tasks and self-positions, their actions and emotions, other main characters, and particular events. As the coding process proceeded, I reexamined all codes and textual segments, made amendments by connecting them with the research questions, and aggregated them to search for each participant’s career developmental stages, story threads, and themes and patterns that indexed their experiences at each stage. I completed the coding work every time with memo writing which is regarded as basic data conceptualization (Yin, 2014, p. 135). By keeping memos, I noted down my interpretation of the cases, findings, and new directions for future fieldwork.

In a later stage of data analysis, I made sense of each case as a whole and compared the four cases. I composed the story of each case in order to represent and understand experience holistically (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 18) and present the complex identities each participant enacted in the trajectory of work and life. Case study participant stories are reported in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7. In a second phase, I re-analyzed the collected data in more depth, and identified the prominent teacher identities of each participant and the salient themes and categories in the ongoing constructing process of each identity. A within-case analysis was followed by a cross-case analysis. In order to compare the four cases for a deeper understanding of the development of teacher autonomy, I drew graphs
and concept maps, which helped connect the identified themes.

3.7 Trustworthiness of the study

Trustworthiness, which encompasses reliability and validity, is commonly used in the evaluation of qualitative research. This section discusses the trustworthiness of this qualitative case study based on the four criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985) – credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability.

Credibility, or internal validity, refers to whether the research findings match the reality. Triangulation, member checking, and adequate engagement in the field were the main strategies used in this study to enhance credibility (see Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2010; Merriam, 2009). Triangulation in this study refers to corroborating evidence with multiple methods of data collection and multiple data sources. The same information was confirmed by using multiple methods of data collection - teacher (auto)biographies, interviews, conversations, observations, questionnaire, and documents and by comparing data from interviews and conversations at different times and in different places. With regard to member checking, I asked each participant to check whether the collected data and data analysis results were accurate and true. Engaging in the field for a prolonged period time allowed me to establish trusting relationship with all participants. Having frequent interactions with them enabled me to probe their experiences repeatedly and in-depth.

Dependability refers to the consistency between the presented data and findings (Merriam, 2009, p. 222). As mentioned above, triangulation using multiple methods of data collection and multiple data sources assisted in the obtaining of consistent data from the EM teacher participants. In addition, in order to make this qualitative case study dependable, I kept a record of the whole research process in my research journal and in memos, and constructed detailed and thorough explanations of data collected and analyzed.
Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings apply to other contexts and participants. Although this study was not expected to be generalizable to other EM teachers and tertiary education contexts, it remained representative to a certain extent. First, I provided a thick description of the research context and participant stories, which may enable readers to judge the similarities between this study and their situations. Second, I used purposeful sampling to select cases. Investigating participants with different backgrounds and years of working experience allowed variations. In this way, readers can compare different cases with their own situations.

Confirmability refers to the extent to which the researcher’s bias influences interpretations. In the whole research process, I monitored my bias and made efforts to constrain it. I positioned myself as a learner instead of an expert when investigating the research participants; I kept a research journal to continuously reflect on the research context, participants, collected data, my personal behaviors in the field, and my interpretations; I also sought advice from peers and experts.

3.8 Chapter summary

In this chapter, I have provided a detailed explanation of the research methodology, research context, and the procedures and processes of participant sampling, data collection, and data analysis. In summary, I designed this study as a multiple case study and intended to gain an in-depth understanding of teacher autonomy as a long-term process by investigating four cases. I used a thick presentation of the research context as a strategy to increase the transferability of this study. I also provided an audit of the research process in order to make this study dependable. Readers and researchers may assess the similarity between this context and others.

As noted by Benson (2007), one possible way to explore the development of autonomy as a long-term process is through stories of long-term experiences (p.
In the following four chapters (Chapter 4 to Chapter 7), I will describe each case study participant’s story of career-long working, learning, and living experiences. Teacher stories reveal the “knowledge, ideas, perspectives, understanding, and experiences that guide their work” (Johnson & Golombek, 2002, p. 17) and expose how teacher autonomy is afforded and constrained across time and contexts. Drawing upon the collected rich data sources, especially narratives, I organize each story through aspects of each teacher participant’s work and life with attention to critical events and experiences that expose manifestations of teacher autonomy. Experiences of each aspect are ordered chronologically so that the developmental stages of teacher autonomy can be captured. Similarities and variations among the four EM teachers’ trajectories are useful to gain an in-depth understanding of the long-term development of teacher autonomy.
Chapter 4 Philip’s story

Philip had been working for twenty-seven years when the investigation started. He received free education as a BA/TEFL major at a teacher education university (or normal university) in China in the early 1980s. Upon graduation, he was employed by this university as an EM teacher because of his outstanding English language proficiency compared to his peers. In the first two years of his career, as a form of preparation, Philip was allotted to work as a senior secondary school teacher, an interpreter at the Education Department of the provincial government, and a teaching assistant to an American teacher at his working institution. He was then assigned to teach English majors in the English Department.

In the early 1990s, Philip left his first employment and joined UA due to family commitments. He continued teaching English majors (zhuanke students before 2001 and benke students after 2001). He was promoted to Associate Professor in 2002 and then Associate Department Head in 2004. When the School of Foreign Languages was established in 2013, he was appointed to the post of Associate Dean.

Throughout Philip’s life career, he had had rich and complex experiences in teaching, administration, and research, which shaped his professional development. In this section, I will delineate these experiences and highlight some others, which played minor roles in his professional development.

4.1 Philip’s teaching experiences

4.1.1 Early teaching experiences

As a TEFL major, according to Philip, he learned little about teaching at university. The curriculum largely focused on language skills and almost completely excluded teacher preparation. As a result, he started English language teaching (ELT) in an exciting but confused status as a teacher.
Philip’s target students were senior secondary school students in the initial phase. Like many novice teachers, he relied on ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie, 1975) – emulating his former teachers to teach English. However, he soon experienced a shock:

My university teachers gave English-medium instruction and focused on grammar and vocabulary. I soon found that this approach was inapplicable to the secondary school students. Noticing that they could not follow me at all, I began to change my teaching by catering to students. (Interview, January 8, 2013, original in Chinese)

Recognizing the need to change, Philip was engaged in exploring effective teaching strategies. He used Mandarin Chinese to develop students’ understanding, tried various means to arouse students’ interests, and offered them generous amounts of help. Through the one-semester-long teaching experience at the senior secondary school, he was satisfied with the rapport established with students, but at the same time, he was well aware of the difficulty of being a good teacher who was able to take care of each individual student.

I was 21, a very young age. I was full of passion and could always turn the boring language points into interesting stories. The students liked my instruction. I used to talk with students to learn their difficulties and help them with limitless patience. There was a naughty boy in my class. He did not listen attentively and often disrupted the class. No matter how hard I explained knowledge to him, he could not understand it. His peers told me he behaved better in my class than in other teachers’ classes. Once a teacher scolded him, he put a snake into the teacher’s desk to frighten her. (Autobiography, February 16, 2013, original in Chinese)

Apart from these early teaching experiences, Philip gained development in some other aspects in the first two years of his career. Interpreting for officers of the provincial government highlighted his insufficiency in vocabulary, interpretation skills, and knowledge of other cultures. Determined to improve this passive situation, he spent evenings reading English newspapers and handbooks on translations of special terms. He not only made a great progress in
interpretation, but also developed his oral English proficiency to a high level through constant interactions with foreigners. Philip’s experiences as an interpreter had a long-term influence on his epistemology of ELT and his morals:

In spite of my improvements, I mainly relied on reading and memorizing. If I were able to make good comparisons between the Chinese and English versions and pay close attention to translation strategies, I would have made much greater progress. Unfortunately I was too young to learn effectively on my own. This is why I emphasize the teacher’s role in student learning at present. Moreover, I recommend students to read widely because textbook knowledge is too limited.

…

At that time, I got along very well with one of the leaders at the Education Department of the provincial government. He was diligent, honest, kind, and caring. I appreciate his qualities. (Autobiography, February 16, 2013, original in Chinese)

Thereafter, Philip went back to his own institution and worked as the teaching assistant of a native English speaker (NES) for one year. Returning to the university campus, he was overjoyed with everything: the views, fresh air, Beethoven’s music spreading over the campus in the early mornings, and students jogging together. To his amazement, the NES adopted many innovative teaching strategies: flexible teaching methods, a variety of student activities, friendly communication with students, and weekly quizzes. He was greatly impressed by her respect for students’ opinions. The NES also held parties for students regularly in her apartment which was provided by the university. Nonetheless, Philip seldom appropriated her strategies in his own teaching.

I found it difficult to imitate her, perhaps because I was inexperienced at that time and felt incapable of managing teaching flexibly, or perhaps because I felt constrained by the poor conditions for non-native English speakers (NNESs). For example, only NESs enjoyed the university’s typing and printing services; their salaries were much higher than NNESs. (Casual conversation, March 6, 2013, original in Chinese)

Two years after his recruitment, Philip was permitted to teach English majors. He was assigned to teach one key course - Intensive Reading - to
first-year English majors. After consideration, he decided to emulate the teaching approach of his two reading teachers in the past:

I benefitted a lot from the two teachers. They were knowledgeable teachers in my eyes because they were able to speak accurate English and provide explicit, detailed, and thorough explanations for each text. As a tactic to deepen our understanding of the texts, they picked the key sentences and words in the post-reading exercises as foci of instruction and paraphrased sentences in many different ways. When doing the exercises, I was surprised to find that I could almost answer all questions. (Autobiography, February 16, 2013, original in Chinese)

Similar to his former teachers, Philip focused on detailed explanations of words, sentences, and texts. As the target students were English majors, he chose English-medium of instruction. Philip put his whole heart into preparing lessons, managing teaching, and establishing rapport with students in and out of class. In wanzixi12 or evening self-study sessions, he went to the classroom and had conversation with students. To his great joy, there was almost no generation gap between himself and the students. When reflecting on his teaching experiences during the three years at this university, Philip commented on himself and the working context at that time:

During my undergraduate study, I did not learn linguistics, pedagogy, and teaching methodology systematically. As a consequence, I knew little about language and language teaching and worked hard on vocabulary and sentences in the first years of teaching. Lacking metacognitive awareness, I failed to carefully reflect on and evaluate my teaching. This may also have a lot to do with the university. It seldom provided continuing learning opportunities for teachers. Neither did it make good use of human resources. For example, one of my colleagues obtained his master’s degree in linguistics from the University of Sydney. When he graduated, our university neither assigned him courses on linguistics nor invited him to share his overseas learning and research experiences. (Autobiography, February 16, 2013, original in Chinese)

---

12 Wanzixi is either a compulsory or recommended self-study activity for university students in China. Every evening, students can study in the provided classrooms. The length of time is dependent on the university’s regulations.
When Philip transferred to UA, a zhuanke university at that time, he was overwhelmed by complacency. His fluent oral English, beautiful pronunciation, passionate teaching, and humor made him popular among both students and colleagues. To his surprise, he observed that his new colleagues taught in more or less the same way – using boring, non-informative, and unenlightening approaches:

Class begins. Good morning! Class (or boys and girls, or everyone). (Students stood up and said “Good morning, teacher”). Sit down, please!

First, let’s do some revision work. Last time… Questions 1… Comrade A, please. (A student stood up, speaking jerkingly). OK, good, sit down, please. Question 2… Comrade B, please. (Another student answered the question). Yea, yea, yea, OK, good…

Let’s learn the next text. Comrade C, please read paragraph… please pay attention to …OK, good, sit down. What’s the meaning of this sentence? The sentence means… (The teacher read the answer from the teacher’s handbook).

Homework for today: after class, please memorize all the new words, OK? Alright, class is over, goodbye class. (Students said “Goodbye, teacher). (Autobiography, February 16, 2013, original in English)

Reluctant to teach in the same way as his new colleagues, Philip made efforts to make his teaching interesting and innovative. In the first years at UA, he undertook different types of language proficiency courses such as Intensive Reading, Extensive Reading, Listening, Oral English, and Pronunciation. Having no experience in these courses except intensive reading, he engaged in exploring teaching strategies for each course.

4.1.2 Adaptation and stagnation

Philip defined his career life in the 1990s as ‘lost years’. The academic culture was bad. The common topics amongst female EM teachers were related to house, family, dressing, gossips and amongst male teachers it was mostly related to earning money. Dissatisfied with the low salary, Philip, in collaboration with the
department head and another colleague, ran a private tutorial center outside the campus for several years. The market was promising because of the increasing popularity of English learning and shortage of English teachers. Their identity of university English teachers helped attract many students. Philip no longer went outside to earn money when his department was appointed a new department head in 2001.

There were no demands from the university except completing the assigned coursework. Seeing that it was effortless to repeat the knowledge and teaching approach that he was familiar with, Philip did not seek changes in his teaching inside the campus. When teaching became routine work, he felt less passionate and put less effort into communicating with students.

As UA upgraded to a benke university in 2000, Philip’s department began to offer a benke English major programme in 2001. In the past twenty years, it had only offered language skill courses to zhuanke students. None of the staff had experience in teaching theory-based courses. As one of the most outstanding staff of the department, Philip was given an opportunity to study British literature at a prestigious university of mainland China. This was the first learning opportunity he was provided by UA during his in-service years.

I was glad to have this opportunity. I like literature. During the six months at that university, I had double harvests. The library resources were rich. I mastered the knowledge of British literature by reading literature books extensively. In addition, I sat in the literature classes for postgraduate students for one semester. At the same time, I wrote several research articles to prepare for my professional title promotion. (Interview, January 8, 2013, original in Chinese)

Philip began to teach the course British Literature to the first-cohort of benke English majors in 2003. As the only literature teacher, he had to teach all the three classes of students. Philip took this course seriously. When planning lessons, he recalled the monotonous literature classes in his undergraduate study. His former literature teacher simply read the prepared lecture notes. As a
consequence, he did not gain much knowledge from his instruction. Reluctant to repeat a pedagogy that could lead to similar negative effects, Philip adopted several strategies in his classes:

I paid attention to three points in my literature class: 1) speaking in Chinese to let the students understand what I said; 2) giving students’ time to note down the key points which were the key examination points as well; 3) teaching interestingly and providing rich information by referring to various materials. (Autobiography, February 16, 2013, original in Chinese)

Following these self-determined principles, Philip made his instructions interesting and readily understandable. Throughout each lesson, he was preoccupied with imparting literature knowledge to students – backgrounds of schools of British literature, terms, biographies of writers/poets/playwrights/essayists, literature works, analyzing methods of these works, and commenting on them. Students were not expected to do anything except listening and note take. In the meantime, Philip taught Advanced English to a class of third-year English majors. According to the curriculum, there were eight lessons each week for Advanced English. Confronted with the heavy workload, Philip suffered from fatigue.

Altogether I had about 15 lessons each week. It was not only time consuming but also energy consuming to prepare and manage the imposed coursework. My workload became much heavier in 2004 when I began to undertake administrative work. I felt extremely exhausted.

…

I repeated the same things class after class, day after day, and year after year. It is a pity that I did not question my sense of routine and seldom reflected on my teaching. In my opinion, the primary reason is that I did not have a good understanding of the language teaching profession in those days. (Casual conversation, April 5, 2013, original in Chinese)

Although Philip’s target students changed from zhuanke students to benke students, and he met new challenges in coursework, it seemed that he only
deliberately sought development in subject matter knowledge. As soon as he got familiar with the new knowledge, he had nothing to look forward to. With regard to his teaching approach, he was conservative and only made minor changes. Becoming the victim of routine decreased his enthusiasm and made him powerless when suffering from burnout.

4.1.3 Awakening in teaching

Philip’s renewal of his teaching philosophy was not by accident. Several special experiences functioned as catalysts that provoked his thinking about EFL learning and teaching.

Sponsored by the visiting scholar programme of the provincial government, Philip conducted research at a US university from 2008 to 2009. The focus of his research was international students’ English language use before and after arriving in the study abroad context. He gained access to an ESL Programme and investigated its enrolled international students who came from different cultural backgrounds - China, South Korea, Japan, India, Saudi Arabia, Central America, South America, and so on. By observing their oral English, reading, and writing classes and interviewing their learning experiences, Philip made many interesting findings. For example, most international students were able to make big improvements in listening and speaking in the US university context; students from East Asia were poorer in speaking compared to those from the Middle East and Central and South America; many students spoke English fluently, but lacked language accuracy. These findings illuminated his understanding of EFL learning and teaching:

In the study abroad context, the communicative teaching approach is widely used. ESL learners mainly rely on listening, speaking, and interactions to learn English. In China, the primary means of language input is reading instead of listening. Without a systematic mastery of the knowledge of the English language (pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar), Chinese EFL learners can hardly comprehend reading materials, let alone using English. Therefore, I suggest that EFL teachers put language knowledge to a significant place in their teaching and
design practice activities based on the level of learners. (Casual conversation, May 22, 2013, original in Chinese)

After returning from the USA, as required by AR, Philip headed the department’s English major curriculum amendment and programme reform. By scrutinizing the EM Curriculum (2000), the curricula of other institutions, the demands of his institution, observing teaching, and interviewing English majors, he reached the conclusion that language skills were of primary importance for English majors in the first two years of undergraduate study. Furthermore, dissatisfied with the passivity of the majority of students, he placed an emphasis on students’ playing a central role in their learning process. He recommended learning resources to students, demonstrated how to develop their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills on a daily basis, and set up learning portfolios to track their development.

As his awareness of EFL teaching and learning heightened, Philip reflected on his teaching experiences and sought development in his literature class.

All teachers, regardless of disciplines, should have strong metacognitive awareness of the teaching profession. They should behave based on morality and ethics (“仁人之心”, “真善之举”). They should be committed to communicating with students, heightening their metacognitive awareness and fostering learner autonomy.

…

Within the discipline, the EM teacher’s basic language skills should be reached an acceptable level. He or she should be able to conduct English-medium classroom teaching and write English articles. Teaching is hard work. The teacher needs to carefully design each lesson and try various methods to inspire students and deal with the multiple problems faced by them. Besides, a qualified EM teacher should have a deep understanding of the English language and ELT, have some knowledge of philosophy, have a specialized area of research, and be concerned about the latest domestic and international events.

…

I have strong awareness of my profession. My professional knowledge, language skills, and teaching skills are satisfactory. I cannot always make good preparations. Teaching as routine makes my class boring. (Questionnaire, June, 2013, original in Chinese)
As a matter of fact, it was a tough process for Philip to reform his teaching. In order to release him from some of teaching load, the department only assigned him one course, that is, British Literature in the most recent years. Due to the lack of British literature teachers, he had to teach all third- and fourth-year English majors. In most cases, it was arranged that he would teach several small classes simultaneously. In this way he reduced his teaching hours, but he was challenged with large class size. Besides, his daily administration work often conflicted with his teaching.

Countless administrative requests come to me every day. Some are reasonable while some are not. Therefore, I have to stay at the office almost every day and deal with these requests. I always feel exhausted after work and do not want to do anything. Sometimes I stay at home to prepare lessons. Unfortunately phone calls disturb me one after another. If I do not make careful planning and preparation, I choose to directly deliver knowledge throughout the whole lesson. It is tiring and boring for me to speak all the time. There is no microphone in large classrooms. I have to raise my voice to let all students hear me. (Casual conversation, April 23, 2013, original in Chinese)

Dissatisfied with his performance in teaching, Philip struggled to seek changes. Instead of fixing on one teaching approach, he tended to proceed in each lesson based on students’ performance, needs, and difficulties:

Imparting all knowledge to students may undermine their initiatives. In order to develop students’ autonomy, I assign them out-of-class reading tasks to prepare for the next lesson. I would like to know students’ understanding of new knowledge before giving my instructions. To my surprise, they sometimes understand writers and their works very well. If they have difficulty in the reading assignments, I will provide hints and guide them to make analyses. I also organize group discussions. It feels good to communicate with students. Students’ smiles, desirous eyes for knowledge, and excitement to discover new knowledge all make me happy.

…

I no longer focus on the literature knowledge itself. Relating writers’ stories and their works to the reality is useful for students to understand lives and the society deeply. Therefore, when coming across illuminating stories, I often ask students to think about the contemporary world and their own status quo. (Interview, March 6, 2013, original in Chinese)
In Philip’s literature class, students were once expected to listen and take notes on key literature knowledge. He resisted multimedia equipment as a tool to assist in his teaching for quite a long time, because he felt it would increase his workload by having to search and design new teaching resources. He finally abandoned this stupid opinion and worked on PowerPoint designs. He capitalized on many resources from books and the Internet to make his PowerPoints informative and attractive. The classroom atmosphere was enlightened at the beginning phase. Soon he received students’ requests to share his PowerPoints, but to his great disappointment, many students did not make good use of these materials. They became less attentive and cooperative in class because they were able to find keys answers to questions from the materials. Between the pedagogical approach of note taking and PowerPoints, Philip returned to the former one – note taking - again.

In my opinion, note taking is more helpful to my students. It can develop their listening and note-taking skills. In addition, note-taking is also a process of comprehending key literature knowledge. I haven’t had any idea of how to make the best use of PowerPoints in the literature class. I temporarily abandoned them. (Interview, January 8, 2013, original in Chinese)

Apart from instruction, Philip also attempted to change the method of student evaluation. He found that a written examination at the end of each semester could not effectively evaluate students in the whole semester. Although final examinations are compulsory, he was still given some space to evaluate students. According to AR’s regulations, the full score of each course is 100 which may be decided either by the student’s performance in the final examination or by the final examination score which makes up 70% and the teacher’s other evaluation results which make up the remaining 30%. In order to develop students’ ability to think independent and write with skill, Philip once tried term-paper writing. The result was worse than his expectation. It was painstaking for him to score over one hundred papers, most of which were of bad quality.
The English majors of our department seldom have this type of practice in the first two years. It is understandable that they cannot do a good job on term-paper writing in the third year. I felt angry that many students committed plagiarism. Perhaps it is inappropriate to let students write a whole paper without having guidance and sufficient practice. Mid-term examinations have taken the place of term papers. I organize two mid-term examinations every semester. My purpose is to check their understanding instead of memory. Therefore, students are asked to answer open questions in the open-book examinations. This evaluation method is more effective than the previous one. Many students can perform very well. (Autobiography, February 16, 2013, original in Chinese)

Philip continuously experimented with different methods to reform his teaching. There were successes as well as setbacks. He persisted in seeking more effective strategies to develop his students and his teaching. A big barrier facing him was burnout. He reported many times throughout this research inquiry that he felt exhausted because of heavy workloads. The worst thing was that he was unable to pull himself out of the awkward situation.

4.2 Philip’s experiences of being the Associate Head/Dean

Philip was appointed the Associate Head of the Department of Foreign Languages in 2004. He gladly accepted this administrative position.

   It was good news for me. It proved that I was recognized as one of the most experienced and outstanding academic staff. It also meant promotion in administrative rank. I consented when the department head discussed with me about this decision. (Interview, January 8, 2013, original in Chinese)

   As can be seen, Philip’s initial perception of the Associate Department Head was mediated by the institutional context in which administration was assumed to be a high profile position. In the first few years, Philip was in charge of the teaching and research affairs of the department. More specifically, his duties were to fulfil the requirements of two administrative departments of UA – AR, which was in charge of the university’s teaching and learning affairs, and the Scientific Research Department, which oversaw the university’s research affairs. In recent
years, as two other academic staff were appointed additional Associate Department heads, his role shifted to being mainly responsible for teaching and learning affairs. It is noticeable that Philip had to handle the demands that were imposed upon him almost on his own.

4.2.1 Taking charge of students’ postgraduate entrance examination

Among all these, he invested much time and effort to help students prepare for the National Postgraduate Entrance Examination (NPEE13).

AR had been highlighting students’ passing rate in the NPEE since the university began to enroll *benke* students in 2000. It imposed pressure on the academic administrators of all departments by carrying out a rewarding and punishing policy. If the passing rate was over 10%, key administrators would receive a bonus; if it was below 10%, they would be fined. It was a huge challenge for Philip to bear responsibility for the passing rate of the first cohort of *benke* English majors (about 120 students).

NPEE was very popular and competitive. I had little knowledge of this examination except that it was difficult for English majors because relevant master programmes had limited quotas. In order to get an acceptable result, at least not to be fined by the university, I searched a lot of information about NPEE and thought out a lot of methods to motivate and help students. (Autobiography, February 16, 2013, original in Chinese)

Philip made great efforts to help student prepare for the NPEE (see Figure 4.1). As a first step, Philip organized meetings with the first cohort of *benke* students in their third year, introducing this Master study opportunity and encouraging them to apply for NPEE. The majority of students were encouraged and decided to take this examination. As a second step, he guided students to select Master programmes and stored their choices in a file. Philip attached great

---

13 NPEE, which is commonly known as *kaoyan*, is a nationwide examination held in mainland China annually. It is a prerequisite for entrance into the master programmes of Chinese higher education institutions. *Benke* students are eligible to take this examination in the final year of their undergraduate study. *Zhuanke* students are eligible two years after graduation.
importance to students’ learning spaces. He allocated common learning rooms to

students and went around the rooms once every day to monitor their progress. From time to time, he shared resources with students, such as examination papers, references, information about institutions, and new policies about the examination, etc. After negotiating with the Department Head, they decided to provide tutorials for students during the summer vacation of 2004.

We were not sure about the examination result. What we could do was to provide as much help as possible for our students. We invited the most experienced teachers in advanced English, British literature, American literature, English linguistics, and Japanese to tutor the students who needed help in these subjects during the summer vacation. Each student only needed to pay RMB 100. We also invited master supervisors from other universities to participate in the tutorial sessions. (Interview, January 8, 2013, original in Chinese)

All students who passed the written examination (chushi) must take an oral examination (fushi). Philip kindly helped many students rehearse their oral examinations. Beyond his expectation, the passing rate of the first cohort of benke students was over 20%. Philip not only received a bonus from the university, but was truly happy for his students who gained further study opportunities. In order to encourage the next cohort of students to take the NPEE, he invited the students
who had been accepted as Master students to share their preparation experiences. He also honored them by posting their photos, names, and contact information on a special board.

Philip felt more confident and motivated to guide and assist students to prepare for the NPEE. In the next year, more than 30% graduates passed the NPEE and the passing rate became more or less stable in the subsequent years. As this burden was released, Philip reduced communication with students assuming that they would be able to take control of the whole preparation process. He then showed more concern for student preparations when the 2008-cohort of students refused to attend the tutorial classes in the summer vacation.

Few students applied for the tutorial classes. I was shocked. Students in the past all welcomed them. I met the students to learn their opinions and plans. Many of them were confident in their own abilities to prepare for the examination. They did not need tutorials. They preferred to plan the summer vacation on their own. I doubted their independent learning abilities, but I still respected their decisions. (Casual conversation, March 19, 2013, original in Chinese)

The 2008-cohort of students performed very well in the NPEE. Two students were accepted into the top-ranked university of China – Peking University. The 2009-cohort of students, who followed the 2008-cohort, refused the department’s tutorials too. Besides, many students insisted on selecting top universities. Philip thought it was too risky. Top universities had higher criteria and the competition was more intense. He persuaded them to think twice and selected appropriate universities based on their levels of competence. Few students accepted his advice. To Philip’s disappointment, the passing rate of this cohort of students was the lowest on record.

I understand the students. It is more and more difficult for Master students to find decent jobs upon graduation. Holding the master’s degree awarded by top universities may make them more competitive in the job market. They must face the reality that they might lose the chance of furthering their study if they did not reasonably select universities and master programmes. I talked with many students when they got the examination results. In fact, many of them did not work
diligently. No pains, no gains. I will provide more supervision for the 2010-cohort of students. (Casual conversation, May 22, 2013, original in Chinese)

During the period this investigation was conducted, Philip faced many problems in NPEE supervision, such as students' decreasing interest for this examination, their declining language proficiency, poor independent learning abilities, and so on.

4.2.2 Taking charge of English major programme reform

Around 2007, AR began to require all benke programmes to carry out reforms. As the director of the English major programme reform, Philip took on this task seriously because it would determine the future development of the programme. Figure 4.2 illustrates that Philip took into consideration many factors when planning the English major programme reform.

He first examined the EM Curriculum stipulated by the FLT Advisory Committee and the curriculums of many other English major undergraduate programmes. He then paid close attention to the latest developments in the English major education circle. There were two lines of thought about how to run the English major programme: one that insisted on retaining the traditional mode, that is, developing students’ listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating skills and disciplinary knowledge as the primary goal; the other line of thinking made a claim for merging English major programmes with another discipline such as ‘English + law’ and ‘English + medicine’ for the purpose of developing students into composite-type English majors (fuhexing rencai) (Chang, 2012). In face of the two arguments, Philip considered the development of the English major programme carefully:

I believe that language proficiency and learning ability are the crucial aspects of our education. Our enrolled students were poorer and poorer in the two aspects year after year. If we focus on cultivating composite-type English majors, students have to shift attention to the knowledge of another discipline. I was afraid that they would find it extremely difficult to develop the knowledge of two disciplines. Another
A concern was that our teachers did not have any background in other disciplines. I discussed this issue with the department head. He concurred with me. But AR attached importance to cultivating composite-type English majors. We finally decided that we ran the English major programme in two directions – one focused on the traditional way and one focused on business English. Students were expected to make choices when they applied for our programme. (Interview, January 8, 2013, original in Chinese)

Figure 4.2 Factors taken into account for programme reform

According to the requirement of AR, curriculums should be developed by adding more student practice courses and reducing the total number of teaching hours. Philip agreed that English majors should be provided with more opportunities to practice their language skills. At the same time, he was against reducing teaching hours because he held that his students needed teacher scaffolding and monitoring. Philip highlighted that he worked for student development instead of AR. With regard to the demand of revising the English major curriculum every year, Philip expressed his hostility to AR:

The amended curriculum was aimed at the four-year-long English major programme. Its effectiveness can only be judged four years after the implementation. One year is too short. When I found that negotiations and
arguments with AR were useless, I decided to give up talking with the people who did not understand language education. I make minor amendments every year and only make concessions on the condition that my students could receive sufficient teaching hours. (Interview, April 28, 2013, original in Chinese)

Apart from the NPEE preparation, curriculum development, and programme reform, Philip was intervened in his administrative work by administrative departments of UA. The heavy workloads exhausted him mentally and physically.

I am always required to hand in many reports to AR – our plan for mid-term examination and graduates’ oral examination, the department’s actions on students’ NPEE preparation, NPEE results, course development progress, contests attended by students, awards received by teachers…I don’t think I need to report all these to it. It is annoying to write so many reports. It makes me unable to be fully engaged in teaching and research. I used to suggest that the university leaders give each department more freedom to manage its own affairs, but did not receive positive feedback. As the associate head, I have to stay in the office every weekday. I share one office with another associate head. Colleagues and students are in and out looking for us. Sometimes I have the idea of resigning my administrative position so that I can concentrate on teaching and research. (Interview, April 28, 2013, original in Chinese)

In spite of the tension between Philip and AR, Philip was willing to dedicate himself to the enterprise of student development. In 2009, he decided to encourage first- and second-year students to learn beyond the language classroom. The number of students was over 200. In order to adopt effective strategies, he conducted a large survey and organized small group (six students) meetings with them. Through these tools, he investigated students’ backgrounds, opinions about English learning and teaching, their needs and status quo, etc.

Many students thanked me. They told me few teachers cared about them like me. Through face-to-face talks, I found that most students were eager to develop their language skills, but had no idea on how to learn and what to learn. They told me they could not sustain their efforts. It took a lot of time to talk with all the students. I enjoyed the process. I felt tired too. (Autobiography, February 16, 2013, original in Chinese)
In order to help students, Philip organized them together and informed them of the objectives they should achieve in listening, speaking, reading, and writing. He demonstrated how to develop each language skill and recommended resources and tools that would help them. He also emphasized the importance of daily practice. Besides, he strongly recommended that second-year English majors should read English novels. He provided them with a reading list, demonstrated again how to read novels, and even helped them order them.

Philip’s efforts were effective in motivating students in the short term. However, most students were not autonomous enough to learn beyond the classroom on a daily basis. Philip was unable to monitor two hundred students, either. Hampered by this problem, he had the idea of carrying out mentorship – with each EM teacher helping to guide several students. When he discussed this with the Department Head, his suggestion was rejected. The Head thought it difficult to implement a mentorship programme and refused to provide financial support. When he turned to colleagues, many of them agreed that it was a good suggestion and consented to take up this responsibility. Encouraged by colleagues’ cooperation, Philip persisted in persuading the department head to support him. Although he was finally allowed to carry out mentorship, he was not given financial support. Philip recounted that many EM teachers did not invest much effort into this task.

Our enrolled students are worse in the overall performance one cohort after another. I am quite concerned with their performance in TEM-4, TEM-8, and NPEE and their development. Mentorship will be a beneficial programme for both teachers and students. Teachers can gain an in-depth knowledge of individual students; students can receive assistance from teachers and be monitored by teachers. Teachers may be reluctant to spare time and effort without payment. I will work hard on the implementation of mentorship in future in spite of all difficulties. (Interview, April 28, 2013, original in Chinese)
4.3 Philip’s research experiences

Teaching was the single component of Philip’s teacher work in the first fourteen years of his career. His original intention to do research was out of a desire for professional promotion. When he learned that three of his colleagues, who commenced their careers one to two years earlier than him, were promoted to Associate Professors in 2000, he had the feeling of being left behind. According to the promotion system, he must complete the specified teaching hours and publish four research articles to gain a promotion. There were no criteria for the level of journals at that time.

I exerted all my effort to meet the requirements on research. It was a coincidence that my department allocated me to learn British literature at a top-ranked university for half a year at that time. I had two things to do during that time: attending literature classes and writing research articles. Since I did not have any experience in writing research articles, I read many books and articles at the university’s library. I also asked a good friend who was an experienced researcher to review my articles and help publish them. (Interview, January 8, 2013, original in Chinese)

Philip was promoted from Lecturer to Associate Professor in 2002. His research outcomes also gained several awards from the institution and the city government. Regardless of these, Philip seldom produced research outcomes after his promotion. He even ignored his institution-supported research project for years.

The promotion reduced my pressure of doing research. In fact, there was no specific policy to force us to do research. After assuming the position of associate department head, I began to be occupied in daily teaching and administrative work and found little time to do research. It is also true that I did not have strong desire to do research. I always felt reluctant to. (Casual conversation, March 5, 2013, original in Chinese)
In recent years, Philip has picked up research again. Many new ideas occurred to him in the process of carrying out English major programme reforms. He always had the impulse to write research articles to share these ideas with researchers in the relevant field. When considering publishing the articles, he preferred top domestic journals.

I believe that my ideas, especially my theories, are new in linguistics and language education. My articles deserve to be published on key journals. The university has high criteria for professional title promotion now. Only publishing my articles on key journals will I have the possibility of promoting to Professor. (Interview, April 28, 2013, original in Chinese)

Philip was confident in his research ability and the quality of his research articles. He met a series of obstacles in the process of publishing. No journals responded to him after his submissions. It was suggested by colleagues that he should seek publishing agencies for help.

A colleague recommended a publishing agency for me. I gave them one of my articles. It replied that it was a good and did not need amendments. They could help me publish it on a key journal as long as I paid RMB 8,000. I was astonished. The black publishing market is disgusting. I rejected this transaction. (Casual conversation, April 23, 2013, original in Chinese)

Publication became a big concern for Philip. Once he contacted the academic journal hosted by his university, which was not recognized as a top journal by the promotion criteria. The editors liked it and agreed to accept it. However, he still refused to publish it in this low-class journal. Having no way out, Philip considered writing English research articles and submitting them to international journals which, as he expected, would provide much more insightful and critical comments for him and treat his papers much more fairly.

Philip did not show much interest in research project applications. Although there were different types of nation-level, province-level, city-level, and institution-level teaching and research projects, he found that social connections
more or less determined the success of application.

None of my colleagues have gained research grants from the central government yet. My university is low-ranked. The central government usually disperses grants to the most prominent scholars from the most prestigious universities. Some of my colleagues have won research grants from the provincial government. I learn that most of them sought leaders and government officials for help. I don’t like this academic culture. (Casual conversation, April 23, 2013, original in Chinese)

Although Philip intentionally kept a distance from the unfavorable research culture of the country, he still found some research activities rewarding. The provincial government held a university foreign language teaching conference every two years. Philip submitted a paper to the conference in 2012 and was awarded the second prize. He discovered from the list of prize that first prizes were all given to the big figures within the province, but he still felt excited because his article was recognized by the conference committee.

4.4 Philip’s other aspects of teacher work

When UA upgraded to a benke university in 2000, it required all teachers who only had the bachelor’s degree to obtain higher degrees. Philip attended a part-time postgraduate programme collaborated by his institution and another institution. He spent two summer vacations and one winter vacation completing all the coursework. This was a good learning opportunity for him. However, unlike most of his colleagues who decided to write a Master thesis in order to obtain a Master’s degree, he gave up. He only obtained a postgraduate study certificate in the end.

Each course was supposed to be completed within three days. The instructor spoke fast in the front, hoping to introduce all the knowledge within the limited time. We students sat there making quick notes. Therefore, I did not have a deep understanding of these subjects as there was no time to absorb knowledge. Nevertheless, it was an unforgettable learning experience. Apart from completing the courses, we had to pass the second foreign language (erwai) examination and complete the master’s thesis in order to obtain the master’s degree. I was reluctant
to prepare for the examination because my second foreign language was the difficult Japanese. According to the institution policy, teachers born before the 1970s could just complete the postgraduate courses without obtaining the master’s degree. So I gave up. (Autobiography, February 16, 2013, original in Chinese)

Philip reported that a higher degree was important, but it was not equal to a teacher’s ability in teaching, learning, and doing research. Although he only held a Bachelor’s degree, he firmly believed that he had sound teaching and research abilities.

In the second semester of every academic year, Philip supervised graduation paper writing. As part of the curriculum requirement, *benke* students must complete their graduation papers in the final year. Philip not only assigned supervision tasks for the EM teachers, but also took up supervision work himself. Although he was patient and conscientious enough to supervise students, he rebelled against graduation paper writing for the reason that his students could hardly reach the level of doing research. Apart from the course ‘academic paper writing’ which was scheduled for one semester in the fourth-year, students had no other training in this aspect. As a result, students’ poor work in graduation paper writing was the common problem complained by most of his colleagues every year. Philip could do nothing with the education system, but supervised students as an imposed task in the graduation season every year. He did not set strict criteria for his students because it was really difficult for them to write good papers. He supervised each student always in a face-to-face situation by commenting on their papers paragraph by paragraph and helped them make revisions in the meantime.

In addition, Philip was uninterested in honors. Many of his colleagues competed for the titles of ‘excellent teacher’, ‘excellent CCP member’, ‘excellent administrator’ and so on. According to his beliefs and values, these honors were formalistic and meant nothing to him.
4.5 Synopsis

Philip took on many responsibilities throughout his career (see Figure 4.3), among which teaching, research, and administration were the major ones.

Philip mainly conducted teaching in the first half of his career as it was the only requirement of his two working institutions. Similar to Tsui (2003, p. 79), the beginning years of his teaching were characterized by ‘survival’, ‘discovery’, and ‘exploration’. He was enthusiastic in teaching and confident in his language proficiency, but was uncertain about his teaching ability. He played an active role in developing his subject matter knowledge and instruction skills and adjusting teaching based on students’ feedback and his reflections. His high sense of self-efficacy led him to a stage of ‘teaching as routine’ which was characterized by decreasing enthusiasm, fewer reflections, and fewer teacher-student interactions. He went through a tough process to emancipate himself from the passive working state and make the choice of reforming his teaching from the teacher-dominated mode to the student-centered mode.

Philip began to do research in the early 2000s out of his desire for professional promotion which was comprised of research requirements. Satisfied with the Associate Professor title in the subsequent years, he was unable to retain motivation to do research. At the current stage he regards research as an important component of work because it can provide theoretical guidance for teaching and

Figure 4.3 Philip’s increasing responsibilities in his career
contribute to the development of teaching. In spite of the perceived value, he struggled to carry out any research under the demanding institution system and the unhealthy research culture of China.

Philip’s management role was like a coin with two sides: on one hand, it enabled him to gain a deeper understanding of and reflect upon the curriculum, institution policies and context, and the higher education context of China; on the other hand, under the centralized administration system, he felt powerless and frustrated.
Chapter 5 Snow’s story

Snow had been working for twenty-three years when this study started and she agreed to participate. She received her *benke* education as an English major in a comprehensive university from 1986 to 1990. According to the job assignment policy mandated from the central government, all graduates must obey the appointment they were assigned by the central government and go wherever they were needed. Upon graduation, she was appointed to an oil field, which was located in the northwest of China, and was assigned the job of English teacher at a training center. This top-down policy dispelled Snow’s dream of furthering her study and working and residing in a large city. Having suffered depression over her appointment at the oil field for ten years, Snow determined to change her working and living environment. Finally she took up a position as a university EFL teacher in a large city in the northwest of China, completed her PhD study at a top-ranked foreign language studies university in mainland China, and then was employed by UA as an EM teacher.

5.1 Snow’s teaching experiences

5.1.1 Teaching experiences before becoming an EM teacher

In those first ten years of her career, as mentioned above, Snow worked at a training center in an oil field. She was the only teacher who had graduated from the university and held a Bachelor’s degree. Her target students were senior secondary school graduates. Their purpose in attending the training center was to obtain a graduation certificate with which they could find a job in the oil field. They had low levels of English language proficiency and did not have any expectation of needing to learn English for future use. The center had no other requirements for teachers except their assigned coursework. It did not evaluate teachers, either. Snow was a bit anxious before commencing the teaching
appointment. Her burden was released as soon as she engaged in teaching.

The textbook was not at all difficult for me. Its difficulty level was the same as that of secondary school textbooks. It was very difficult for students, however. I had to explain the discrete language points in the textbook (words, phrases, and grammar rules) in detail. My goal was to deliver knowledge. Anyway, it’s relaxing, very easy to teach English there. (Interview, February 4, 2013, original in Chinese)

Snow did not perceive any challenge from the well-paid and relaxing job. It was effortless and boring repeating the basic English knowledge day after day. This state of working failed to get rid of her feelings of depression and loneliness.

I could not accept the job assignment. I longed for a rich cultural life. The remote oil field could absolutely not meet my demand. I lost myself. Like many young people, I fell in love, got married, and gave birth to my daughter in the first years. Life remained boring to me. (Interview, February 4, 2013, original in Chinese)

In 2000, the training center was dissolved. Snow was redistributed to a senior secondary school in the oil field to teach English. This new job imposed some pressure on her. The secondary school attached the greatest importance to students’ passing rate in the NCEE. It organized many practice examinations to prepare students. All teachers were evaluated based on students’ examination scores. Reluctant to lag behind, Snow took a series of actions to help her students develop language skills and gain higher scores: 1) she mastered the key test points by examining textbooks, curriculum requirements, and past NCEE papers; 2) she summarized her students’ strong and weak points by reviewing their answer sheets and asking them questions in class; 3) she prepared exercises for students to overcome their learning difficulties and equipped them with examination strategies when doing these exercises. All these efforts were rewarded by students’ achievement of satisfactory scores.

At the same time, Snow was considering leaving the oil field. She actively sought jobs in the capital city of her province. Her education background helped her easily find a teaching position at a university. In 2001, Snow moved from the
oil field to a capital city. She became a college English teacher (see 1.1.2 for the difference between college English teachers and EM teachers in the tertiary education context of China). She taught proficiency courses, mainly reading, to non-English-major university student.

I thought teaching university students must be totally different from teaching secondary school students. I felt nervous. I even doubted my ability of managing the university classroom. When I stood on the platform transmitting my prepared knowledge to students, I found I could completely control the whole classroom. The students were greatly dependent on me. They listened to me and took notes now and then. It’s an easy job for me. (Interview, February 4, 2013, original in Chinese)

In contrast to her previous teaching jobs, the university required teachers to prepare lessons together. Snow prepared lessons with colleagues based on the curriculum. They focused on delivering the following aspects of knowledge to students: words, phrases, sentences, grammar, background information of authors and cultural and historical terms and events, and the general meanings of texts. Snow seldom questioned her teaching because her colleagues taught more or less the same knowledge and she occupied the authority in the language classroom. Unlike the secondary school evaluation system, college English teachers were not responsible for students’ examination scores. In fact, there were no specific criteria to evaluate teaching.

5.1.2 Early experiences as an EM teacher

Snow identified herself as a conscientious English teacher and knowledge transmitter in the first half of her teaching profession. It seemed that neither the teaching contexts nor Snow herself placed an emphasis on other aspects of knowledge, such as the teacher’s pedagogical skills, students’ metacognitive knowledge, and so on. It wasn’t until her PhD study that Snow reconsidered her epistemology of teaching and her identity as an English teacher.
In 2006, Snow won a visiting scholar opportunity. The host university was one of the key foreign language studies universities of mainland China. Encouraged by her future PhD supervisor, she decided to take the doctoral entrance examination of the host university (The examination included three subjects – a foreign language excluding English, English linguistics, and applied linguistics). She was successfully enrolled as a PhD student by this university in 2007. Her supervisor’s behaviors and actions had a strong impact on her understanding of teacher identity.

My supervisor supervised ten PhD students. In spite of the heavy supervision workload, he insisted on meeting us once a week or once two weeks. He was strict with our PhD theses. He not only carefully examined and revised our theses, but also set high criteria for us. We were pushed to work diligently.

... I respect my supervisor. I learn from him that a qualified teacher should be a moral human being. A qualified teacher should equip himself/herself with solid professional knowledge and skills. A qualified teacher should care about students. It’s common around the campus that supervisors exploited students. They asked students to work for them. These work had nothing to do with the students’ own studies. My supervisor valued our time and effort. He had heavy family burden; he had heavy teaching and research workloads; he had heavy supervision workloads. No matter how busy he was, he never asked us for any help. My supervisor only attended international conferences to present his research and rejected to attend domestic conferences because of his antagonism to the academic culture. (Interview, February 4, 2013, original in Chinese)

Under the influence of her supervisor, Snow was diligent, careful, and critical in doing research. Moreover, she highlighted the importance of mutual respect between teachers and students, teachers’ consideration for students, teacher scaffolding, and teachers’ critical reflection on academic culture.

In the last two years of her PhD study, Snow was assigned to teach English majors at the foreign language studies university where she was a doctoral student. The courses she taught included language proficiency courses (Intensive Reading and Advanced English) as well as disciplinary knowledge courses (English Rhetoric and English Linguistics). To her surprise, the students’ level of language
proficiency was extremely high and they did not welcome the traditional information processing approach in the two language proficiency courses she taught them.

The students were unimaginably excellent. They comprehended the textbook so well that I did not need to focus too much on it. They always voluntarily explained the textbook knowledge and called for more teacher-student communication activities. I had to change my teaching approach. We spent much time discussing a wide range of topics, including the prominent themes and issues in textbooks, hot issues in the society, philosophical concepts, and topics in various disciplines. Student demands made me reflect upon my teaching objectives: it was important to develop English majors’ language skills; but it was of equal importance to develop their critical thinking ability, guide them to express their opinions logically and convincingly, and develop them into moral human beings. (Biography, May 4, 2013, original in English)

In face of the big change in classroom teaching, Snow noticed that her own knowledge and skills needed to be developed. Apart from subject matter knowledge, she enriched her interdisciplinary knowledge and was alert to the latest national and international events. In order to improve her pedagogical skills and provide learning opportunities for students, she observed many experienced teachers’ classroom teaching, read their teaching plans, and asked for advice on how to manage the different types of courses.

Influenced by her learning and teaching experiences during her PhD study, Snow began to reconstruct her language teacher identity. She expanded her identity from that of a subject matter knowledge transmitter to a teacher who cared about students’ metacognitive knowledge, interdisciplinary and moral knowledge, critical thinking, students’ learning and living attitudes, and values.

5.1.3 Teaching experiences at the current working institution

When Snow joined UA upon the completion of her PhD, she was allocated to teach Advanced English and English Linguistics to third-year English majors in the first semester. She was pleased with this assignment. Third-year students, in
her opinion, should be more critical and reflective than first- and second-year students. Therefore, she felt it would be feasible to share opinions and values with these students. Besides, the small class size (around 25 students) for Advanced English made it convenient for the teacher to communicate with all students.

In my opinion, students’ attitudes, opinions, and values are more important than subject matter knowledge itself for their study and future development. In the advanced English classroom, I spent more than half of the in-class time discussing social and life issues with students. They were cooperative. We got on very well with each other. I enjoyed the process of communicating with them and observing their minor changes in behaviors, views, and actions.

... It was difficult for students to understand the textbook. So I mainly explained it. Due to the limited time in class, I did not provide many practice opportunities for students. (Interview, Jan. 10, 2013, original in Chinese)

Compared with the English majors at the top foreign language studies university where Snow had pursued her PhD study, the English majors at UA were on average less competent. In the face of the students’ lower standard, Snow took up the knowledge transmitter role again. Few students questioned this traditional teaching approach. Judging from Snow’s account, it seemed obvious that she prioritized students’ views and values over language proficiency and knowledge of the English language. Her dedication to teacher-student interactions in these aspects was rewarded by the good rapport she built with students and the growth in students’ intellectual, attitudinal, and ideological knowledge.

The department’s course arrangement for the next semester annoyed Snow. When she overheard that she was allocated to teach another class of students Advanced English, she was confused. Moreover, her workload was increased. Apart from Advanced English and English Linguistics, she was assigned to teach first-year English majors Intensive Reading.

I went to the Department Head’s office asking why I could not continue teaching my class. He told me that it did not matter because I had another class to teach. In order to let him understand my teaching philosophy, I exemplified the meaningful
things I had been doing and the necessity of long-term interaction between the teacher and students. I also complained about his disrespect for teachers because he changed my class without negotiating with me. The head finally agreed to let me teach my class in the next semester. However, it was too late. The course arrangements had been submitted to the Academic Registry, which did not permit any change. To show my resistance for the unreasonable arrangement, I refused to teach Advanced English in future. (Interview, January 10, 2013, original in Chinese)

In the Intensive reading class, Snow detected many problems in first-year English majors – low levels of language proficiency, passivity, dependence on the teacher, confusion, etc. She held the view that language skills and learning attitudes were of equal importance for the novice English majors. In her daily teaching practices, she still adopted the traditional approach of delivering textbook knowledge to students. In the instruction process, she almost explained everything, including background knowledge, key words, phrases, and sentences, grammar, discourse analysis, themes, relevant historical, political, or literature knowledge. In the following lesson, as a form of revision, she asked students to answer her questions on the previously taught knowledge.

I have to say that the students’ learning abilities are so bad that I always have to explain the key points several times. Do you know why I translate many paragraphs into Chinese? The students can hardly follow me if I speak English. (Casual conversation after classroom observation, March 5, 2013, original in Chinese)

Snow reported that the students had great difficulty in learning. As a teacher, she could only patiently give them instructions. In regard to student practice, Snow provided only a few opportunities for students. A typical example was that she asked students to give a presentation in every Monday’s class. They were free to choose the form, such as telling stories, reporting news, etc. Each of them must complete the presentation within ten minutes. Each student only had one presentation opportunity every semester.
I don’t care much about how well the students perform. What I am concerned about is whether they take the task seriously and make careful preparation. Time in class is quite limited. I have to spend much time on the textbook. As they develop into more competent students, I will provide them with more opportunities. (Casual conversation, April 22, 2013, original in Chinese)

In the intensive reading class, Snow also paid close attention to students’ attitudes towards learning. Every week she spared some time inquiring into their status quo in learning and daily life, listening to them, and giving them advice. She hoped to guide students to take a positive attitude towards learning and plan their learning in the long term. In spite of all her efforts, she was disappointed to find that the students were greatly dependent on her. They could hardly sustain their efforts to learn without her reminders.

I was away for about two weeks last month. When I came back, I asked my students how they went with their study. They said they missed me very much. They were sloppy without me. Then we spent one teaching hour talking about their problems. This is why I insist that language teachers and the curriculum should make a long-term plan for student development. (Interview, May 4, 2013, original in Chinese)

In language proficiency classes as with advanced English and intensive reading all were aimed at developing students’ language skills and were allocated with the longest teaching hours amongst all courses, Snow found it possible to implement her teaching philosophies. She was committed to developing students’ attitudes and values by communicating with them on a weekly basis. Subject matter knowledge seemed to be put in the secondary place. The traditional teacher and student roles in the language classroom did not change – Snow was the authority and students were recipients of knowledge. Out of concern for her students’ long-term development, Snow was critical of the curriculum and course arrangements. She was even empowered to resist inappropriate course assignments.
The teaching hours for disciplinary courses such as linguistics and rhetoric were much shorter than proficiency courses. Snow admitted that she had no idea about how to make her teaching more effective.

There are many concepts and theories in linguistics and rhetoric. The students have no knowledge of them before taking up these courses. I guess I should be responsible for introducing the knowledge to them. (Causal conversation after classroom observation, March 8, 2013, original in Chinese)

As a rule, Snow checked students’ understanding of the taught knowledge in following lessons. She gave them hints if they had difficulties. In this way, most students could answer her questions.

In spite of Snow’s effort to communicate with students about attitudes and values, she did not transform her traditional teaching practices. In her class, she almost dominated the whole process, especially when it was concerned with subject matter knowledge.

In some sense, language teaching is a process of developing individual learners. Apart from knowledge of the English language, it should involve guidance of ideology and introduction of knowledge of humanities. I prefer to lead students to follow me because my teaching philosophies are established based on years of experiences and must be useful for their development. The teacher should manage the classroom. (Questionnaire, June 21, 2013, original in Chinese)

Snow noted that students’ cooperation in the classroom and their attitudinal and ideological growth were her major source of job satisfaction. She also enjoyed talking with students beyond the classroom on equitable terms. Nonetheless, she suffered from burnout from time to time.

Sometimes I am reluctant to come to the language classroom. I get annoyed sometimes. Perhaps these symptoms were concerned with my physical condition which turned worse in hot weather. I always arrange more student activities such as role play, presentation, and exercises to go through this period. (Questionnaire, June 21, 2013, original in Chinese)
External evaluation on teaching was not necessary for Snow. She held that teaching should be conducted based on the teacher’s conscience. Student’s growth instead of external acceptance was important to her.

5.2 Snow’s research experiences

Similar to Philip, research was not part of Snow’s responsibilities in the first half of her career. In the latter half, she gradually constructed her researcher identity, which changed across time and contexts. It was established during her master’s study, further developed during her PhD study, and turned out to be a struggle at her current working institution.

5.2.1 Beginning years of doing research

Returning to early years to look at Snow’s first involvement in research, it is necessary to consider the time when she pursued Master study, during the years 2000 to 2003. When she was in her own words ‘lost’ in the oil field, she learned from her former classmates that many of them had obtained a Master’s degrees. This news reminded her that she might be able to enrich or change her monotonous life by pursuing Master’s study. Although her qualification was good enough to handle her job in the oil field, Snow made the decision to pursue a Master degree. After taking the entrance examination, she successfully enrolled in a part-time MA programme in English linguistics at a nearby university.

In her Master study, she gained much knowledge in English linguistics and in doing research. In the process of writing her master thesis, she was supervised by a strict and conscientious professor. Following his guidance, Snow invested substantial effort in thesis writing.

It was a wonderful journey. I learned many things: 1) how to write the thesis; 2) how to explore the related field on the internet; 3) how to find the related literature; 4) how to usefully employ the materials in different libraries; 5) how to understand the supervisor’s advice; 6) how to be a serious researcher. (Biography, May 4, 2013, original in English)
During her Master study, Snow believed that she changed from a secondary school teacher to a university teacher. At the university, the academic staff not only pursued further studies, but also sought professional title promotion. Following this trend, Snow set herself the goal of achieving a promotion from Lecturer to Associate Professor.

I admired my colleagues’ achievements in research and their promotions. So I began to writing articles tentatively during my master study. I must publish four articles. One of them must be published in a CSSCI (Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index) journal. It was a bit difficult for me at that time. I worked very hard and finally met the research requirements. (Interview, February 4, 2013, original in Chinese)

Snow obtained her Master’s degree in 2003 and was promoted to an Associate Professor in 2004. These achievements became a major source of her job satisfaction. More importantly, she established confidence in her research ability and gained momentum for further development. Two years after her promotion, the visiting scholar programme previously mentioned at a top foreign language studies university was open for application. Only Associate Professors and Professors were eligible to apply for this programme. It was a golden opportunity to visit the foreign language studies university and collaborated with researchers there. Snow was successfully selected and was sponsored to stay at the university for one year.

5.2.2 Research experiences during PhD study

Snow did not consider doing PhD study until her supervisor suggested that she have a go. As soon as she made up her decision to take the PhD entrance examination, she designed a tight schedule.

I only had half a year to prepare for the examination. Luckily I did not have any workload as a visiting scholar. I was immersed in reading, note-taking, thinking, and memorizing every day. The university library had rich resources. I borrowed many books there for reference. It was a tough journey, but I gained rich
knowledge on linguistics and laid a foundation for my PhD study. (Biography, May 4, 2013, original in English)

During Snow’s three-year-long PhD study, research was at the heart of her life. She identified herself as a researcher in critical reading and strove for development. Her supervisor, who was a conscientious, critical, well-planned, and expert researcher, set a good example for her. Apart from Snow’s individual efforts, she attributed her development in research to her supervisor and peers. Her supervisor held regular meetings with all of his PhD students, each of whom must report their progress. He was strict with their PhD theses, too.

Our university adopted the blind review system for PhD theses. It made us anxious. I remember that in the days before submitting my thesis, both my supervisor and I worked extremely hard. I followed his comments to amend my thesis and was given prescribed time to hand in the revised versions. He checked emails at 11.30 pm every day, reading and revising our theses at midnight. (Interview, February 4, 2013, original in Chinese)

Apart from her supervisor, Snow was engaged in communities of practice with her peers. They shared the same goals – completing the PhD study and worked together towards this goal.

I had a close friend during my PhD study. We were both visiting scholars at that university and were supervised by the same professor. We prepared the doctoral entrance examination together and were accepted as PhD students at the same time. We frequently communicated with each other, sharing our worries and happiness. (Biography, May 4, 2013, original in English)

In addition, there were many research activities on campus, such as peer discussions, workshops, seminars, and conferences. Snow learned about up-to-date developments in her research area and gained many insights from these activities. Influenced by these rich experiences, she became a researcher who was interested in doing research and regarded it as her major responsibility.
5.2.3 Research experiences at current stage

When Snow was employed by UA as a ‘high-level talent’, she was expected to mainly contribute to the development of the university by producing outstanding research outcomes. It was frustrating that neither the university nor the education system provided a favorable academic culture for doing research. Snow faced a dilemma:

I like doing research and hope to make contributions to my research area. But doing research is definitely not like this: teachers conduct research just for professional title promotion and they would rather go beyond the bottom of the moral line to achieve this goal – bribing, trading, plagiarizing… As a result, research cannot contribute anything to teaching. (Questionnaire, June 21, 2013, original in Chinese)

Dominated by her antagonism to the working environment, Snow was reluctant to join the institutional and domestic research communities. In spite of this, she was unable to resist participating in research activities. The Department Head (the present Dean) kept urging her to apply for research projects and awards and publish research papers. Under this pressure, Snow had to take action. She won two province-level projects. Snow acknowledged that there were many constraints in applying for research grants:

The proposals must have powerful theoretical underpinnings and provide strong evidence to convince the reviewers that they were meaningful. I needed many references, but the resources at the university library were too scarce. Besides, I needed a long period of time concentrating on the proposals, but my heavy teaching workloads occupied too much of my time. Last but not least, social connections were crucial for successful applications, especially in this province. I had to turn to my alumni and supervisors for help. (Questionnaire, June 21, 2013, original in Chinese)

Perhaps within the current academic context, the only enjoyable thing for Snow to do as a researcher was to do fieldwork. Snow’s research focused on introducing critical reading theories into her reading classes and examining the
changes that took place in students. She collected rich first-hand data from her own language classroom. However, her teaching and research agendas were sometimes disrupted by course arrangement, curriculum, etc. (see 4.2.1.3).

Snow resisted doing research as an isolated activity. She regarded that it was also important to attend conferences to learn about the latest development in research and to exchange views with other researchers. The university did not provide much financial support, so she had to turn to the department.

The head is mean about money. He prefers the conferences that are held within the province because it saves expenses. I proposed attending conferences outside the province several times. He only consented once. I have been working here for two and a half years, but I only attended two conferences, one inside the province and one in Shanxi province. (Casual conversation, May 8, 2013, original in Chinese)

Pushed by the department head, Snow wrote several articles. As a non-native English speaker, she had no confidence in her academic writing in English. Like many of her colleagues, she wrote Chinese articles and had to follow the institutional system to get them published in top journals.

Even if I hold a PhD degree, no domestic journals care about it. Only money and social connections in the present academic circle will get things published. I am against publishing my articles via these means. That is why I did not publish any articles last year. (Interview, May 4, 2013, original in Chinese)

Having no way out, Snow had to contact publishing agencies, no matter how reluctant she was. Disappointed with the current working and education environment, which did not allow her to actualize her value as a researcher, Snow was planning to seek study abroad opportunities.

Snow’s department sometimes organized special meetings with the few academic staff who had doctoral degrees. The chair of these meetings, the Associate Head who was in charge of research, normally assigned research tasks – applying for grants and awards and publishing articles. Snow seldom shared her opinions in these meetings because the Associate Head did not initiate research
activities or supported their research. He was mainly concerned with his own research and spent much of the research expenses of the department for his research.

### 5.3 Being a mother and career choices

It was obvious that early in Snow’s career the lack of freedom in job selection by the central government due to the intense political atmosphere upon graduation meant that Snow was like a caged bird working and living in an isolated oil field. Nonetheless, in the following course of her career, she had made several big decisions, which led to her further personal and professional development (See Figure 5.1).

![Figure 5.1 Big changes in Snow’s career](image_url)

The first one was moving from the oil field to the capital city of her home province. She quit her job in the secondary school and found another one in a university. The second one was whilst she was doing her PhD study. And the third appointment meant giving up job opportunities in the largest city of China and working at her current institution which was located in a medium-sized city. Snow’s daughter played a pivotal role in her decision making, although her own pursuits were also important.
The oil field was an underdeveloped place, which could hardly meet Snow’s desire for a rich cultural and spiritual life. It is understandable that she was reluctant to let her daughter grow up in such an environment. The older her daughter grew, the more eager she was to change their living environment. When it was time for her daughter to receive formal education (In mainland China, students receive free primary and junior secondary school education which altogether last nine years.), she was determined to leave the oil field. She did not need to make much effort to find a position in the university of the capital city of her home province with her education background. Her parents also lived in the city and could provide accommodation and take care of her daughter for her. However, her husband’s background did not allow him to find a better job in the city. In the end, Snow had to leave her husband in the oil field. She took her daughter to the city where she worked in a university and her daughter received her six-year-long primary school education.

It was difficult to make up the decision. Living in the oil field drove me mad. I did not want my daughter to grow up in this terrible environment. My husband was reluctant to separate from us. He had to support my decision for the sake of our daughter’s growth. (Interview, February 4, 2013, original in Chinese)

Snow’s daughter was also the reason for her desire to pursue PhD study. As a caring mother, she had her daughter by her side during the three years of her PhD study, taking care of her and more importantly, letting her experience the junior secondary school life in the largest city of China - Shanghai. Snow was not only thinking of the short-term benefits she could provide for her daughter, she also bore her daughter’s senior secondary school education in mind all the time. She did not plan to go back to her hometown, an underdeveloped place in the northwest of China. Instead, she intended to reside in Shanghai. This warned her that she must graduate in due time and obtain the residential certificate as quickly as possible so that her daughter would be accepted by a local junior secondary school. Although Snow completed her study within three years, she met
difficulties in settling down:

All the institutions I applied for asked me to wait for the recruitment results without specifying the exact dates. I became restless when there were no responses after half a year. At that time one of my friends who worked at this institution (UA) told me that it would be easy for me to be recruited because it was short of PhDs in language studies. I thought it might be an alternative to help me out of the awkward situation. When I contacted the department head, he warmly welcomed me and promised to recruit me as soon as possible. The institution provided accommodation and helped my daughter enter a senior secondary school. The secondary school education of this province was well-known across the whole country, so I agreed to join this institution. (Interview, January 10, 2013, original in Chinese)

In order to provide the most favorable learning environment for her daughter, Snow spent much time taking good care of her – preparing nutritious food for her, going to her school to accompany her in her extracurricular time, picking her up after evening classes, taking her to the theater to see all the movies she liked at weekends, and taking her for tours during summer and winter vacations. As a mother, Snow was willing to offer everything she could to support her daughter’s study and development.

5.4 Snow’s other aspects of teacher work

As the department was upgraded into a school in 2013, Snow was appointed the Head of the English department. She was the only one who met the selection criteria – the Head must be either a Professor or an academic staff holding the doctoral degree. She seemed uninterested in this administrative position. Neither did she have any expectation for her future administrative work.

I don’t want to take up this position. What can a department head do? I don’t think I will have any real power. I will have to follow the Dean’s and Associate Deans’ demands. Besides, I don’t plan to stay in this university for a long time. I cannot bear the academic culture here. (Casual conversation, June 17, 2013, original in Chinese)
When the School of Foreign Languages came into being, the Dean began to arrange some inter-institutional communication activities. In the first half of 2013, he visited two other universities within the province. Each time he led five staff, most of whom were those in school leadership positions. Snow was invited on these visits, thinking they were good opportunities to learn how other universities run their foreign language major programmes and exchange ideas with them. However, she was disappointed to find that these activities enlightened the Dean, but failed to stimulate him to make improvements.

In order to highlight the significance of the academics holding doctoral degrees, the university asked them to attend many institutional meetings, which were only attended by institution and department leaders and were always concerned with institutional and CCP policies. Snow hated these meaningless meetings in which she could only listen.

5.5 Synopsis

Snow’s career trajectory was different from that of Philip’s in that she had worked at four education institutions, located in different regions of China, inclusive of a training center, a senior secondary school, and two universities. If we take a close look at her experiences and the historical context, she still shared many characteristics with Philip.

From Figure 5.2, it can be seen that there are similarities to Philip’s pathway: for both of them teaching was the single most important job in the first half of their careers. Snow taught from 1990; she also experienced a stage of inexperience, a stage of routine teaching, and a stage of transformation. After experiencing a short period of anxiety as a novice teacher, Snow began to practice teaching as routine (textbook knowledge transmission) because neither the training center nor the students themselves, who would be future oil workers, posed any challenge for her. She did not question her teaching until she began to teach English majors in her years as a PhD student. From then on she began to
attach greater importance to students’ attitudes, beliefs, and development than she had done before.

![Diagram](image)

**Figure 5.2 Snow’s increasing responsibilities in her career**

Snow made ongoing developments in research, facilitated by her study at Master and PhD levels and the research requirements for professional promotion at her former working institution. Disappointed with the current research culture of China and her current institution, she hoped to actualize her value through teaching instead of doing research. At the same time, she was considering leaving the institution and joining a more favorable working context.

Snow held the appointment of Head of Department when the investigation was conducted. She submitted to the imposed identity, but took an antagonistic attitude towards it mainly because of the limited power she would have. Philip, who was the Associate Dean of the School of Foreign Languages, shared the similar attitude towards the current administrative power relationship of UA.
Chapter 6 Daisy’s story

Daisy had been worked for about fifteen years when this study commenced. She received benke education as a BA/TEFL major at a teacher education university from 1994 to 1998. In her days, the central government had already abolished the state-controlled system of job assignment. Graduates were free to make their own choices on future jobs. Majoring in TEFL, most of Daisy’s peers planned to be English teachers upon graduation. Daisy, however, was diffident in her competence as a qualified English teacher. In every oral English examination, she only got “60” (The full score was 100), which made her frustrated. As an alternative, Daisy attended the NPEE in the final year of study and selected her favorite subject - Chinese literature. Unfortunately she failed the examination. She went back to her hometown and joined UA, the only university located there. It seemed to be her best choice because it was considered a decent career to be university teachers, especially university English teachers, at that time.

In the beginning years, Daisy took up many teaching tasks as an assistant teacher; she then did her Master’s study and was promoted to Lecturer; in the subsequent years, she sustained efforts to develop her teaching, but resisted research. Influenced by her religious belief, Daisy took an optimistic attitude towards work and life. I will first describe her experience of becoming a Christian, one of the most important factors that drove her to make changes in her career. I will then describe her experiences of teaching, conducting research, becoming a mother, and other events in the process of tracing her trajectory of professional development.

6.1 Becoming a Christian

Daisy became a Christian in 2011. Prior to that year, she had been quite pessimistic in both her work and life. She compared herself to a stalk of grass which was not as high as the tree and not as fragrant as the flower. As far as
teaching was concerned, she had regarded herself as an incompetent EM teacher. Accidentally on one accidental occasion, she accessed the blogs of a priest on the Internet. There she found rich information about the Holy Bible and the priest’s interpretations. Daisy’s decision to become an adherent of Christianity occurred by accident.

I did not expect that I would become a Christian when reading his blogs. I just read them every day out of curiosity. One day, when I was doing laundry, I asked myself “Who am I?” “Why did I come into this world?” “What am I living for?” “Who will love me forever?” I was suddenly inspired that I was the child of God. No matter how small I was, I was an integral part of the world and God always accompanied me loving and protecting me. (Interview, January 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

As a Christian, Daisy read the Bible and the blogs of her favorite priests every day. She also kept a blog on the Internet. Posting knowledge of the Bible and her reflections via blogs had already become a part of her daily life. In this way, she gained a deep understanding of the concepts of love, hatred, justice, life, death, forgiveness, etc. More importantly, Daisy took a more positive attitude towards work and life. With the help of religion, she gradually recognized her own value and dedicated herself to creating a beautiful life, filled with love and gratitude. This big change had a great impact on her professional development.

6.2 Daisy’s teaching experiences

6.2.1 Early experiences as an EM teacher: I was incapable

Similar to Philip’s undergraduate study, the TEFL programme Daisy attended placed an emphasis on language proficiency and disciplinary knowledge rather than knowledge and skills of language teaching. In the final year of her undergraduate study, she only attended a two-week-long practicum in a senior secondary school. During this period, she only conducted classroom observations without taking concrete teaching practices.
Daisy commenced her career in the teaching profession with pain and bewilderment. She defined herself as an incompetent EM teacher because of her low examination scores in oral English. Confronted with the first course she was assigned to teach – Cultures of English-speaking Countries, she felt quite anxious.

I did not know how to teach this course at all. There was too much knowledge of the major English-speaking countries, including geography, history, culture, politics, religion, education, people, life, etc. I wrote to a former teacher for help. She encouraged me and sent me some materials. I still had no idea on how to teach. Having no way out, I had to memorize all the content in the textbook and recite them to students in class. My instruction was illogical, unsystematic, and mechanical. I felt quite embarrassed. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

As an outcome of her ineffective teaching experience in the first semester, Daisy was convinced that she was not a competent and qualified EM teacher. She felt diffident, but she had a strong desire to change this status quo. In the following semesters, she was challenged by many new courses such as Intensive Reading, English Grammar, English Writing, Translation, etc. In order to survive the heavy workload, Daisy was well aware that apart from subject matter knowledge, she must develop pedagogical skills.

It’s really a big challenge for me to take on new courses every semester. I spent almost all my time on lesson preparations and classroom teaching. In order to improve my teaching, I reflected upon my performance after each lesson. I analyzed the pros and cons and tried to make improvement in the next lesson. For example, if I discovered that my instruction was unstructured and made it difficult to grasp the key points, I made attempts to highlight the key points at the beginning and the end of the next lesson. During my instruction I paid attention to students’ responses and tried various methods to let them understand me better. (Interview, January 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

It was a painful process for Daisy to explore the teaching approaches of different types of courses. Recalling the experiences during this period, Daisy acknowledged that these were opportunities of practice, which enabled her to
become familiar with many language proficiency courses. A qualified EM teacher, according to her knowledge, should be capable of handling all proficiency courses. She also felt it a pity that one semester was so short that she was unable to explore effective teaching strategies to cope with the particularity of each course. Via continuous reflections and explorations, Daisy was no longer simply dependent on textbooks and teacher handbooks. She started to make her own judgment about each course and the allocated textbook, add extra materials, and make the whole teaching process more systematic.

Teaching had been always an isolated activity. However, in Daisy’s memory, there was an unforgettable classroom observation activity organized by the department in the beginning years of her teaching profession. As a novice EM teacher who was confused about language teaching, this was a great learning opportunity for her. Curious about how her colleagues taught English major courses, she observed their teaching quite attentively:

Teacher A (She referred to Philip, one of the case study participants of this study.) was humorous and explained everything clearly and thoroughly. He paid attention to individual differences and made most students follow him. Teacher B (anonymous) organized her class very well and explained everything explicitly. Teacher C (anonymous) highlighted the key and difficult points to students and her explanations were concise. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

Enlightened by these colleagues’ teaching, Daisy found more strategies to improve her own teaching such as language use, classroom organization, highlighting key and difficult points, attention to students, and so on. Bearing clear goals in mind, her classroom was better ordered than before. Despite her progress, she remained diffident and longed for further development.

6.2.2 Ongoing development in teaching

In the first three years, changing course assignments prevented Daisy from understanding each course deeply. From the fourth year on, Daisy took up three
fixed courses – Extensive Reading, Grammar, and American Literature. This type of course assignment rescued her from a disordered status quo.

It was stressful days for me to take up new courses every semester. I had to spend most time on learning. Fixed courses released my burden and allowed me sufficient time to consolidate my accumulated knowledge and explore effective strategies to teach these three courses. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

In Daisy’s mind, she carried an identity of being an incompetent EM teacher. The only way for her to develop into a competent teacher was to invest substantial effort in teaching. Instead of taking routine actions, she was engaged in reflective teaching practices. It seemed that each of her lessons was exquisitely prepared and planned. Daisy carefully considered each procedure of her class – how to start it, how to lead in new knowledge, how to explain it, how to consolidate students’ understanding, how to motivate students, etc. A noticeable characteristic was that she not only sustained efforts to explore what to teach and how to teach, but also took into consideration student needs and responses.

I always have to spend quite a long time on lesson preparation. Although I am quite familiar with the subject matter knowledge now, I still have to spend at least one whole day preparing my lesson. There is too much to think: how can I arouse students’ interests? What strategies can be adopted to make students best understand my instruction? How can I let students grasp key points? How can I make sure that students have mastered the key points?... (Interview, April 25, 2013, original in Chinese)

Through continuous exploration, Daisy’s Extensive Reading class became well structured: 1) The teacher checked students’ revision work; 2) The teacher led in a new text; 3) Students read the new text and did post-reading exercises within prescribed time limit; 4) The teacher checked students’ answers to post-reading exercises; 5) The teacher led students in an analysis of the text; 6) The teacher organized student discussions on the theme of the text; 7) The teacher shared an extra reading text with students; 8) The teacher assigned students
out-of-class revision and reading tasks.

Daisy noted that she once took it for granted that students were autonomous enough to review the textbook knowledge. In the final examination of one semester she was surprised by students’ poor performance:

My former students used to gain high scores on the questions on textbook knowledge in final examinations. I seldom checked them in class. But this cohort of students’ performance in their first final examination was quite disappointing. I designed three types of questions in the examination paper to check their textbook knowledge: matching words and their meanings, choosing appropriate words or collocations to complete the given sentences which were extracted from the textbook, and explaining some key sentences. It might be my fault as I did not monitor the students’ learning. From the second semester on, I checked their revision work at the very beginning of each lesson. (Interview, January 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

At the revision step, Daisy provided contexts for students to explain words, phrases, and sentences rather than checking discrete items alone. She believed that the former strategy was more effective for students to consolidate language knowledge. Adding the revision step in her teaching allowed Daisy to monitor students’ progress and in the meantime drove them to review the taught knowledge out of class.

In the past, there was no warming-up in the Extensive Reading class. Daisy directly explained the text in detail as soon as students finished reading it within the prescribed time limit. Students seemed uninterested and could not comprehend the texts very well. This status quo might be changed if she led into each text in a way that could arouse students’ interests and help them become familiar with the topic of the new text before reading it. It was time-consuming for Daisy to prepare the warming-up step.

It is always difficult to decide on the warming-up topic. It should be interesting and related closely to the new text. After making the decision, I need to seek materials from books, magazines, journals, and Internet resources to introduce the topic. I design PowerPoints for the warming-up step. Useful pictures and information are all included in PowerPoints. (Interview, April 25, 2013, original in Chinese)
With regard to text explanation, she compared extensive reading with intensive reading and reached the conclusion that her major task should be helping students gain the general ideas of texts and equip them with necessary reading skills. Therefore, instead of analyzing texts in detail, she focused on the general ideas of whole texts and paragraphs and highlighted key words and sentences. At the same time, she involved students in text analysis by asking them to explain or translate key points; she also gave students training on certain reading skills such as scanning, skimming, etc.

After learning each text, Daisy always shared additional reading material with students:

I love reading and I subscribe several English magazines. It is a reading course. I hope that my students can gain access to more reading materials to develop their reading skills. Therefore, I select one article from the magazines for each lesson and spend ten to fifteen minutes in each lesson sharing an extra article with them. There is also a Text B in the textbook for each lesson. Although I only teach Text A, I ask students to write a summary of Text B to develop their reading ability. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

As an English Grammar teacher, Daisy highlighted her responsibility to enhancing students’ awareness of grammar in daily learning. In order to achieve her goal, she gave a concise introduction to the key grammar knowledge and rules and spent most of the in-class time doing exercises. Each individual student was asked to deal with specific exercises, including the keys and explanations. Daisy wrote all exercises on the blackboard for several years. As soon as multimedia equipment was available, she used PowerPoints to present them, which saved a lot of time.

The grammar course only lasts one semester. Given this, my primary goal is to convince them of the importance of grammar. Letting students do a great number of exercises seems to be effective to achieve the goal. When the end of the semester approached, there were always many students expressing their wish to continue taking the grammar course. In order to encourage them to learn grammar independently, I expressed my willingness to communicate with them via email
Since the department was short of literature teachers, the head designated Daisy to learn American literature at a top-ranked university in 2003. This was a good learning opportunity for her, a lover of literature. This was the only learning opportunity she was provided by the department and the university in her career. Attending the MA courses on American literature there, Daisy not only acquired much literature knowledge, but also learned many teaching skills, such as how to introduce writers and their works and how to guide students to appreciate literature works. From 2007 onwards, she taught the course American Literature at UA.

In the American Literature class, Daisy attached importance to literature knowledge and students’ morals and values. In order to help students master the key literature knowledge, she normally gave a summary of what had been taught at the end of each lesson. At the very beginning of the following lesson, she prepared several open-ended questions on the taught knowledge for students to answer. She gave a summary again with the intention of consolidating students’ knowledge.

Apart from literature knowledge, Snow made an effort to cultivate students’ human quality and inspire them to view life from new perspectives and think deeply about life.

When learning Emerson, I always stress that students should get back to a simple life and follow their inner self rather than simply following others; when learning Emerson’s poems, I encourage them to seek beautiful things from ordinary life; when learning Frost’s poems, I warn students that they should think twice before making big decisions and take responsibility for their own decisions. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

American Literature was a difficult course on disciplinary knowledge for most students. In spite of this, Daisy refused to simply transmit knowledge. In order to get students involved, she raised her voice to ask “OK?” “Clear?” to learn
whether students could follow her and asked them specific questions from time to time:

It is important to let students think, so I remind myself of asking students questions all the time. It’s easy for me to forget about this if I do not consciously remind myself. If the new knowledge is concerned with the taught knowledge, I prefer to let students do more work. For example, we need to review Hamlet when analyzing the poems of Pond and Eliot, so I ask students to talk about the characteristics of Prince Hamlet. When it is about new knowledge, I take more responsibility of introduction and explanation. I also ask students questions to see their understandings of poems, plays, novels, characters, plots, rhetoric, etc. (Casual conversation after classroom observation, March 20, 2013, original in Chinese)

Daisy adopted several strategies to develop students’ out-of-class learning ability. She provided extra materials for students to prepare for new lessons and a list of important literature works for them to read on their own. Most students were indifferent to her suggestion and help. The few students who followed her advice reported that the works were too difficult to understand. Concerned about student learning and development, Daisy inquired about students’ problems and gave them advice during breaks, hoping to seek other ways to motivate students to learn out of class.

Due to her low sense of self-efficacy and high sense of commitment to teaching, Daisy placed great effort on striving for better teaching. In addition to her self-improvement in language use, explanation, and classroom organization, she was concerned with students’ language skills, knowledge, thinking, and values. She not only capitalized on the many resources (e.g. textbooks, online resources, blackboard, multimedia equipment, etc.), but also created many spaces (warming-up topics, teacher-student interactions, etc.) towards making her teaching student-centered.

6.2.3 Daisy’s changes in teaching after becoming a Christian

As the child of God, Daisy no longer felt inferior to others in the world. Gratitude
and love began to play a central role in her inner self. The religious belief transformed her understanding of herself as an incapable EM teacher. Recognizing her competence, she enjoyed teaching and was enthusiastic to improve teaching. In daily teaching practices, she made continuous effort to develop her own knowledge and skills as well as students from various aspects.

Many American literary works are concerned with the knowledge of the Holy Bible. Daisy, as a Christian, believed that her mission was not only reading the Bible on her own, but also sharing relevant knowledge with students to make them better understand literary works. Students seemed quite interested in the stories in the Bible.

In the American Literature class, Daisy also experimented with term paper writing. Every semester, she asked students to write a term paper on a selected topic of a literary work. The score was added to the total score of this course. Taking into account students’ lack of experience, she gave them guidance and answered their inquiries. To her disappointment, many students would rather commit plagiarism than write the papers independently. To cope with this ethical problem, Daisy searched the library and online resources to see how many ready-made papers were available and gave up the topics that made it convenient for students to commit plagiarism.

When scoring term papers, I pay attention to both students’ attitudes towards the assignment and the quality of their papers. Many students simply wanted to complete the required task. They always completed the term papers sloppily. Some only wrote a few words. Some even plagiarized other papers. My feedback was mainly scores, although I wrote comments for some papers. I hope that students can benefit from this practice - reading and analyzing literary works, seeking references, and developing their writing skills. It is helpful for their graduation paper writing. As the teacher, I need to seek better ways to convince them of the importance of term paper writing and to evaluate their papers. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

During this study, Daisy told me that she was considering first-year students’ out-of-class reading. She planned to contribute her English magazines to students
as their out-of-class reading resources.

We can only learn two texts each week. Students need to do more reading out of class. I know many of them are not self-disciplined. It may be reasonable to divide them into small learning groups. It is difficult to envisage the outcomes. I must find a possible way to monitor their progress. I haven’t got any idea on this yet. Anyway, I prefer to implement my idea into practice first. There must be solutions. (Casual conversation after classroom observation, March 27, 2013, original in Chinese)

Daisy confessed that she used to keep a distance from students as she did not know how to deal with the teacher-student relationship. Therefore, she built a ‘serious teacher’ image in front of students. However, more recently she has learned to love people around her, including students, and hopes to be a considerate teacher. During instruction, she shares some of her personal experiences; during breaks, she has more communication with students than before.

In regard to the teaching profession, Daisy admitted that she did not have a systematic understanding of it. She searched a lot of information on what a qualified EM teacher should be like when answering the questionnaire (see Appendix 4).

Teaching and education are two distinct concepts. We as teachers always focus on delivering knowledge while as educators we must pay attention to our influence on students in terms of knowledge, skills, values, behaviors, words, etc. The teachers that impressed me the most deeply are those who not only had rich knowledge but also had high moral qualities - responsibility, modesty, enthusiasm, optimism, commitment, generosity, patience, care for students. In my opinions, teachers cannot simply complain about the university or the society. They should change their inner selves first. I still have a lot to do to become a qualified teacher. (Questionnaire, May 4, 2013, original in Chinese)

6.3 Daisy’s research experiences

Daisy learned to do research in the process of writing her Master’s thesis. Then she withdrew from any research for years until she converted to Christianity.
Currently she plays an active role in doing research in spite of the top-down pressures and high standards for evaluating research outcomes.

Daisy’s original intention to conduct research was due to following the requirements of UA, in that she had to attend a part-time MA programme two years after the commencement of her teaching profession. It was a good learning opportunity for her as a novice teacher who was struggling in her development. The length of study time for part-time postgraduate study was flexible. Some of her colleagues spent eight to nine years. Daisy was the first one among her colleagues who obtained the Master’s degree.

I began to prepare for my thesis as soon as I completed all the coursework in 2003. I selected American literature as my field of research out of my interest. References for my research were scarce at my university. I went to the National Library in Beijing several times. It was in the writing process that I enhanced my confidence in completing the Master’s thesis. At the beginning, I did not know how to write an abstract at all. Thanks to my supervisor, a responsible and careful professor, I learned a lot about doing research and academic writing. He marked every problematic place in my thesis, including punctuations and words. He set a model for me as a conscientious researcher. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

Daisy forged her researcher identity in the process of selecting her area of research, searching and capitalizing on references, and drafting and amending her Master thesis. There was always a ‘more capable other’ - her supervisor - scaffolding and influencing her.

It was a fruitful year for Daisy in 2004. She obtained her Master’s degree and was promoted from an Assistant Teacher to a Lecturer. According to the promotion criteria for lecturers, the academic staff must complete the prescribed teaching hours and publish two research articles in any type of academic journal. Almost all academic staff found no difficulty in satisfying the requirements. In the same year, Daisy gave birth to her daughter. Suffering from postnatal depression, she did not do any research work for several years.
When Daisy shifted attention to research again, she was astonished to find that the teacher promotion system stipulated quite high criteria for research outcomes. Confronted by this pressure, she chose to withdraw.

The teacher promotion system placed too much emphasis on research and social connections. There were too many hidden rules. I did not want to be subjugated to the system. I even made up the decision not to seek promotion throughout my career. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

In spite of her antagonism to the teacher promotion system, Daisy was unable to be immune from it. Research and promotion became the most popular topics among colleagues. Colleagues’ research achievements and/or promotion and department heads’ constant reminders made her struggle. On one hand, she did not resist doing research; on the other hand, she was scared by academic corruption and was reluctant to get involved.

It’s difficult to publish journal articles without money or social connections. The university’s academic corruption was severe. I heard a lot of secrets of how colleagues bribed the review panel members. I was told that it was almost impossible to get promoted if we did not deal with a good relationship with them - gifts, dinners, money were unavoidable. (Interview, January 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

In fact, Daisy tried several times to pick up research and prepare for her title promotion. There were so many obstacles that she had to give up each time. As a result, she only published two journal articles from 2004 to the present. Having no way out, she considered taking the doctoral entrance examination in 2009. Her hope to do PhD study was shattered by the examination result.

I hoped that through PhD study my research ability could be developed to a higher level. It would be helpful for my teaching and promotion too. I finally selected a PhD supervisor that I knew. She taught me one course during my MA study. We then met once in a conference. I thought she might know me too. My performance was good in the written examination, but bad in the interview. I was not admitted in the end. Neither did the professor encourage me to apply for her PhD again.
Feeling frustrated by the examination result, Daisy had no intention to take the doctoral examination again. In recent years, she began to attach importance to research and set the goal of being promoted to an Associate Professor. Influenced by her religious belief, she interpreted her negative attitude towards research and promotion as an excuse of avoiding efforts. She convinced herself that the correct way to address the unfair system was not to withdraw, but to try her best. In addition, the department head (the present dean) showed more concern for the academic staff’s research and professional promotion. More than one half of Daisy’s colleagues were present lecturers. Most of them had reached the five-year limit and could apply for promotion again. However, most of them were unready. As one of the most experienced academic staff among them, Daisy felt a bit embarrassed.

I joined UA in 1998. Now only three teachers recruited prior to 1998 haven’t promoted to Associate Professors. I am one of them. I have convinced myself of the importance of doing research. It is useless to complain about the system without making effort. I am willing to do research and try promoting my professional title. Looking back, I feel regretted. I only published two journal papers and won one province-level research project. I must hurry up now. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

Daisy set two goals for herself: to be a more qualified EM teacher and to be promoted to an Associate Professor. She took immediate action as soon as she had determined to achieve her goals. She decided to continue to conduct research in American literature, which was the research area she was interested in and the area of her Master’s study. Although it was difficult to publish her research papers in the top journals recognized by her institution, she decided to write first and then seek means to get them published. She held that the quality of the research must be ensured so that there would be chance of publishing them.
I have drafted one half of my first book and have written an article, which are both on American literature. Next I will submit my article to a journal in which I have published one. I don’t want to isolate myself in doing research. It is necessary to communicate with the outside world to learn the up-to-date developments in American literature research and to gain enlightenments. In these years I have only attended two conferences, one was an annual conference of foreign literature in 2006 and the other one was on the teaching of foreign language majors in 2012. I learned some new information from these conferences. In order to develop my research ability, I will strive for more opportunities to attend conferences (Interview, April 25, 2013, original in Chinese).

It seems that Daisy regained enthusiasm to conduct research and empowered herself to overcome difficulties and obstacles. Dissatisfied with the isolated status quo, she decided to network with other researchers by attending conferences. In the meantime, her EM teacher identity was still strong.

My research does not have much to do with my teaching. I am eager to get promoted, but I will definitely not place teaching in a less significant position. Teaching is always the most important job for me. (Casual conversation, May 10, 2013, original in Chinese)

In spite of the university’s overemphasis on research in the promotion system and her desire for promotion, Daisy was reluctant to shift attention from teaching to research. Instead, she was trying to balance the two aspects of work.

6.4 Daisy’s experiences of undertaking administrative work

Daisy was appointed Director of the extensive reading teaching-research sector (jiaoyanshi) in 2006 and then Associate Director of the comprehensive English teaching-research section in 2009. At UA and in her department, only outstanding teachers were assigned administrative positions, so Daisy understood her appointments as the leadership’s recognition of her work.

In fact, there were no compulsory tasks for directors except filling out several classroom observation forms each semester, gathering final examination papers from colleagues in the teaching-research section, and checking the final
examination answer sheets scored by teachers and their reports on the papers and students’ performance. Teaching-research sections were in some sense formalistic organizations. Having neither offices nor financial support to manage their work, directors seldom arranged meetings or activities.

Within this status quo, Daisy assumed that her responsibility was completing the required tasks. Although most directors submitted the required forms without conducting any classroom observation activities, Daisy was totally against these dishonest behaviors. Her observation notes and comments were always based on first-hand data:

Classroom observations were the tasks that I must complete every semester. Before observing my colleagues’ teaching, I would ask for the consents first. Some of them refused my requests. As a form of respect, I never entered these teachers’ classrooms. This type of activity is good because it forces teachers to reflect upon their teaching in order to perform the best they can in front of me. I also have negotiations with them on their teaching. But I only observe one lesson of each teacher’s in each semester. It is very difficult to exert a long-term influence on teachers. (Interview, January 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

In the past, AR required teachers to design two final examination papers for each course. It then chose one of them for the examination. Since 2008, it required teachers to design ten papers for each course and still chose one of them for the final examination. This new rule irritated most teachers.

It was meaningless to design ten examination papers. We only used ONE in the final examination. How could teachers ensure the quality of each paper? I did not have any power to influence the decision of AR. What I could do was to report teachers’ complaints to the department heads. If they could do nothing with the requirements, we had to be obedient. (Casual conversation, June 17, 2013, original in Chinese)

When learning that the department’s negotiation with AR failed, Daisy began to persuade the teachers within her teaching-research section to stop complaining and concentrate on designing examination papers. Postponement
would affect the final examination. Although she had little power in the director position, Daisy thought that the practices were useful for her development.

I learned to protect collective rather than individual interests in face of contradictions. Getting along with colleagues was important for me to carry out my tasks. Respect and negotiations were the keys to build up rapport with them. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

6.5 Daisy’s other aspects of work and life

Daisy supervised students conscientiously in graduation paper writing every year. She confessed that she was a bit reluctant to undertake this task because of students’ indifferent attitude and poor writing. She normally voluntarily contacted her students, giving them instructions on how to select topics, search materials, and write the BA thesis, and set an agenda for them. In the supervision process, she carefully read students’ papers and gave comments and advice. It was frustrating that she, instead of the students, was the most conscientious one in this process.

When the mentorship programme initiated by Philip was on trial, Daisy was assigned to mentor five first-year English majors. She welcomed this programme, assuming that it would be beneficial to students. However, she was struggling to fulfill her responsibility.

It is a critical time for me. I am busy preparing for professional promotion. I need sufficient time to write books and articles. At the same time, I have to spare time for lesson preparations. I don’t think it is the right time to have heavier workloads. My inner struggle had lasted some time before I persuaded myself to meet students. (Interview, April 25, 2013, original in Chinese).

Out of Daisy’s expectation, most students were enthusiastic to share their learning experiences, daily life, and desire for guidance, help, and sharing. Perceiving her value in mentoring students, Daisy was more willing to communicate with students. She met them regularly inquiring their status quo.
Daisy was the mother of a nine-year-old girl. Like Snow, she was well aware of her mother identity and endeavored to be a good mother. Becoming a mother posed many difficulties for her. She was in a terrible physical condition during pregnancy. After labor and the birth, she suffered from postnatal depression.

I only taught courses for two weeks in 2004. I felt so uncomfortable that I was unable to manage teaching. It was extremely difficult for me to accept the new mother identity after my daughter’s birth. My family members at that time were unable to accompany me. I always felt helpless, depressed, irritated… The doctor told me it was postnatal depression. Unable to get out of this state, I had to suspend my job for two years. (Autobiography, March 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

Gradually getting out of postnatal depression, Daisy began to make effort to be a good mother. She learned many things about how to raise kids such as cooking, rhymes, and interactions with kids from multiple sources. The experience of raising her daughter influenced her attitude towards students. In the past, she kept a distance from students as she had difficulty communicating with them. After becoming a mother, she seemed to be less serious in front of students – there were more smiles on her face; she shared personal experiences with students, etc. Besides, Daisy’s daughter became the source of power that drove her to pursue professional development.

6.6 Synopsis

During the fifteen years’ of her career, Daisy’s responsibilities increased from teaching to other aspects (see Figure 6.1). Daisy’s teaching experiences were distinctive from those of Philip’s and Snow’s. Diffidence tortured her emotionally, but instigated continuous reflections on her teaching and sustained her effort to develop knowledge and skills in the whole course of her teaching career.

Nevertheless, Daisy was not committed to research all the time. After completing her MA thesis, she seldom engaged in research mainly because of her antagonism towards the teacher promotion system. Currently she plays an active
role in doing research in order to change her passive status quo and seek promotion.

Daisy interpreted her administrative appointment by her department as a reward for her performance in teaching. However, confronted with the reality that she had little power and resources, she only completed routine tasks. Reluctant to play an ‘obedient’ role in the power structure, she did not consider applying for the Department Head and Associate Head positions when they were open for application.

Figure 6.1 Daisy’s increasing responsibilities in her career
Chapter 7 Jacky’s story

Jacky was the youngest teacher among the case study participants. He received a three-year zhuanke education as a TEFL major at UA in the late 1990s. After passing the top-up undergraduate degree examination (zhuanshengbenkaoshi), he received a two-year benke education as a BA/TEFL major at another university. He was employed by UA as an EM teacher upon graduation. Jacky obtained his MA degree in 2009 and got promoted from an assistant teacher to a lecturer in the same year. During this study, he was busy preparing for professional promotion.

7.1 Jacky’s teaching experiences

Jacky commenced in the teaching profession in 2004. During his in-service years, he suspended teaching and pursued his MA study (full-time) for three years. After resuming teaching in late 2009, changes took place in Jacky’s understanding of the teaching profession, his EM teacher identity, and his actions in teaching.

7.1.1 Entering the teaching profession

University teachers enjoy a high social status in mainland China. Jacky felt excited to be a university EM teacher and the colleague of his former teachers. Similar to the other three EM teachers, he was inexperienced and unprepared. As a novice teacher, he was assigned to teach first-year English majors two language proficiency courses – Intensive Reading and Listening.

In order to be accepted as a qualified EM teacher, Jacky invested much time and effort in lesson preparations. Having limited knowledge of the two courses, he focused on discrete language points, mainly words and sentences. In the whole teaching processes he played a dominant role by analyzing the texts in intensive reading textbooks and explaining the listening exercises after playing audiotapes.

Different from the other three teachers, Jacky had the intention of being a ‘role model’ for his students.
I was cautious about my words and behaviors, which, I hoped, could bring positive rather than negative influence on students. Besides, I expected to be the ‘role model’ of my students by showing them how a diligent and good English major should be like. (Interview, Jan. 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

Jacky’s learning experience – transiting from a zhuanke student to a benke student – strongly influenced the construction of his EM teacher identity. With the intention of setting a good example for students as a diligent and active EFL learner, Jacky attached great importance to his performance in daily teaching practice. In the meantime, he was curious about the effectiveness of being a ‘role model’.

I asked questions in class. Students seldom voluntarily answered my questions. I had to call their names. Many of them were unable to provide satisfactory answers. Their oral English was poor in general. I had to persuade the students to be self-disciplined and diligent inside and outside the language class. Sadly, my effort was always in vain. (Interview, Jan. 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

Noticing that persuasion could hardly sustain students’ long-term effort in language learning, Jacky began to analyze students’ problems, through which he hoped to seek other ways out. In his opinion, the crucial factor that led to students’ poor performance was their passivity. The teacher must take certain responsibility to push them to work hard.

I decide to ask students more questions in class. They must answer my questions on both taught knowledge and new knowledge. To my disappointment, this strategy was ineffective. Students were not cooperative. I had to give up. I performed the best as I could and mainly let students listen. (Biography, July 23, 2014, original in English)

Jacky refused to take further action to change the status quo. Frustration prevented him from gaining a sense of self-efficacy. Highlighting the importance of being a role model, he placed an emphasis on his own performance. Students were positioned as passive recipients of knowledge. Two years later, Jacky
suspended his teaching role due to Master study.

7.1.2 Renewed teaching after completing his MA study

Jacky undertook his MA study at a prestigious foreign language studies university in mainland China. Upon completing the MA study, he, encouraged and sponsored by his supervisor, went abroad for visits, collaborations, and conferences. The MA study and going-abroad experiences broadened his horizon and enhanced his self-confidence.

All the travels contribute directly to my teaching. I knew Michael’s (Jacky’s supervisor) favorite secular quote is from Socrates: “I am neither a citizen of Athens, nor of Greece, but of the World!” That’s a good goal for my future. At the very beginning, I didn’t understand its significance. But after travelling in the world, I DO understand the meaning of it.

…
So when I came back to my university for teaching, I have been trying to bring the sense of globalization and international citizenship to my students.

…
I know the world is full of variety and mystery. But my cultural experience outside of China strengthens it. All my international travels make me better and better and let me think more globally. I love the world and I love more the people who made everything become interculturally real for me. (Autobiography, Jan. 16, original in English)

After resuming his teaching position, he was allotted to teach third-year English majors two new courses – Advanced English and Interpretation. Viewing himself as a world citizen, Jacky was passionate enough to influence his students, especially their learning attitudes and perspectives of viewing the world, by sharing his experiences. He enjoyed being the idol of students who were jealous of his learning and oversea experiences.

One of the big changes in Jacky’s teaching was that he was no longer solely dependent on textbooks and teacher handbooks. He capitalized on many resources to enrich his teaching, including his personal experiences, relevant social events, and cultural knowledge. He also designed PowerPoints to present these
understandings to students. He actively upgraded his teaching materials as long as new resources were sought.

However, Jacky still dominated a large part of the instruction process. In the Advanced English class, he introduced all the background information of authors and texts, explained the whole texts for students (his foci were key words, paraphrases, translations), discussed the themes and summarized the whole lesson on his own. Students were only given the opportunity of reading aloud the texts and translated them into Chinese. All the post-reading exercises were left to students.

The texts are difficult. I think I had better explain them to students. I assume that students are autonomous enough to do all the exercises after class… I have never checked them. I don’t know whether they do the exercises or not. Anyway, it is their responsibility. (Casual conversation after classroom observation, March, 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

At the end of each lesson, Jacky normally spared several minutes for students to review what they had been taught and to ask questions. He complained that students seldom asked questions. He always gave them some suggestions during this period.

A second big change in Jacky’s teaching was that he organized student presentations after learning each text. Students were divided into small groups. They selected topics that were relevant with the text, searched sources together, and presented the topics to the whole class. After each presentation, there was a five-minute-long Q&A part.

Third-year students should learn more independently and cooperatively than first- and second-year students. During my Master’s study, my teachers used to provide us with presentation opportunities. I benefitted a lot from these practices. I guess my students also need this type of practice. I am generous enough to spare two teaching hours for student presentations every time. (Casual conversation after classroom observation, March 12, 2013, original in Chinese)
Student presentations always frustrated Jacky. Most students did not take this practice seriously: they either chose irrelevant topics or simply downloaded resources from the Internet; in many groups the responsibility of presentation was shifted to one student; many presenters read the prepared PowerPoints all the time; spelling, punctuation, and usage errors were ubiquitous in their PowerPoints; Jacky had to raise questions after each presentation as most students were reluctant to. In spite of his critical comments and warnings, students remained unchanged. Similar problems occurred in almost every presentation. Having no other method to change the awkward situation, Jacky decided to continue employing this form of student practice strategy:

I don’t plan to abandon this activity. The students are too lazy. It at least forces them to learn out of class. The presentation itself can let them practice presentation skills to some extent. (Casual conversation after classroom observation, March 12, 2013, original in Chinese)

In the Interpretation class, Jacky also played a dominant role. He introduced all theories and skills. In order to develop students’ interpretation skills, he prepared many exercises for them to do in class. He read each exercise and then asked individual students to translate it into Chinese or English. Few students voluntarily did the exercises, so he had to call names. Jacky’s Interpretation class did not proceed very well. He placed the blame on students.

Students always complain that there are so many new words in the given exercises that they cannot interpret them successfully. I have already replaced many difficult exercises with easier ones. I believe that students should do a better job in class. However, they let me down all the time. I expect that one student can finish one exercise. It turns out that I have to ask several students. It is too time-consuming. (Casual conversation after classroom observation, May 14, 2013, original in Chinese)

Confronted with students’ problems, Jacky suggested that they enlarge their vocabulary by becoming familiar with the special terms in different disciplines
such as politics, economy, medicine, etc. outside the classroom. He persuaded them to work hard and warned them of the harmfulness of the bad learning habits all the time. At the end of each interpretation lesson, Jacky also spared several minutes or so for student reviews and inquiries. Similar to the situation in the advanced English class, Jacky had to highlight key points, raise questions, and comment on students’ performance during this period to break students’ silence.

Compared with the novice stage, Jacky’s classroom teaching was more student-centered. In almost each lesson he persuaded students to take a positive learning attitude and gave advice on how to develop learning strategies and took practice outside the classroom. In spite of this, he still gave closer attention to his own development as an EM teacher.

A qualified EM teacher should have rich subject matter knowledge and accumulate knowledge in philosophy, history, culture, traditions, etc. In addition, the EM teacher should develop his/her ability of explaining and analyzing knowledge so as to transmit knowledge to students. It is important for the teacher to set a good example for students. (Questionnaire, July 3, 2013, original in Chinese)

Jacky conducted his personal learning by acquiring new knowledge from time to time. He seemed unable to control the teaching process very well because of his high expectations for students. During this study, Jacky admitted that he was suffering from burnout.

I am reluctant to go to the classroom. Students’ performance disappoints me. I feel exhausted. Moreover, the university gives too much pressure on teachers in other domains of work. This makes it difficult for the teacher to concentrate on teaching. Of course, the teacher should regulate the self. I need more effort to cope with my exhaustion. (Casual conversation, May 20, 2013, original in Chinese)

7.2 Jacky’s research experiences

When Jacky was recruited by UA in 2004, the university had already stipulated higher requirements for academic degrees and research outcomes. This warned him of the necessity of seeking development in these two aspects because he only
had a Bachelor’s degree and had no research experience at all.

As soon as he felt secure in teaching, Jacky set an agenda for doing master study. Different from most colleagues who applied for part-time Master programmes, he chose to attend a full-time Master programme. The prerequisite for becoming a full-time Master student was passing the NPEE.

It was much easier to attend part-time Master programmes because no examinations were required, but I did not want to work and study simultaneously. I preferred to be fully immersed in an academic environment. It was challenging to take the NPEE. The competition was fierce. On the other hand, the NPEE could help me gain access to the university I dreamed of. Therefore, I decided to take on this challenge. (Interview, Jan. 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

Before applying for the NPEE, he selected intercultural communication as area of research. In the preparation process, he accumulated rich knowledge in this area. He read a number of important books. To name a few: World Culture: Origins and Consequences written by Frank J. Lechner and John Boli, The Cultural Dialogue: An Introduction to Intercultural Communication written by Michael H Prosser, The Clash of Civilization written by Samuel P. Huntington, The Writing on the Wall written by Will Hutton, etc.

In 2006, Jacky was admitted as an MA student by one of the key foreign studies universities in mainland China and his research engagement started in reality. Through formal education he gained knowledge in both his research area and research methods. It was an autonomous learning process to write his MA thesis: he played an active role in selecting topics, searching the literature, designing the research, carrying out the research, writing up the thesis. His research ability further developed under his supervisor’s guidance and help.

Jacky’s MA study was just the beginning of his engagement in research. He established a strong researcher identity in the years following his graduation. With the help of his supervisor, Jacky travelled to many countries and attended several international conferences, which functioned as catalysts that motivated him to do research:
During 2012 IAICS (International Association for Intercultural Communication Studies) annual conference in Taiwan, I could talk with the scholars from all over the world. Interestingly, I had a dinner with another 4 presenters one evening – one from Iran, two from Japan, one from America who married a Japanese … So we exchanged a lot over the dinner. We talked from “Taiwan impression” to “Chinese culture”; then we mentioned China’s policy toward Taiwan and Japan’s influence to Taiwan. And suddenly the relation between Iran and US caused our attention. So after 5 minutes’ talk about the relation, the topic was changed to the similarity among Chinese, Japanese, English and Persian. ... Anyway, the conversation moved freely and smoothly. Thinking, laughing and discussing filled the 2 hours’ conversation. (Autobiography, Jan. 16, 2013, original in English)

The intercultural communication and international conference opportunities were crucial for Jacky to develop his researcher identity. He had a strong interest in doing research. He also established the belief that he must participate in the international research community, learning the latest development in the discipline, sharing his research, and exchanging ideas with other researchers.

After resuming his position at UA in late 2009, Jacky set a well-planned agenda for his research activities.

I love doing research. I monitor myself to write at least two research articles per year. It is definitely unacceptable to isolate myself from the research community. I must attend the key annual conferences in my field and present my research. At present, my professional title is lecturer. I am eligible to apply for promotion in 2014. I plan to be successfully promoted to an Associate Professor that year. (Interview, Apr. 23, 2013, original in Chinese)

Jacky’s supervisor was a key person in supporting his research engagement. He not only sponsored Jacky to attend international conferences, but also invited him to co-author books, which were published by well-known international publishers. None of his colleagues had these experiences before. It seemed that Jacky’s research pathway was smooth all the time. He began to struggle when confronted with the university’s teacher promotion criteria (high-level teaching and research projects, awards, and research outcomes).
Jacky actively applied for different levels of research projects. The cruel reality convinced him that it was extremely difficult to rely on his own effort to gain a success. He had to rely on social connections to increase the chance of success. During this investigation, he had two research projects - a province-level one (RMB 20,000) and an institution-level one (RMB 3,000). The financial support was limited, but was useful for him to carry out research activities.

My supervisor has no research grants to support me now. My department has funds, but the head is reluctant to support me to attend conferences unless I win high-level awards in them. I have to rely on my own grants now. Although it is costly, I will not miss the opportunity of attending key annual conferences. (Casual conversation, May 21, original in Chinese)

Publications were important for Jacky in the process of constructing his researcher identity. The university’s criteria set many obstacles for him. Jacky had a high sense of achievement when the two books he coauthored with his supervisor were published by international publishers and one of his articles was published in a well-recognized domestic journal in his circle. However, all these outcomes were not categorized as high-level ones by his university.

Many researchers including my former teachers congratulated me when I publish the article in the core journal in my discipline. I am proud of myself too. It is disappointing news that the university does not recognize it as a high-level research outcome. It does not recognize the international publishers as high-level ones, either. I have to publish one book in the listed high-level domestic publishers and several articles in high-level journals. (Interview, Apr. 23, 2013, original in Chinese)

In order to meet the requirements of the university, Jacky had to consider publishing agencies. Publishing his articles via this channel would impose heavy financial burden on him:

I have made inquiries about service and publication fees. I am hesitating. If I don’t eat and drink, perhaps my salary earned in a whole year can afford the
publication fee for one article. (Interview, July 5, 2013, original in Chinese)

Apart from research project application and publications, Jacky also actively sought opportunities to win awards. In most cases, applicants must pay for award applications. In order to save money and increase the chance of success, Jacky turned to experienced colleagues and friends for advice. Awards, to some extent, were a source to retain his motivation to do research.

In spite of his antagonism to the current teacher promotion system and academic culture, Jacky was determined to seek promotion.

I have to face the teacher promotion system and follow the policy because I need promotion. Promotion means pay rise. Earning higher salary can ensure the quality of my life. I need a better life, for myself and for my family. (Questionnaire, July 3, 2013, original in Chinese)

In spite of the research pressures, Jacky noted that his research activities did not affect his teaching in negative ways. He did not need to use all his time to do research because in the past few years he had already accumulated a number of research outcomes. However, he confessed that he preferred to do research than teach because the former could bring him a high sense of job satisfaction while it took time for him to feel satisfied in teaching.

7.3 The impact of family on Jacky’s career development

Getting married in 2010, Jacky shouldered the responsibility of taking care of his wife, parents, and parents-in-law who all carried great expectations for him in his career. Under their pressure, Jacky sought development in many aspects, including fame, professional title, administration positions, and income. It was understandable that he played an active role in many activities.

Jacky applied for the Associate Head of the English Department position when the former department upgraded into school in early 2013. This choice was against his belief in being a university teacher:
The university teacher should not get involved in administrative work. He/She should get committed to teaching and research and be immune from negative external influences. But this is an ideal and cannot become true in reality. (Questionnaire, July 3, 2013, original in Chinese)

Jacky’s ideal state of work was that he sustained enthusiasm in teaching and research and did further study to improve his qualifications. Under the current education and institution system, it is common that outstanding academics take up administrative positions. This rule and the family’s expectation pushed him to make concessions. Jacky successfully got the position. Having no idea of his responsibilities as an Associate Head, he planned to learn through practice. He also had some concerns. For example, he would not have much power to act out the Associate Head’s role; he would not be so free as before as he had to stay in the office every day while ordinary teachers did not have to; he must spare time to manage daily administrative work and hence had less time to plan teaching and do research.

Life turned to be much more complicated after getting married. Jacky had more pressures not only in career development but also in his daily living.

I have to deal with many family affairs. So I cannot pay all my attention to my work as before. Now my parents are eager to have a grandchild. They are nagging about this every day. My head is nearly talked off by them. (Interview, Jan. 15, 2013, original in Chinese)

7.4 Jacky’s other aspects of teacher work

As a young academic staff with a desire for development in teaching, research, professional title, post, and so forth, Jacky played an active role within his working context to actualize his value: he was present at students’ English contests every year mentoring, judging, and commenting on their performance; he voluntarily assisted the department’s work; he also showed up in sports meetings representing staff in relay races. Jacky noted that he wanted to receive recognition from students as well as colleagues, the institution, and even outside
In 2012, he applied for the ‘excellent young staff’ project initiated by his institution for the reason that this offered an opportunity for his development and he found with his backgrounds he was eligible and competitive to participate in this project. His successful selection in this project offered him a special status – ‘excellent young staff’, although it did not bring him any material benefit. In order to prove that he deserved this title, Jacky was more careful with his words and behavior in front of his students and colleagues and was desirable to make achievements in teaching and research.

Jacky was also the head teacher of several classes of final-year English majors. He accepted this role without careful thought because he presumed that the students should be capable of taking charge of their own business and hence he did not need to make much effort. However, he felt uncomfortable when he found that the students had direct contact with the counselors who took charge of student affairs without having prior negotiations with him and the counselors more or less made up the final decisions without getting his consent. Reluctant to play this meaningless role, Jacky told the counselors several times not to assign this task to him anymore.

7.5 Synopsis

Although Jacky’s length of time in the teaching profession was shorter than the other three EM teachers, his development changes in his career trajectory can still be easily traced (see Figure 7.1).

As a young university EM teacher, Jacky had a strong desire to develop himself into an influential teacher who was able to positively influence students. His disappointment with students’ performance prevented him from developing his teaching. After completing his MA study, he provided students with more opportunities to put into practice their learned knowledge. However, he felt frustrated and emotionally exhausted in face of students’ poor performance and
refused to make changes.

Figure 7.1 Jacky’s increasing responsibilities in his career

Jacky maintained strong motivation to do research by participating in an international research community and producing research outcomes on a regular basis. He also desired professional promotion by completing the institution’s research requirements. Although there were conflicts between his conception of research and that of the institution’s, he had to conform to the institutional requirements in order to achieve his goal of promotion.

Jacky was against administrative positions which, in the centralized institution system, would hinder his development into an expert teacher and researcher. However, he believed that it would be difficult for him as a young academic staff to survive in the institution without having an administrative position. After careful considerations, he decided to actively apply for the position of Associate department head, although he had no plans for his future work.
Chapter 8 Case analysis and discussion

In the previous four chapters, I have unfolded the four EM teachers’ stories tracing their working, learning, and living experiences from the commencement of their careers to the present status quo. The stories enabled me to understand the EM teachers’ lived experiences which could not be observed directly and to “present experience holistically in all its complexity and richness” (Bell, 2002, p. 209). They also provided a means to reveal teacher identity changes, manifestations of teacher autonomy, and the key factors that affected the development of teacher identities and autonomy (Chase, 2011; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

After describing the four case study stories, I will answer the following three research questions in this chapter:

1) How do the EM teachers control over the multiple aspects of their teacher work across time and contexts?
2) What are the major individual and contextual factors that facilitate and constrain the development of teacher autonomy?
3) How do teacher identities affect the development of teacher autonomy?

The case study stories inform that classroom teaching is the very first, but is not the “only one element within a teacher’s actual role” (Goodwyn, 2011, p. 18) in the current tertiary education context of mainland China. Apart from teaching, research and administration, which are highlighted by both the Chinese central government and the university, are shown to occupy significant positions in the four EM teachers’ professional lives. Therefore, in this study, I will analyze the four case study participants’ long-term development of teacher autonomy with a focus on three aspects of their work – teaching, research, and administration. In order to examine the formation of teacher identities and manifestations of teacher
autonomy under the influence of teacher identities within particular periods and contexts, I divide the four teachers’ experiences in each aspect into stages. The case study participants’ teaching experiences can be appropriately divided into the stage of inexperience, the stage of adaptation, and the stage of reform; and their research experiences can be divided into the stage of active novice research, the stage of stagnation vs. development, and the stage of struggle; the administration experiences may be divided into the stage of imagination and the stage of practice. In the following sections, I will first analyze the development of teacher autonomy at different stages, then discuss the key factors that affected the development of teacher autonomy, and finally illustrate the interrelationship between teacher identities and teacher autonomy based on empirical evidence.

8.1 Stages of autonomy development

8.1.1 Stages of teaching

The narratives of the four EM teachers presented in Chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 signified that teaching has been the major component of their work throughout their careers. As indicated by the findings, the EM teacher identity (For Snow, an English language teacher in the first sixteen years and then an EM teacher in the subsequent years of her career), which was imposed on the four case study participants as they entered the teaching profession, changed at different stages of teaching. At each stage, the teacher participants viewed themselves as different types of EM teachers, which influenced their exercise of autonomy to varying degrees.

8.1.1.1 The stage of inexperience

The four EM teachers all experienced ‘sink-or-swim’ situations (Khamis, 2000, p. 1) in the beginning years of teaching. Neither TEFL programmes nor working institutions provided them with necessary and sufficient preparation for language teaching. Philip, Daisy, and Jacky all graduated from BA/TEFL programmes that
prepared them to be future English teachers. In reality, these programmes were run more or less the same as ordinary English major programmes. They focused on language skills and disciplinary knowledge such as literature, linguistics, and culture (see 1.2.1) instead of knowledge and skills of English teaching.

Besides, the EM teachers’ working institutions made few attempts to guide, support, and evaluate the newly recruited teachers. They imposed teaching assignments on the teachers and left them to survive in the profession on their own. Philip was an exception as his former working institution provided informal teacher preparation opportunities for novice teachers, such as secondary school English teacher, interpreter, and teaching assistant. These practices were helpful, but were not effective enough to prepare Philip for teaching English majors. In all the case study participants’ working institutions, teaching was an isolated activity. Colleagues seldom communicated or collaborated with each other.

Placed in a helpless professional state, the teacher participants experienced great pressure. As novice teachers\textsuperscript{14} “with little or no teaching experience” (Tsui, 2003, p. 4), they were uncertain about their ability to manage the assigned teaching tasks (mainly language proficiency courses). Nonetheless, they all strived for acceptance from students and institutions and the aim to become full members of the new education communities. They exercised their autonomy to explore what to teach and how to teach in order to gain control over the language courses and classrooms. A common characteristic amongst the four teachers was that they mainly focused on accruing subject matter knowledge, in particular textbook knowledge, and adopting and adapting conventional knowledge transmission strategies to address students’ needs. This indicates that the traditional views of ELT, which they adopted from past learning experiences, had a strong influence on them as novice language teachers. Although the four teachers were liable to be “coursebook-dependent” (Senior, 2006, p. 59) and

\textsuperscript{14} Novice teacher is defined differently in language education. It can be anyone who has just commenced the teaching profession after completing the language teacher education programme; it can be anyone who teaches a new course for the first time; it can also be an experienced teacher in other subjects who has received a second license or endorsement. See Farrell (2012) and Tsui (2003) for more discussions.
centered on knowledge transmission rather than knowledge construction, it needs to be acknowledged that their growth was evident in their continuous exploration processes.

Wenger (1998) notes that engagement in practice is a major source of identification. It was true that the four teachers constantly negotiated their novice teacher identities in concrete classroom teaching practices. Due to differentiations in practical teaching experiences as well as dispositions, past learning experiences, and working conditions, the following variations were evident amongst them in their personal identification as a language teacher.

Philip gradually came to view himself as a capable EM teacher in his language classroom. After joining UA, the present working institution, he felt more confident, and even a bit complacent when comparing himself to colleagues, most of whose education backgrounds and performance were not as good as his. With his increased teaching experience, Philip felt more capable of handling the imposed teaching assignments. His fluent oral English, sense of humor, passion, and systematic, detailed, and explicit explanations received positive feedback from both students and colleagues. Snow had a similar sense of her professional self. Working at the training center of an oil field, she had the best qualification amongst her colleagues. Moreover, her target students were future oil workers whose language proficiency was at a low level. She did not need to take on any challenge as long as she was able to transit textbook knowledge to students in the allocated teaching hours. She quickly found that it was a relaxing job.

In stark contrast, Daisy’s frustrating English learning and teaching experiences led to a negative understanding of herself as an EM teacher. In order to overcome her sense of failure, she constantly questioned herself and exerted herself to make further improvements. Jacky’s education background was a bit different from the other three teachers who directly received benke education before entering the teaching profession. He invested much effort in changing his identity from a zhuank student to a benke student by taking the top-up
undergraduate programme examination. His confidence also grew in the process of actualizing this identity shift. With the intention of establishing a diligent and confident teacher image in front of student, he prepared lessons carefully, explained textbook knowledge in a fluent and detailed way, and also shared his diligent learning experiences with students. Satisfied with this performance, Jacky viewed himself as a capable EM teacher too.

In the beginning years of teaching, the novice teacher or inexperienced teacher identity, which produced concerns as well as expectations, engaged the teacher participants in a complex “learning to teach” process (Chuk, 2010; Farrell, 2009) and reflective teaching practices (Farrell, 1998, 2004, 2007, 2011). The newly emerged capable and incapable English teacher identities seemed to affect them in a positive rather than a negative manner in their teaching practices. They had strong motivation to develop their oral English, their subject matter knowledge, strategies of transmitting knowledge, and their performance in the language classroom. Their willingness to engage in self-directed teaching and teacher-learning (Smith, 2003; see Table 2.1), their continuous reflections on teaching practices (Little, 1995, p. 179; see also Huang, 2005; Vieira & Marques, 2002), and their agency to improve teaching (Toohey, 2007; Toohey & Norton, 2003) contributed to their “intellectual, experiential, and attitudinal growth” (Lange, 1990, p. 250) and ultimately their development of autonomy in teaching.

8.1.1.2 The stage of adaptation: slaves to routine vs. agents of change

The inexperienced teacher identity began to dissolve when the EM teachers felt that they had landed on the planet safely. Their working institutions paid little attention to monitoring and evaluating their teaching and left them to judge their own performance. New language teacher identities were constructed in daily teaching practices.

Philip and Snow seemed to strongly believe that they were in control of the subject matter knowledge and the language classroom. When narrating their
teaching experiences at this stage, Philip highly praised himself and his teaching and Snow frequently used ‘easy’ and ‘relaxing’ to describe her job. Jacky also had a feeling of being ‘in control’ when he ignored students’ poor performance. In general, conceiving of themselves more or less as capable teachers, the three teachers were much less reflective than before of their knowledge base, teaching abilities, performance, and student needs. Similar to Fessler’s (1985) description, they “resigned themselves to putting in ‘a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay’” (p. 187). Few attempts were made to seek progress. They had more or less turned into “slaves to routine” (Farrell, 2004, p. 7).

In fact, both Philip and Snow experienced contextual changes and undertook new courses. As UA developed from zhuanke to benke level, it posed a new challenge for Philip in that he was required to teach the new course British Literature to benke English majors; Snow experienced two transfers to two working institutions – a senior secondary school and a university, and correspondingly she was assigned different teaching tasks and faced different target students. The two participants could be both seen to exercise a level of technical autonomy in their accumulation of new subject matter knowledge and in seeking appropriate methods to transmit knowledge. However, their views of the self and the paradigm of language teaching did not change much. In their eyes, a good knowledge transmitter was a capable language teacher. The prolonged fixation of this teacher identity prevented them from perceiving and taking on new challenges. Symptoms of teacher burnout could be detected from Philip and Snow, including emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment (Chang, 2009). They did not have strong motivation to teach, and both became more indifferent to students, and did not demonstrate a high sense of self-efficacy.

Daisy struggled with the ‘unqualified EM teacher identity’ that was established in the first years of her teaching. She felt inferior in comparison to her colleagues in respect to her oral English and felt incapable in relating to students.
Taking up new courses every semester did not allow much room for her to explore effective strategies to manage each specific course. This negative identity, however, did not undermine her desire for improvement. When she was no longer required to develop new courses but to teach three fixed courses – extensive reading, grammar, and American literature she was familiar with or interested in, Daisy regarded this arrangement as an opportunity to develop her teaching. She was different from the other three teachers in that she never seemed satisfied with her performance. She engaged in continuous reflective teaching practices, and exercised her autonomy to develop every aspect of her teaching, including her own oral language proficiency, teacher-student interactions, student motivation, student practice activities, student evaluation, extra materials, PowerPoint presentations, and even students’ out-of-class learning activities. Through her efforts, Daisy gradually saw herself as a more capable EM teacher.

The stage of adaptation was critical for the EM teachers. In this stage, great changes took place to their language teacher identity and in their exercise of teacher autonomy. Most teacher participants were immature teachers. Having no external guide, they were unable to make sound judgments about their personal levels of competence and find direction for further development. Their views of themselves as language teachers were more or less fossilized and fixed. Contextual changes seemed not powerful enough to change their self-positions. When talking about their experiences, the teachers put students in a passive position. They seldom mentioned students’ responses to their behaviors. Perhaps they paid little attention to their responses and solely overgeneralized teaching based on their understandings of the courses and teaching practices. The influence of the traditional teacher-student power relation (Hawkins & Norton, 2009; Littlewood, 1999), in which the teacher is the authority and students are passive recipients, appeared strong in these teachers.

Greatly influenced by her frustrating learning and teaching experiences, Daisy defined herself as an ‘unqualified EM teacher’. This negative identity did
not, however, impede her progress. Rather, it influenced her professional actions in a positive manner. In order to legitimate her EM teacher identity, Daisy was open to change and negotiated her identity through reflective teaching practices. Maintaining a negative teacher identity might be harmful to the teacher’s mental and physical health, even though it might not prevent his/her effort for further development.

8.1.1.3 The stage of reform

The term ‘critical incident’ refers to “some event or situation which marked a significant turning-point or change in the life of a person or an institution” (Tripp, 1993, p. 24). Through narratives the EM teachers recalled some critical events, which had “an unusually high emotional charge” and “a continuing significance” (Tripp, 1993, p. 98). They admitted that these highly significant events inspired them to renew their epistemologies of teaching and give increased attention to students. This section will first introduce the effects of critical incidents on the EM teacher identity construction and reconstruction and then compare how the four teacher participants transformed their classroom teaching with the intention of assisting the development of their students.

On the basis of the EM teachers’ reminiscences and accounts, this study identified three types of critical incidents that enhanced their awareness of and reflections on the EM teacher identity and motivated them to reform their teaching. One type was the autonomous learning experiences of the EM teachers themselves. For example, Snow’s PhD study experience and Jacky’s Master study experience aroused their awareness of the significance of the learner taking responsibility for his/her own learning. A second type of critical incident was having special working experiences. They might not have an immediate effect, but nevertheless exerted a powerful influence on the teachers’ teaching philosophies when they were in function. According to Philip’s reflections, the following experiences all contributed to his change in teaching approach: planning and
amending the English major curriculum, reforming the English major undergraduate programme, assisting students to prepare for the NPEE, having a visiting scholar experience at an American university, research experience in linguistics, second language acquisition and language education, etc. A third type of critical incident happened in the teachers’ personal lives. A typical example was Daisy’s participation in a Christian community, which greatly enhanced her self-confidence as an EM teacher.

Inspired by the critical incidents they encountered in their careers and lives, the EM teachers constructed stronger EM teacher identities in real practice. They related themselves more closely to students and envisaged student development within the institutional and broad educational and sociocultural contexts. Philip defined himself as an EM teacher who strived to develop students’ independent learning abilities; Snow viewed herself as an EM teacher who was committed to students’ attitudinal and ideological growth; Daisy’s desire for personal and student development influenced her perception of herself as a loving and caring teacher; Jacky situated himself as an influential teacher due to his intercultural communication experiences. The formation of different EM teacher identities brought about the four EM teachers’ different foci in classroom teaching reform. Table 8.1 below illustrates the variations among the teachers and the types of courses they undertook.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Courses</th>
<th>Target students</th>
<th>Efforts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td>British literature</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Assigning out-of-class reading tasks; Starting casual talks with students before class; Proposing questions for the learned knowledge; Checking students’ preparation to decide how to proceed the lesson; Proposing questions to encourage individual thinking or group work; Relating literature knowledge with real life</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8.1 The EM teachers’ efforts to develop students
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Tasks and Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Snow</td>
<td>English linguistics</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Transmitting knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advanced English</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Transmitting textbook knowledge; Initiating teacher-student conversations on the topics covered by the textbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Comprehensive English</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Transmitting textbook knowledge; Organizing student report sessions every Monday; Teacher-student conversations on students’ status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>Extensive reading</td>
<td>Year 1</td>
<td>Reviewing the learned knowledge by asking students to paraphrase key sentences and spell and explain key words; Leading in every text with interesting topics; Assigning in-class reading tasks and checking students’ understanding by asking questions; Providing additional reading materials for students to read and discuss in class; Considering assigning out-of-class reading tasks by providing materials for students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>English grammar</td>
<td>Year 2</td>
<td>Transmitting grammar knowledge; Preparing sufficient exercises for students to do in class; Checking students’ performance and giving immediate feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>American literature</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Checking students’ learned knowledge by asking questions; Asking students’ questions during her instruction; Adding extra materials to assist students’ understanding of literature works; Relating literature knowledge with real life; Encouraging students’ out-of-class reading on literature works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacky</td>
<td>Advanced English</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Transmitting textbook knowledge; Assigning “student presentation” tasks after learning each text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interpretation</td>
<td>Year 3</td>
<td>Transmitting interpretation skills; Letting students do in-class interpretation exercises</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8.1 exemplifies the four teachers’ attempts to make their teaching more student-centered. In spite of this, there was a big difference amongst them in their executing of this approach. Philip and Daisy involved students in the whole teaching process, while Snow and Jacky remained dominant in transmitting textbook knowledge and arranged student presentations and teacher-student interactions as a separate part of their classroom teaching. In addition, Snow and Jacky attached more importance to students’ learning attitudes than to other aspects such as their language skills, critical thinking, etc.

In order to develop students’ autonomous learning ability, Philip assigned them out-of-class literature reading tasks and proceeded his lesson by focusing on students’ difficulties in reading. Playing the role of a more capable other in his literature class, Philip interacted with students during the instruction process by posing questions to encourage them to think and providing hints to help students to cope with difficulties. He also initiated group discussions to engage students in small support groups to discuss issues pertinent to literature works.

Although Daisy managed the three courses she taught (Extensive Reading, Grammar, American Literature) in different ways, she involved students in every step of her teaching in all the courses. She checked students’ revision work at the beginning of each lesson because most of them were not self-disciplined; she asked students’ opinions during her instruction; she provided additional materials and exercises for student practice; she tried out out-of-class learning tasks to develop students’ autonomous learning ability.

In contrast, Snow and Jacky still adopted the knowledge-transmission approach without allowing much student participation during their instructions. They gave detailed explanations of texts (in the comprehensive English and advanced English classes), subject matter knowledge (linguistic knowledge in Snow’s linguistics class and interpretation knowledge and skills in Jacky’s interpretation class), and related background, historical, and cultural knowledge. Apart from their own teaching, they both asked students to present in class
(‘student report session’ in Snow’s class every Monday and group presentations in Jacky’s class) as an opportunity to practice their language skills. Snow gave students several minutes to present anything, while Jacky allotted two whole lessons for students to give formal presentations on the themes related to the learned text. He highlighted the importance of this activity for third-year English majors, but provided little help in face of students’ poor performance. Although Snow and Jacky did not carry out big reforms in their teaching, they both paid much attention to students’ attitudes towards learning. Snow invested much time and effort to have ‘private conversations’ with students on their thoughts about language learning, university life, and future plans. Jacky made use of every opportunity to share his learning experiences with the intention of convincing students of the importance of diligence.

The above discussions show that the EM teachers, as inspired by critical incidents, all perceived the necessity of reforming their classroom teaching by paying more attention to students’ needs. As noted by Kumaravadivelu (2003), the “promotion of learner autonomy involves the willing cooperation of teachers as well as learners” (p. 155). However, many of them seemed to pay little attention to students’ psychological readiness for their reforms. Having little knowledge about the theories and principles of learner autonomy and little guidance in their teaching, some of their efforts were rewarding while some were frustrating. A notable problem was that most of these teachers had higher expectations for students than for themselves. For example, Philip pointed out that he always lacked motivation to carefully prepare for his lessons because of his heavy administration workload. Snow and Jacky both highly evaluated their own ability in teaching, but seldom questioned the problems in their teaching approach and the activities they designed. They also tended to put the blame on students and the constraining institutional context when things did not go as planned. This may have created barriers for student development.
Apart from the teachers’ changes in their classroom teaching, they all
developed a critical awareness of the curriculum and top-down system. Philip was
dissatisfied with AR’s intervention on curriculum matters and the amendments
demanded; Snow complained about her heavy workload and resisted the
department’s inappropriate coursework arrangement. The EM teachers all
demonstrated a critical attitude towards the institutional system, which prioritized
research over teaching and learning, and instead all highly valued the role of
teaching in their professional lives.

8.1.1.4 Summary

The four EM teachers’ years of teaching experiences demonstrate that identity
formation is “an ongoing process” (Lee, 2013, p. 331), influenced by the teachers’
learning, teaching, and living experiences, the education and institution contexts
as well as the teachers’ changing beliefs. It involves “a subjective interpretation”
(Billot, 2010, p. 711) of the teachers’ positions in the context of concrete teaching
practices. There is a strong link evident between the EM teacher identity and
classroom teaching practices: the EM teacher identity was constructed in practices
and in turn shaped teachers’ practices (Lee, 2013, p. 332). As shown in this study,
teacher identities were displayed as negotiable, rigid/unchangeable, or fragile.
Negotiated teacher identities, such as the novice teacher identity, Daisy’s
incapable teacher identity and loving teacher identity, Philip’s teacher identity
formed in the stage of reform, were comprised of agency and contributed to the
development of teacher autonomy. Similar to Trent (2011), rigid and
unchangeable teacher identities were revealed to present difficulties for the
development of teacher autonomy. In addition, Jacky’s EM teacher identities
formed in the initial stage and current stage were shown to be fragile. In spite of
his intention to be a role model and an influential teacher, he seemed reluctant to
further explore effective teaching strategies in face of students’ problems. Instead,
he tended to put all blames on students.
As introduced in 2.1.1, there are many debates on whether or not teacher autonomy and learner autonomy are interrelated (see Lamb, 2008 for an overview), most of which are based on theoretical assumptions. The findings of this study reveal that the EM teachers did not identify themselves as teachers who should be committed to fostering learner autonomy at all stages of careers.

In the stages of inexperience and adaptation, the four teacher participants were unaware of the importance of learner autonomy for numerous reasons:

1) They commenced their teaching professions with little teaching experience, which forced them to focus on their own development in the beginning years;
2) Most of them were not open to change even when they felt in control of their teaching;
3) They did not learn the idea of learner autonomy from any source (such as the education propaganda, institution requirements, teacher education, books, conferences, etc.);

In later stages, the EM teachers were more likely to choose to teach towards the goal of developing learner autonomy for various reasons. It was apparent that some needed a long process for some teachers and a shorter one for others to make this choice. It was dependent on their knowledge base, teaching ability, experiences, awareness of and ability to reflect on their relationship with students, their responsibilities, students’ learning conditions and their future development as a social human being, and ultimately the motivation to transform their classroom teaching. None of the four EM teachers were clear about what learner autonomy was and what actions should be taken to foster learner autonomy. Their initiatives were mainly based on their personal theories. For example, Philip focused on students’ out-of-class reading and in-class interactions with the teacher on new literature knowledge; Snow focused on students’ attitudes and values; Daisy focused on student practice in and out of class; Jacky focused on the teacher’s role model. It is noticeable that some of the EM teachers gained more effective outcomes while some others’ effort did not; some were willing to make a
continuous effort to explore more effective ways for students’ development, whereas some were reluctant, even if they recognized the value of learner autonomy; some controlled both the students’ and their personal learning while some ignored teacher learning in the process of developing students.

As evidenced in this study, it cannot be suggested that teacher autonomy has a logical connection with the teacher’s commitment to fostering learner autonomy. Little (2000) notes that “it is unreasonable to expect teachers to foster the growth of autonomy in their learners if they themselves do not know what it is to be an autonomous learner” (p. 45). Besides, whether to foster learner autonomy or not in the language classroom was a personal choice, at least for these EM teachers who worked in an institutional context which permitted teachers ‘excessive’ freedom to manage classroom teaching.

8.1.2 Stages of research

From the four EM teachers’ stories, it can be seen that research became an important part of their professional lives. Within their particular working context, there were some distinct differences between teaching and research. First, teaching was compulsory while doing research was selective. The four teachers needed to undertake course assignments every semester. They made their own choice on whether to do research or not. Second, in appointment review and promotion, teachers’ performance in research played a decisive role in comparison with their performance in teaching. Third, the teachers had much more freedom to teach than to do research. They were almost free to plan and manage their classroom teaching, but were greatly restricted in doing research because of the difficulty in meeting the university’s high criteria. Therefore, the construction process of the researcher identity revealed its own distinctive characteristics. In this section, I will analyze the characteristics of researcher identity at different stages, its influence on the development of teacher autonomy, and how the coexistence of EM teacher identity and researcher identity affected the teachers’
exercise of autonomy on teaching and research.

In this study, not all the EM teachers conducted ‘teacher research’ which means “systematic and intentional inquiry about teaching, learning and schooling carried out by teachers in their own school and classroom settings” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993, p. 27). Teacher research has been highly recommended for language teachers and teacher educators as “a potentially productive form of professional development and a source of improved professional practice” (Borg, 2010, p. 391; see also Allwright, 1997, 2003, 2005; Borg, 2007, 2009; Nunan, 1997a). Apart from teacher research, the teacher participants conducted research in many other areas, including linguistics, second language acquisition, American literature, and intercultural communication. On account of this phenomenon, research in this study refers to “research into specific areas and academic research in general” (Xu, 2014, p. 244).

8.1.2.1 The stage of active novice research

In this study, most EM teachers entered the research enterprise by conforming to the institutional requirements for higher academic degrees and professional title promotion. Snow was a bit different. Her first two working institutions (a training center and a senior secondary school) had no research requirements for teachers. She sought the Master study opportunity as a way out of her dissatisfaction with the routine of work and life at the training institution and her desire for a change. When she joined her third working place, a university, she was required to obtain a Master degree and to do research for promotion. It is more or less true to say that the four EM teachers were initially driven by instrumental purposes instead of intrinsic motivation to do research. When they began to conduct research, they had little knowledge of how to begin. Therefore, they primarily viewed themselves as novice researchers who should fulfil academic requirements (Åkerlind, 2008, p. 28).
For all the four EM teachers, the novice researcher identity was positively constructed as they conceived of the requirements of working institutions and master programmes as opportunities for professional development. Philip and Snow, who had the intention of being promoted to Associate Professor, both reported that in the early 2000s they were able to satisfy the institutional research requirements (four published journal articles), which were much less stringent than current requirements, as long as they invested sufficient time and effort. Snow, Daisy, and Jacky enjoyed the academic atmosphere of the Master programmes where they were enrolled. They were afforded key courses in their fields of research and provided supervision for thesis writing. Within more or less favorable research contexts, the EM teachers were willing to exercise autonomy to learn to do research and engage in research activities at the initial stage.

All the four teachers identified their specialized areas of research which were grown out of their personal professional interests: Philip selected second language acquisition; Snow selected linguistics; Daisy selected American literature; Jacky selected intercultural communication. Each tended to view themselves as researchers of specific fields. Defining the focused area of research was only the first step to becoming a researcher.

As novice researchers having little knowledge of academic research and of the specific areas of research, the EM teachers were autonomous to learn to conduct research. Two significant ingredients were necessary for this professional activity - independent learning and the assistance of a ‘more capable other’ such as supervisors and peers. In order to acquire the academic knowledge of their areas of research, they sought and capitalized on many resources from university libraries and other mediums. Based on the accumulated knowledge, they tentatively selected research topics, designed their studies, and drafted research articles and/or Master theses. It is noticeable that research was not an isolated activity. Instead, it was conducted through interactions with more competent researchers. Snow, Daisy, and Jacky all had supervisors who guided their research.
Philip voluntarily turned to an expert researcher for help. As reported by the EM teachers, at this early stage they met different difficulties in doing research. For example, Philip needed others to help judge the quality of his research articles and publish them; Daisy had difficulties in structuring and writing her Master thesis. Interactions with more competent researchers were conducive to developing their knowledge of the research fields, research methods, and academic writing and satisfying external research requirements.

The above discussion reveals that the novice researcher identity was established on the condition that the EM teachers met external requirements which they considered reasonable. It engaged them in autonomous research activities. Although they valued the process of learning to do research, they seemed to attach more importance to research productions - their Master theses and/or published journal articles, which not only enhanced the confidence in their research competences and led them to construct competent researcher identities, but also functioned as the tools of satisfying external requirements. The EM teachers all reported a sense of achievement and job satisfaction when completing the research tasks. However, few of them grew inner interest in research at this stage. Neither did they plan for further research after completing external requirements.

8.1.2.2 The stage of stagnation vs. development

Allwright (1997) holds that sustainability in research activities is crucial for the reason that “the adoption of a research perspective (an ongoing concern for understanding) is arguably much more important than the production of one-off research projects” (p. 369). As indicated by the EM teachers’ stories, although the teachers formed positive researcher identities at the novice stage, they still might not have perceived the potential value of doing research in the broad context of their professional roles due to their instrumental purposes. In order to sustain their efforts, “favorable conditions” (Kirkwood & Christie, 2006, p. 446) were proven
to be critical for the ongoing development of the researcher identity. The findings indicate that after going through the initial stage, the four EM teachers’ researcher identities underwent either positive or negative changes as the teachers interacted with different academic contexts. Their attitudes towards research and levels of research engagement were greatly affected by researcher identity changes.

The researcher identities of Philip and Daisy seemed fragile as they stepped onto the next stage. At UA, research was only compulsory for teacher promotion, and academic staff must hold the assigned professional title for a minimum of five years before applying for another promotion. After promoting to an Associate Professor and a Lecturer respectively, Philip and Daisy relieved their burden. They enjoyed the freedom of choosing to do research or not. Philip did not have a clear plan for further career advancement. He confessed that he was reluctant to maintain “the required level of effort indefinitely” (Allwright, 1997, p. 368). Daisy, who was physically and mentally tortured by postnatal depression, almost ceased her efforts to carry out research. It was almost true that these two teachers did not have a strong researcher identity. Suspending research activities was harmful to the ongoing construction of researcher identities.

With the new policies at UA, heavier weight was put on research and higher criteria were stipulated for research activities. Social connections played a more important role in teacher promotion. Influenced by the institutional policy, Philip and Daisy believed that researchers must have publications and doing research was only valuable when it was connected with promotion. They reconsidered doing research and further promotion, but felt disempowered in face of the top-down system and academic corruption. Unable to change the working conditions, they responded to the new policy and culture with antagonism – they distanced themselves from research and teacher promotion. Their ‘non-participation’ in research activities implied their vulnerability due to the pressure of their working context.

Snow and Jacky experienced things differently from Philip and Daisy. They
took a more intrinsic research journey as soon as they had accomplished the novice research tasks. Snow attended a PhD programme where she received formal training and supervision in doing research and attended meaningful research activities such as peer discussions, workshops, and seminars/symposiums/conferences. Doing her PhD study in a supportive context resulted in her gradual growing interest in research on critical reading. She emphasized that a good researcher must take a serious attitude towards research and make contributions to the research circle. Aspiring for doing good research, Snow completed her PhD thesis conscientiously and took research as one of her responsibilities in future work.

Similar to Snow, Jacky’s researcher identity further developed as he transited from the novice stage to the next stage. His Master supervisor instead of his working institution provided him with a series of professional development opportunities, including experiencing intercultural communications, attending international conferences, coauthoring publications, and so on. He showed strong interest in research and developed his research competence and sense of self-efficacy through these experiences and practices. Jacky’s researcher identity became stronger than ever before – he had begun to position himself as a researcher who had an intrinsic desire to publish research articles on a yearly basis and attend important conferences to keep up with the up-to-data development in the field of research and keep in contact with other researchers. Like Snow, he viewed research as one of his major responsibilities. In his daily work, he was autonomous to plan his research activities, monitor the research progress, and participate in research activities inside and outside his working institution. He enjoyed the research process and his research products, in particular publications.

In this study, research conditions were shown to be significant during the transition period between the novice stage and the following stage. The novice researcher identity, which was constructed based on external research requirements, was fragile and unstable. It was susceptible to change. As revealed
by the findings, favorable conditions facilitated the further development of researcher identity while unfavorable conditions impeded, even undermined, the ongoing construction of researcher identity. From the different research experiences of the four EM teachers, it can be seen that the establishment of a strong researcher identity, which was conducive to research engagement and endeavors, hinged on research conditions, research interest, publications, and networking with other researchers.

8.1.2.3 The stage of struggle

Influenced by the tertiary education context of mainland China, in which “the status of a Chinese university is closely associated with its level of research” (Bai & Millwater, 2011, p. 234), UA continued to elevate the status of research as a component of teacher promotion and university development. As outlined in 3.2, teaching and research projects, publications, and awards were achievements that outweighed those of classroom teaching inside the professional promotion process. These research activities also became major criteria for the institution to evaluate the performance of Departments/Schools on a yearly basis. Therefore, it is not surprising that staff members, including EM teachers, were imposed on great pressure to produce research outcomes by Departments/Schools of the university. The empirical data indicate that the changing working conditions as well as the EM teacher participants’ areas of research, conceptions of research, research experiences, and career stage ultimately played a huge role in shaping each EM teacher participant’s researcher identity construction at a new stage, which strongly influenced the four EM teachers’ exercise of autonomy on conducting research.

Table 8.2 lists the similarities and differences among the case study participants in their areas of research, their attitudes towards research and external requirements, conceptions of the relationship between teaching and research, their motivation to do research, and future plans for research.
Similar to Bai and Millwater’s (2011) research findings, the heavy burden of conducting research had “both positive and negative effects” (p. 241) on the EM teachers. The positive effect might be the teachers’ recognition that they should play the dual roles of teacher and researcher. As shown in Table 8.2, it can be seen from the overview of each EM teacher that they adopted a positive attitude towards research itself. Philip and Daisy, who were antagonistic towards the university’s research requirements and academic corruption inside and outside the working institution, began to be strongly aware of the crucial role of research for their professional development. Seeing themselves as researchers who should do research as an important component of teacher work, they no longer abandoned research, but aspired to build a research profile in spite of all difficulties. Snow and Jacky, who developed strong researcher identities through professional development opportunities outside the working institution, were convinced that research remained important inside the constrained workplace. With the strong
awareness of the researcher identity, the four EM teacher participants set agendas for their own research and did research autonomously.

However, due to the high pressures imposed by the university on research outcomes and professional promotion, conflicts became prominent between the EM teachers’ personal conceptions of research and external research requirements and the unfavorable academic culture permeated within their working institution and the higher education sector (Borg & Liu, 2013; Lai, 2010). Table 8.2 reveals that the four EM teachers all took a negative attitude towards external research requirements and cultures. According to the findings of this study, the teacher participants were challenged by many perceived constraints and difficulties in carrying out research in the institutional and broad higher education contexts, including 1) high criteria for research outcomes, such as nation-level and province-level teaching and research projects and awards, and publications in core publishers; 2) academic corruption in professional promotion, project and award application, and publication; 3) lack of research funding for fieldwork, publications, and conferences; 4) lack of research training, guidance, mentoring, and networking with other researchers. These conditions greatly constrained the EM teachers to enact their researcher identities.

Areas of research might be a key factor that influenced the EM teachers’ understanding of the relation between research and teaching and the perception of their teacher and researcher identities. Philip and Snow, who conducted research in the field of foreign language education, expressed negative attitudes towards the institution’s overemphasis on research. They held that teaching and research should mutually inform each other. In other words, they viewed themselves as researchers who were able to obtain first-hand data from their teaching practice to conduct research and explore how theories of research could inform teaching. Although they were both interested in conducting research in the field of language teaching and learning, they were not well supported by the working institution.

Professional life phases might be another crucial factor that influenced the
EM teachers’ construction of their researcher identities and exercise of teacher autonomy (Xu, 2014, p. 13). Philip and Snow, who held higher professional titles (Associate Professors) and higher administrative positions (Dean and Department Head) than the other two participants, were more inclined to maintain their claimed researcher identities when they were endangered by imposed ones. Perceiving the dark side of academic research through their experiences of applying for projects and awards and publishing articles, they were reluctant to do research simply for utilitarian purposes, that is, for promotion, honors, and bonus, and to make research achievements through money or social connections, although they had to compromise with the top-down system and ‘hidden rules’ under some circumstances.

In spite of their disappointment with the academic culture of mainland China, Philip and Snow did not lose hope. They both wanted to be researchers who could enhance teaching, develop the self and students, and contribute knowledge to the foreign language education field. In order to actualize their imagined researcher identities, they considered participating in more favorable academic communities. Philip decided to submit his research articles to international journals; Snow, who had no confidence in her ability to write English articles, hoped to seek a study abroad learning or collaboration opportunity to conduct research. As the top-down system greatly restricted their professional freedom, they both showed more concern for their students and teaching than research. Their responses can be interpreted as forms of resistance to the top-down system.

When compared with Philip and Snow, Daisy and Jacky, both in their 30’s, were more eager for external recognition and promotion. Therefore, they were more compliant with external requirements. In spite of this, they still made efforts to free themselves from the university’s restraints – participating in valuable research activities which were overlooked by the university. As a researcher in American literature, Daisy did not highlight the necessary relation between research and teaching. However, she highlighted that teaching should always take
priority over research in her work. When confronted with contextual constraints, it can be seen that Daisy was not as pessimistic as Philip and Snow. She conceived of herself as a change agent. This might have been an influence of her religion together with her desire for promotion. Although she was disempowered by the context and powerless to change it, she was not disempowered in her ability to change herself. She attached primary importance to individual effort and secondary importance to publications which were determined by more external factors such as publishers, publishing agencies, social connections, and money.

Strong research interest and desire for promotion were two major driving factors in respect to Jacky’s research engagement. Defining himself as a researcher who should participate into key conferences in the field of intercultural communication, collaborate with influential figures (such as his master supervisor) in the field, and produce publications regularly, he exercised a high degree of autonomy to participate in these activities. Even though he was not financially supported and his publications were not well recognized by his institution and Department/School, he was reluctant to withdraw. Nevertheless, in order to achieve the goal of gaining promotion, he had to passively conform to the institutional research requirements and hidden rules. With regard to the relation between research and teaching, Jacky believed that research could be conducive to teaching, but not the other way around. Inspired by his research experience, he added much cultural knowledge to his teaching and persuaded students to think critically about cultural differences. Different from the other participants, Jacky gained a high level of job satisfaction from research, but suffered from exhaustion and frustration in his teaching. This may partly account for his inclination for routine teaching and reluctance to reform his teaching.

The above discussions expose variations in the four EM teachers’ interpretations of their researcher identities, emanating from their response to the constraining institutional and educational contexts. There were great tensions between their claimed researcher identities and the research criteria employed by
their working institution, and hence they exercised different degrees of autonomy on conducting research. It is noticeable that although the EM teachers were placed in a passive position by the top-down system, they each in their own way empowered themselves to “exert some control over educational settings by mediating between constraints and ideal” (Vieira, 2003, p. 222). This confirms Benson’s (2010) statement that “teacher autonomy is constrained or facilitated by structural factors within school and education systems, but it also depends upon the interests and internal capacities of individual teachers” (p. 273). What has emerged here is that a teacher’s researcher identity has a strong influence on his/her self-empowerment and exercise of teacher autonomy.

8.1.2.4 Summary

In the above three parts, I analyzed the continuous construction of the four EM teacher participants’ researcher identity and their levels of research engagement (degrees of autonomy) at three stages of their careers and lives. In the first stage, they mainly saw themselves as novice researchers who needed to learn to do research and produce research outcomes to satisfy external research requirements. Therefore, they were in a novice sense research-active. In the second stage, research opportunities proved to be significant to further develop the researcher identity and sustain the EM teachers’ efforts. By contrast, the researcher identity seemed fragile and dissolved as soon as Philip and Daisy satisfied the external requirements. The current stage was described as a struggling stage of negotiating the researcher identity and exercising autonomy to conduct research. Facing the working institution’s overemphasis on research in professional promotion and high criteria for evaluating research productions, more experienced teachers were more likely to resist external requirements and sought space to actualize their claimed researcher identities while less experienced teachers were more obedient to external requirements which must be satisfied in order to seek professional promotion.
Similar to the EM teacher identity discussed in 8.1.1.4, the researcher identity was also shown to be of different types and strongly affected the degrees of teacher autonomy. Most teachers formed negotiable researcher identities in the initial stage and the struggling stage. As a consequence, they exercised a high degree of autonomy to conduct research. Due to conflicts between the centralized educational and institutional systems and individual teachers, the political dimension of teacher autonomy was extremely prominent at the struggling stage. The researcher identity was also revealed to be so fragile in the cases of Philip and Daisy that it dissolved in the middle stage. As a consequence, the two teachers exercised quite a low degree of autonomy on research.

Furthermore, discussions reveal that the relationship between research and teaching can be “complementary, conflicting, or unrelated to each other” (Marsh & Hattie, 2002, p. 603). Different views of this relationship may explain why these EM teacher’s teacher identity and researcher identity carried different degrees of importance in the broader concept of each teacher’s professional development and why they exercised different degrees of autonomy on teaching and research.

8.1.3 Stages of administration: power vs. obedience

For historical reasons, Chinese universities are managed from the perspective of an administration dominance paradigm (Xu & Zhang, 2004). It is customary for university teachers to hold both academic and administrative positions, conforming to these roles may be driven by the desire for material interests, better access to academic resources, and the influence of the traditional Chinese culture which values administrative power (Zha, 2011). As discussed in 8.1 and 8.2, the EM teachers’ academic freedom to making policies concerning teaching and to do research was constrained by the institutional and educational systems, both of which were governed by administration power. In this sense academic staff may strive for more academic power by taking up administrative positions.
The four EM teachers in this study were all academic administrators occupying different positions in the School of Foreign Languages (see Table 3.3). The following section will compare their understandings of their administrator identity and examine the administration experiences of Philip and Daisy.

Xu (2012) differentiates imagined identity from practiced identity by noting that the former stems from “the imagination about relationships between oneself and other people and about things in the same time and space with which the individual nevertheless has virtually no direct interaction” and the latter is constructed in “real-world interactions in communities of practice” (p. 569). When this study was conducted, Snow and Jacky had just been appointed. They had not yet constructed an administrator identity in practices. In their imagination this identity mainly revolved around power relations between themselves (as subordinates) and the administrators at higher positions. Snow reported that she did not reject the appointment as she was the only one that satisfied the selection criteria for department heads (Professor or teachers holding Doctoral Degrees). Jacky, on the other hand, had actively competed for the position of Associate Department Head in competition with other colleagues. His choice to go down this path was in contradictory with his expectation as a profession to be someone who primarily engaged in teaching and research. His rationale, however, was that it was unrealistic to keep away from administration in the current Chinese tertiary education context if an academic teacher wanted to seek career development. Snow and Jacky did not expect they would have much power in management and hence they did not have any plan for their future work.

Philip and Daisy gladly accepted their assigned administrative identities and held strong administrator identities in the 2000s. This was partly because they were well recognized by the higher authorities, and partly because they expected that they would gain more power. In contrast to Snow and Jacky, they had years of experience that established their administrator identities in real-life practices. Due to the nature of their particular administrative work, they interacted with different
groups of people and defined their relationships with these groups in different ways.

As an example, Philip, in the former Associate Department Head and present Associate Dean roles, was mainly responsible for teaching and learning issues which determined that he had direct contact with four groups of people – the administrative staff at AR, the leadership within his Department/School, especially the Head/Dean who had the final decision making power of Department/School issues, EM teachers, students (see Figure 8.1).

![Figure 8.1 Power relations in Philip’s administration work](image)

When defining his relationship with AR, which controlled all the teaching and learning issues of the university and the Head/Dean who had the final decision-making power of Department/School issues, Philip complained that he was a powerless administrator who had to comply to most of their requests. Between AR and the Dean, he was more willing to interact with the latter one who, as a professional in English language education, had a better understanding of the particularities of the discipline area, although he was not always supportive. In spite of top-down constraints, Philip believed that engagement in managing teaching and learning affairs was rewarding. Through years of experience, he gained rich knowledge about curriculum, the English major undergraduate
programme, the institution policies, and students, all of which contributed to the development of his teacher and researcher identities.

As shown in Figure 8.1, although Philip was in charge of all EM teachers in the aspect of teaching, he formed a weak administrator identity when relating to these teachers as he always kept a distance from them. On one hand, he respected their freedom to manage their own teaching; on the other hand, confined by time, energy, and financial support, he seldom organized teaching activities or established collaborations with them. By contrast, Philip’s administrator identity was strong and comprised agency when he addressed his relationship with students. He was permitted great freedom to manage student learning affairs. In order to develop English majors’ language skills and learning ability, he initiated many activities that were beneficial to student development such as out-of-class reading activities, interviews, surveys, and mentoring for first- and second-year students and the various strategies that he adopted to support third- and fourth-year students’ NPEE preparation (see Figure 4.1). Perceiving the great value in his continued efforts to promote student development might be one of the major reasons that persuaded him to keep the administrative position.

Regarding her relationship with department leaders, Daisy also viewed herself as a powerless administrator who passively conformed to the leaders’ requirements. Her administrator identity was much weaker than Philip’s due to her “lack of active engagement in administration” (Hong, 2010, p. 1539). She was much less critical and struggled than Philip in the types of power relationship she experienced because of her light workload as Director and Associate Director of teaching-research sectors (see 6.4). Although Daisy admitted that playing the role of academic administrator developed her leadership skills, she did not initiate any activity except fulfilling the department’s requirements when enacting her administrator identity.

In summary, in the administration-dominated university context, the EM teachers were in a subordinate position even when they held administrative
positions. Involving teachers in administration without listening to their voices can be harmful to both teacher and institution development. Philip was a typical example in that he empowered the self to engage in student development by struggling between the constraints and hopes and shortening the distance between ideals and possibilities (Vieira, Barbosa, Paiva, & Fernandes, 2008, p. 220).

8.1.4 Characteristics of the long-term development of teacher autonomy

The above three sections have analyzed how the four EM teachers took control of their teaching, research, and administration at different stages with a focus on the exercise of teacher autonomy from the technical-psychological, motivational, political and sociocultural perspectives. As illustrated by Figure 2.1, the development of teacher autonomy requires an optimal condition in all these four perspective as they are interrelated and mutually influence each other. In other words, the teacher needs to have a strong knowledge base and strong awareness, sustain motivation to seek development, claim freedom within constrained working environments, and actively interact with the context. The findings expose that in most cases the EM teacher participants were unable to exercise a high degree of technical-psychological, motivational, political, and sociocultural autonomy simultaneously. They tended to exercise different degrees of autonomy on each aspect of teacher work (teaching, research, and administration) at different stages. Moreover, they exercised different degrees of autonomy on different aspects of work when they managed them together. Therefore, the overall developmental process of teacher autonomy was characterized by unevenness.

Nevertheless, it was noticeable that some teachers experienced ongoing development of teacher autonomy if one aspect of teacher work was under scrutiny. This was evidenced by Daisy’s development in teaching and Jacky’s development in research. With a strong awareness of her EM teacher identity, Daisy sustained effort to accumulate subject matter knowledge, explore effective
teaching strategies, improve classroom management, seek and capitalize on teaching and learning resources, design in- and out-of-class learning activities, motivate students, and build rapport with students. In spite of the institution’s overemphasis on research, Daisy never ceased effort to find and create spaces to develop her teaching. Similarly, Jacky sustained motivation and effort to develop his research competence by independent learning, seeking further study opportunities, networking with researchers in his research circle, presenting in domestic and international conferences, and publishing papers and books.

8.2 Contextual and individual factors influencing teacher autonomy

Having analyzed the long-term development of teacher autonomy through the lens of teacher identity, it can be seen that individual teachers and context are interrelated (Beijaard et al., 2004; Benson et al., 2013; Day et al., 2006). Throughout their careers and lives, the teacher participants interacted with various contexts, including institutional and educational contexts, further study contexts, professional development contexts outside their working institution, and living contexts (see Figure 8.2). These contexts either facilitated or constrained their autonomy to a greater or lesser extent. Nevertheless, the findings indicate that the development of teacher autonomy was ultimately dependent on the individual teachers. Due to variations among the individual teachers (working experiences, biographies, beliefs, etc.), the four EM teachers interacted with the various contexts in different ways. This section discusses how teacher autonomy was affected by the interaction between individual teachers and contexts across time.
8.2.1 Teachers and the education and institution contexts

The concept of autonomy is essentially a political concept (Holec, 1981; Little, 1991) meaning “freedom from control by others” or “freedom from external constraints” (Benson, 2000; Benson & Huang, 2008; McGrath, 2000). As shown by the research findings, due to the planned economy of mainland China, the EM teachers worked in centralized education and institution contexts. Their professional freedom was greatly constrained in terms of administration and research (via the teacher promotion system). By contrast, they were granted sufficient freedom to teach inside the classroom, although they had no voice in curriculum planning and policy-making concerning teaching. It is crucial whether they empowered themselves within constraints and made good use of the given freedom to seek professional development. The findings indicate that in all these conditions, teacher autonomy is “hard won and only achieved through struggle” (Barfield & Brown, 2007, p. 160).

Centralized administration system

Centralization emphasizes the politicization of the concept of teacher autonomy (Benson, 1997; Vieira, 2007). In this study, the administration system of UA had two prominent characteristics. First, administrative departments rather than
academics and academic departments controlled the crucial aspects of academic life. Second, outstanding academics were directed into administrative leadership roles where it was assumed that they would assist administration, but in actuality they were granted limited power. In spite of their academic administrator titles, the four EM teachers were placed in a less powerful position compared with administration departments and leaders in higher positions. The findings indicate that feelings of powerlessness might lead to compliance, cynicism, and resignation (Lamb, 2000) while self-empowerment made it possible to find spaces within constraints for development.

At the university level, purely administrative staff instead of teachers had control of and dominance over major resources and funds of the university. They had decision-making powers in terms of teacher promotion criteria, curriculum development, programme reform, student examination regulations, etc. As a teaching and research unit of UA, the School of Foreign Languages (the former Department of Foreign Languages) had to comply with the policies carried out by administrative departments, although it was given some freedom to handle Department/School affairs. Ordinary teachers had no power over the decisions. For example, the EM teachers were seldom given the opportunity to articulate their views, no matter how resistant they were to the current teacher promotion criteria. Philip as the Associate Head/Dean and Snow as a ‘high-level talent’ were required to participate in many meetings and activities on institutional policies. However, they were not allowed to express their opinions. Philip once empowered himself to call for more freedom to manage departmental affairs, but received no feedback. Within these types of teacher-university and academic administrator-university power relations, the EM teachers were oppressed and could hardly gain power.

At the Department/School level, the dominant power was in the hands of one individual, the Dean. Although the four EM teachers were granted limited decision-making power, they empowered themselves in one way or another to
influence the Dean’s decisions. When his suggestion about carrying out mentorship was rejected by the Dean, Philip persisted in persuading him until he consented. Snow received respect by expressing her objection to the Department’s coursework arrangement. Both Snow and Daisy tried to get financial support from the Department to attend conferences. All these examples indicate that within the micro context – the Department/School, teachers were able to exert some control over their working conditions as long as they asserted power.

In regard to the academic administrator identity, this study reveals the dilemmas of most teachers. Ideologically, being an academic administrator meant the institutional and departmental recognition for their academic excellence in teaching and/or research. It also supposedly symbolizes power and authority within the centralized education and institution system. In reality, however, being an academic administrator within the context of this institution meant limited power and added workloads. Snow and Jacky both fell into a dilemma about claiming this identity or not. Their decision to become academic administrators was influenced by external pressures and inner struggles. Placing themselves in a powerless position, they had no expectations for change in their future administrative work.

In reality for Philip and Daisy, assuming both academic and administrative positions seemed to be a double-edged sword. On one hand, administrative positions provided opportunities for career development. As the Associate Head/Dean, Philip was given the chance of hosting English major curriculum development and programme reform, attending conferences, learning institution policies, and assisting students’ NPEE preparation. Because of these experiences, he gained more knowledge of language teaching and became more critical of the centralized education and institution systems and his EM teacher and academic administrator identities. Committed to fostering learner autonomy, Philip acting with agency took a series of actions, including transforming his classroom teaching, carrying out large surveys on first- and second-year students,
conducting focus-on interviews on these students, arranging out-of-class reading activities, carrying out mentorship, etc. On the other hand, administrative duties produced negative effects. Philip was susceptible to teacher burnout in the face of a heavy workload, difficulty in balancing multiple aspects of teacher work, and powerlessness in managing administrative work. Physical and mental exhaustion as well as his idea of resignation were symptoms of burnout.

**Teacher promotion system**

The centralized education and institution contexts in this study were also manifested in teacher promotion criteria (overemphasis on research and ranks of teaching and research projects, awards, and publications) and academic corruption (social connections, money, publishing agencies, etc.). Many tensions and contradictions occurred between external requirements and the teachers’ personal conceptualizations of development. Within this milieu, the EM teachers chose either participation or non-participation (Trent, 2011; Wenger, 1998) to conduct research in an unfavorable academic context.

A high degree of research pressures, little support, and unfavorable academic culture seemed to “do more harm than good” (Wong, 2014, p. 315). Antagonism and powerlessness made most teachers choose a withdrawal option away from doing research and seeking promotion at different stages of their careers. This type of non-participation did not support the negotiation of researcher identity. Nevertheless, the findings also reveal that having a good understanding of the pressures and constraints and a sense of their ideal researcher identities, all the EM teachers were able to make informed choices and exercise discretion in ways that were conducive to their professional development.

More experienced teachers (Philip and Snow) felt more empowered to seek the intrinsic value of doing research in more favorable academic cultures (international journals, study-abroad contexts, etc.). Less experienced teachers had to struggle for both promotion and the quality of research. Although Daisy and Jacky had to conform to teacher promotion requirements and get involved in the
unfavorable academic culture, they were not completely passive. Daisy controlled the process of doing research to ensure the quality of her research outcomes; Jacky continued participating in an international research community to develop his research ability without receiving much financial support from the university.

Areas of research were revealed to be important to influence the teachers’ understanding of the relationship between teaching and research and their actions. Philip and Snow, who held that teaching and research should mutually inform each other, reformed teaching based on theories of teaching. Teaching was one of the motivators that drove them to do research. Jacky, who emphasized the influence of research on teaching, enriched his language class with more knowledge of his area of research – intercultural communication. Viewing teaching and research as two separate responsibilities, Daisy did not make attempts to connect them with each other. However, she was strongly aware that the heavy research tasks might influence her teaching in negative ways and intentionally she sought ways to balance them.

**Classroom teaching**

Compared with the university’s stringent requirements for research, the EM teachers were almost free to teach in any way they wished inside the classroom. There were no specified criteria to evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching. In the meantime, the university did not provide much guidance and support for teaching. The EM teachers were expected to be expert teachers, but were given scant opportunities for pre-service training, which is regarded as the “starting point for inexperienced teachers” (Genc, 2010, p. 399), and in-service training, which is argued to be “crucial to the long-term development of teachers as well as for the long-term success of the programs in which they work” (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p.1). Among the four EM teachers, only Philip and Daisy were once supported to learn British literature and American literature respectively for one semester.
As noted by Anderson (1987), “unbridled, it becomes license” (p. 368). This study exposes that excessive freedom led to many undesirable outcomes, such as suspended teacher learning, teacher domination, routine actions, indifference to students, lack of critical awareness and reflection, reluctance to change, etc. Therefore, granting freedom must be based on the condition that teachers are able to make good use of it.

The EM teachers’ experiences also proved that it was a big challenge for both teachers and students to change the pedagogical relations in the Chinese education context. It seemed that neither the teachers nor their students were ready to change the teacher’s authority in the language classroom. Although the teachers tentatively permitted students some freedom, mainly in the form of completing learning tasks individually or cooperatively, they took actions based on their personal beliefs rather than student demands. Many students did not cherish the given freedom and learning opportunities and completed the assignments in a carefree manner. This negative response indicates that freedom cannot be simply given. It is the teacher’s responsibility to make continuous efforts to convince students of the value of personal freedom and power in learning. The findings show that some teachers were willing to do this, whilst some were reluctant to.

Furthermore, this study indicates that continuous reflections (Genc, 2010; Little, 1995; Vieira, 2009) rather than the amount of teaching experiences contribute to a better control of teaching. Although the EM teachers were engaged in reflective teaching practices in the beginning years, most of them did not sustain efforts in respect to reflection. The research findings are in line with Schön (1983) who claims that teacher reflection should be practitioner-based. Teachers needed to reflect before action, in action, and after action (Farrell, 1998, 2004; Schön, 1983, 1987, 1991). Besides, it was of equal importance for the EM teachers, who received no teacher training, to accumulate sufficient theoretical knowledge to explore and clarify personal theories of teaching (Genc, 2010, p. 399). The EM teachers, especially those who did not conduct research in the area
of language education, had limited theoretical knowledge to guide their teaching practices. As a result, some of them firmly believed in their own personal theories and were unable to “exercise sound judgment on one’s current level of competence and the kinds of challenge that one could and should take on” (Tsui, 2003, p. 277). For example, Snow focused on students’ learning attitudes by initiating private conversations with them. However, in the teaching process, she still adopted the information-processing approach, which placed students in a knowledge recipient position. Jacky’s blame on students instead of himself also proved his lack of knowledge of the teacher’s role in the teaching process. Therefore, reluctance to counteract one’s personal theories sets up a barrier for teachers’ professional development.

8.2.2 Teachers and professional learning and development contexts

Apart from the constraining working context, the four EM teachers entered other academic contexts at different phases of their careers, including the universities where they did their MA and/or PhD study, took courses, and attached as visiting scholars as well as communities of practice comprising scholars in specific research areas. In these contexts, the EM teachers were either prepared or allowed room for self-directed learning, teaching, and research. They were not isolated, but had more capable others guiding and supporting their autonomy. In this sense, teachers needed to be enabled through professional learning and development opportunities to exercise sound judgment of their own capacities and external forces and to control their learning, teaching, and research (Benson & Huang, 2008; Genc, 2010; Kennedy & Pinter, 2007; Vieira, 1999, 2003).

All the EM teachers in this study commenced their careers with a Bachelor’s degree. Unprepared and untrained for teaching and research, they lacked the ability to fully understand their identities and practices. Further study opportunities were revealed to be crucial for these teachers who worked within working contexts that seldom provided guidance and support: they developed
their knowledge base through courses and self-directed learning; they were willing to go against all difficulties; they were scaffolded by more capable others; they were granted sufficient freedom for self-direction. With their development of autonomy, the teachers felt more willing and empowered to exercise discretion in their work when they returned to their working environments.

Apart from formal learning contexts, there were a few professional development opportunities leading the EM teachers to communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) where people worked towards the same goals. Philip once collaborated with an American scholar doing research at an American university. Through this practice, Philip reflected on his language education and his role in teaching. A radical change took place after he ended this visiting scholar journey – he transformed the traditional teaching practices and endeavored for fostering learner autonomy. On the other hand, Jacky networked with researchers in his research area by attending key conferences in the field regularly. These opportunities enabled him to retain motivation to do research and to learn the up-to-date research outcomes. The research findings indicate that lack of professional development opportunities greatly constrained the EM teachers’ development. Out of dissatisfaction with the current working environment, all the EM teachers desired the gaining of access to other communities of practice, which were assumed to allow room for actualizing their values.

8.2.3 Teachers and living contexts

Previous research recognizes that educational, institutional, and teacher education contexts influence the development of teacher autonomy (Benson, 2000, 2010; McGrath, 2000; Vieira, 2007; Vieira et al., 2008). The research findings of this study expose the reality that teachers’ living context, including their families, social communities, and living environment, also influenced the exercise of teacher autonomy.
At the family level, the two female teachers’ mother identity and Jacky’s breadwinner identity strongly influenced their professional choices and actions. Most prominently, Snow’s mother identity drove her to provide a good living and education environment for her daughter via her own continuous professional development (pursuing higher academic degrees, striving for the visiting scholar opportunity, etc.). Becoming a mother, Daisy was unable to manage her teacher work because of postnatal depression; being a mother was instructive in that she was able to more effectively handle the teacher-student relationship and brought her inspiration on how to improve teaching (sharing personal experiences, her daughter’s stories, etc.). As a male teacher, Jacky seemed to have great pressure on professional title, administration position, salary, and honors from his family. Family affairs interfered in his daily work too.

At the level of social communities, a typical example can be drawn from this study is Daisy’s participation in the Christian community. It was fair to say that Daisy’s change from a pessimistic teacher to an optimistic one was largely affected by Christianity. Besides, constraints in the living environment were revealed to influence teachers’ behaviors, actions, and emotions in teaching and could lead to teacher resignation. It was noticeable in this study that Snow had been against her work and life in the oil field from the beginning to her departure. Her antagonism towards the living environment made her suffer long-term depression.

8.2.4 Summary

The above discussions reveal that the EM teachers’ working, learning/professional development, and living contexts were integral to each other, acting as either enabling or constraining factors in the development of teacher autonomy. Therefore, the investigation of teacher autonomy should be situated in the broad social conditions in which teachers work, learn, and live instead of the working environment alone. The findings also indicate that the EM teachers were not
simply constructed or constrained by contexts. Rather they might be able to construct contexts. This perhaps highlights the significance of teacher autonomy. In order not to be governed by others, teachers should understand the complexities of their profession (Crandall, 2000, p. 40), make informed decisions, and take intentional actions to author their own profession.

8.3 Teacher identity and teacher autonomy

This study differed from previous studies of teacher autonomy in that it addressed the dialectic between personal and social aspects of teacher autonomy and examined the long-term development of teacher autonomy. Teacher identity, a key linking concept between sociocultural theory and the theory of autonomy, was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of teacher autonomy. Based on the conceptual framework provided in 2.3 (see Figure 2.2), the interrelatedness between teacher autonomy and identity is shown in the following three aspects. First, teacher identity and autonomy are both processes. Changes of teacher identity at different stages were revealed to strongly affect the teacher participants’ exercise of teacher autonomy. Second, the multiplicity of teacher identity was shown to be a major cause of degrees of autonomy. Third, in line with Hague (2011), autonomy was proven to be a process for teachers to change and develop their identities. This section discusses the close relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher identity.

8.3.1 Teacher identity formation and autonomy as processes

As noted by many researchers, identity and autonomy are both dynamic in nature (Beauchamp & Thomas, 2009; Beijaard et al., 2004; Miller, 2009; Paiva & Braga, 2008; Sinclair, 2000). This characteristic may be best displayed in the long-term experiences of teachers. 8.1 has analyzed the formation of teacher identities and the development of teacher autonomy in a long-term process spanning the EM teachers’ whole professional lives.
Three major teacher identities were identified in this study. They were the EM teacher identity, researcher identity, and administrator identity. The findings provided rich evidence that the three teacher identities changed across time and contexts. Furthermore, they were of different types – some were negotiated and comprised agency, some were rigid and unchanged for some time, and some were fragile. Influenced by the types of teacher identities, the teacher participants exercised different degrees of teacher autonomy. From this perspective, the long-term developmental process of teacher autonomy was characterized by unevenness.

In the initial stage, the teacher participants positioned themselves as novices who had little experience in the ‘assigned identities’ (Buzzelli & Johnston, 2002; Varghese et al., 2005) – EM teacher, researcher, and academic administrator. These identities were negotiable as the teachers all had the strong desire to develop into more experienced and qualified EM teachers, researchers, and academic administrators. According to Wenger (1998), these teachers were eager to be ‘identified with’ and ‘identified as’ capable EM teachers, researchers, and academic administrators. Viewed from these four dimensions – technical-psychological, motivational, political, and sociocultural, the development of teacher autonomy in this phase was manifested in the expansion of knowledge base, strong teacher motivation (mainly extrinsic motivation) and awareness of the need for change, continuous interaction with students and more capable others (mainly supervisors, experts, and peers), and self-empowerment to enact their identities in real practices.

In the more experienced stage, the novice teacher identities changed into various types. They were rigid, fragile, or negotiable. The first two types hindered the development of teacher autonomy. The findings show that most teachers’ EM teacher identity was inclined to be rigid, evidenced by the teachers’ routine actions in teaching, demotivation to teach, abuse of power (domination and distance from students) in the teacher-student relationship, and disempowerment in the
teacher-institution relationship. It’s an interesting phenomenon that the EM teacher identity tended to be fixed and unchangeable when the teacher participants were overconfident in their teaching competences. Fragile identity was formed as Philip and Daisy transited from the novice research stage to the next stage. Having no goal for further research engagement, the two participants ended efforts to conduct research. Guided by negotiable teacher identities, the teachers were able to find spaces and opportunities for development in different aspects of work. It is noticeable that the teachers’ inner desire for change was crucial to the exercise of teacher autonomy, especially when they were within restricted working contexts. For example, viewing herself as an incapable EM teacher, Daisy sustained motivation to develop her identity. Although she received little external support, she continuously reflected upon her teaching and sustained efforts to learn to teach. In the meantime, favorable conditions were also important to motivate the teachers to further negotiate their identities. Snow and Jacky both negotiated and developed their researcher identities within favorable learning environments.

During this investigation, the four teacher participants were more likely to negotiate their professional identities in the face of tensions and contradictions between their beliefs and the demand of the top-down system (Alsup, 2006; Day et al., 2006; Schempp et al., 1999). However, due to professional phases and status, there were still variations among teachers. More experienced teachers – Philip and Snow - were seen to be self-empowered to develop the quality of their teaching and research and to resist the top-down forces which overemphasized the number and level of their research outcomes. They even sought access to other environments which might provide them with “a wide range of valuable options” (Wall, 2003, p. 308). Having no control over the top-down policies, less experienced teachers – Daisy and Jacky - chose compromise. Unlike the other two teacher participants, their primary goal was to develop their professional titles, which determined that they had to conform to institutional research requirements. Nonetheless, Daisy and Jacky still empowered themselves to negotiate their
researcher identities and sustained efforts to conduct research within the restricted institutional and educational contexts.

It should be pointed out that not all teacher identities were negotiable. The findings expose that some identities, in particular the EM teacher identity, had the tendency of fragility and rigidity and hindered the development of teacher autonomy. Snow and Jacky, in spite of their good intention to change students’ learning attitudes, were seldom critical of their own teaching competence, teaching methods, and teaching effectiveness. To some extent, their EM teacher identity was unchanged. Although Jacky made several attempts to change his identity by adding student activities to his classroom teaching, he ended efforts as soon as he felt frustrated by students’ poor performance. In this sense his newly formed EM teacher identity was susceptible to dissolve.

In summary, an in-depth understanding of teacher identity and autonomy can be gained if they are regarded as processes. This is because they both change across time and contexts. More importantly, in the long-term process, teacher autonomy is strongly affected by teacher identity. This study identified three types of teacher identity – fragile, rigid, and negotiable. Influenced by different types of teacher identity, the teacher participants exercised different degrees of autonomy.

**8.3.2 Multiple teacher identities and degrees of teacher autonomy**

Apart from the dynamics of teacher identity, its multiplicity was prominent in the findings. This study concurs with Day et al. (2006) that teacher identity should be viewed from the duality of the personal and professional dimensions instead of the single perspective of professional identity. Personal identities such as mother identity and religious identity were shown to influence the teacher participants’ exercise of autonomy on their work. In addition, the findings provided rich evidence to show that when multiple teacher identities exist simultaneously, they are of varying degrees of importance at different time and places (Danielewicz, 2001). This may account for the teacher participants’ exercise of different degrees
of autonomy on different aspects of work.

From the four EM teachers’ stories, it can be seen that apart from the three prominent identities discussed above, there also emerged many other identities throughout their lives and careers such as head teacher, graduation paper supervisor, mentor, wife/husband, mother/father, etc. which, to a greater or lesser extent, affected their ability, willingness, and self-empowerment to seek professional development.

Becoming and being a mother opened a new window of understanding for the two female teachers and heralded changes in their professional lives. Snow’s desire to create a better education and growing environment for her daughter was one of the most powerful driving forces activating her agency in seeking career development (see Figure 5.1): she brought her daughter from the underdeveloped oil field to the more developed city where she sought a university teacher position; she brought her daughter to the largest city of China by competing for the visiting scholar opportunity and PhD study opportunity; she chose the present working institution mainly to ensure that her daughter received a good education. In the process of becoming a mother, Daisy went through a tough period of postnatal depression during which time she had to suspend her work. Adaptation to the mother identity encouraged her to bring her experiences of raising a child to classroom teaching. This improved her relationship with students as it changed her from being a ‘serious teacher’ into a more easy-going, friendly, and caring one.

Besides, each individual teacher, either in life or in their profession, forged some particular identities which also had a great impact on their career decision making: Snow’s PhD identity persuaded her to engage in research and granted her some power to resist the top-down pressures; Daisy’s religious identity enhanced her self-confidence as an EM teacher; Jacky’s young teacher/man identity encouraged him to sustain efforts in seeking professional development and high status at the institution, etc.
This study has provided plenty of evidence which shows that when multiple teacher identities coexisted at a given time and context, there was always one or two core identities that dominated a teacher’s decisions and actions. It is difficult to establish a unified professional identity by integrating the multiple identities together because in any given context under particular circumstances, different identities emerge to adapt to the context. Take the EM teachers’ situations when this investigation was conducted for example, Philip was struggling between being an EM teacher, a researcher, and an administrator; Snow intentionally focused more on teaching out of her antagonism towards the immoral research atmosphere; Daisy was making efforts in both teaching and research; Jacky remained enthusiastic in conducting research, but was much more passive than before in teaching practices, especially in the face of students’ poor performance.

In summary, degrees of teacher autonomy may be the outcome of the multiplicity of teacher identity. Personal teacher identities should be taken into account as they integrated with professional teacher identities to influence the development of teacher autonomy. Dominant teacher identities always guide teachers to exercise the highest degree of autonomy on one aspect of work.

8.3.3 The reciprocal relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher identity

Apart from the strong influence of teacher identities on the development of teacher autonomy, the research findings also provided rich evidence for a reciprocal relationship. It may be appropriate to understand that the process of teacher autonomy development as a process of teacher identity formation, change, and development.

The study identified three types of teacher identities – fragile, rigid, and negotiable ones (see 8.3.1). The formation and further change of these identities may be partly accounted by the fluctuation of teacher autonomy. In this study, the exercise of teacher autonomy is understood as the teacher’s deliberate actions to
change themselves or working conditions. The findings show that the teacher participants tended to exercise different degrees of autonomy on different aspects of work at different career stages. The overall developmental process of teacher autonomy was thus uneven. It is undoubted that the development of teacher autonomy was conducive to the negotiation and development of teacher identities. For example, Daisy sustained motivation and efforts to develop teaching throughout her teaching profession. In this process of autonomy development, her EM teacher identity changed from an unqualified teacher to a more capable teacher. Likewise, without the development of teacher autonomy, teacher identity experienced difficulties for further development. This relationship can be explained by the fragile researcher identity formed by Philip and Daisy in the initial stage of research. Although the researcher identity was positive in this stage, it dissolved as soon as the two teachers ended efforts to conduct research.

As exemplified by Figure 2.2, teacher identity and autonomy are interrelated in that they mutually influence each other. Teacher autonomy is needed for teachers to change and develop their identities to make them contribute for development. Teacher identity has either a positive or negative impact on the exercise and development of teacher autonomy. As noted by Farrell (2011), it is important to bring the tacit conceptualization of teacher identities to the level of awareness through self-reflection (p. 55). In this study, several forms of narratives (interviews, auto-/biographies, casual conversations, open-ended questionnaire) were adopted to encourage the four EM teachers to reflect on their EM teacher identities. Some teachers reported that the conducting of this inquiry helped renew their beliefs while some held their beliefs and were reluctant to change. In this sense, more external guidance, support, and incentives are needed to get them engaged in reflective practices that are conducive to the development of teacher identities and teacher autonomy.
8.4 Chapter summary

This chapter answered the three research questions by analyzing and discussing the findings of this study. It first analyzed how teacher identities and teacher autonomy changed across time and contexts and discussed the uneven characteristic of the developmental process of teacher autonomy. It then analyzed how teacher autonomy was influenced by the interactions between individual teachers and the working, learning, and living contexts. In the end, it discussed the reciprocal relationship between teacher identity and autonomy based on the conceptual framework provided in Figure 2.2 and the research findings.
Chapter 9 Conclusions and implications

This PhD study investigated the autonomy of four Chinese EM teachers in the whole course of their careers. It is one of the first studies on the multidimensionality and the long-term development of teacher autonomy within a particular sociopolitical and higher education institutional context. After analyzing and discussing the research findings in Chapter 8, I bring together the major contributions and limitations of the study and state its implications for language teachers, teacher educators, institutions, and future research in this chapter.

9.1 Contributions of this study

9.1.1 Reconceptualizing teacher autonomy in second/foreign language education

Although the concept of teacher autonomy has received much attention in second/foreign language education, there is still much controversy on its meaning (Benson & Huang, 2008; Huang, 2005). In spite of this, researchers have almost reached the consensus that autonomy can accommodate different interpretations and take numerous forms of manifestation due to the particularities of individuals and related sociopolitical contexts (Benson, 2009; Little, 1991; Nakata, 2011; Sinclair, 2000). Based on literature and the particular Chinese tertiary education context, this study defined teacher autonomy as the teacher’s capacity to take control of his/her work and clarified the meanings of ‘capacity’, ‘control’, and ‘work’. It contributed to the understanding of teacher autonomy in the following three aspects:

First, it viewed teacher autonomy from multiple dimensions instead of one. It pointed out and demonstrated that the four components of ‘capacity’ - ability, willingness, freedom, and interdependence, which roughly correspond to the technical-psychological, motivational, political, and sociocultural dimensions of
teacher autonomy (Chuk, 2010; Oxford, 2003) - were interrelated and mutually influenced each other. Furthermore, highlighting the multidimensionality of teacher autonomy uncovers the interaction between the personal (technical-psychological and motivational) and social (political and sociocultural) aspects of teacher autonomy. Second, the study placed an emphasis on the role of change in teacher control. Interpreting ‘control’ as teacher agency, it highlighted that taking good control of work relied on the teacher’s conscious effort to change the self or the working environment within opportunities and constraints. Third, it was inappropriate to conceptualize the concept of teacher autonomy simply within the realm of language teaching and learning to teach. In order to enhance our understanding of teacher autonomy, this study suggested broadening the scope of investigation to multiple aspects of teacher work to scrutinize how teachers take control of these work to make them influence each other in a positive instead of a negative manner.

Besides, this study addressed the relationship between teacher autonomy and learner autonomy based on empirical evidence. The case study participants engaged in developing their own teaching competence instead of fostering learner autonomy in the beginning stage of teaching. In spite of their attempts to foster learner autonomy in the more experienced stages, they experienced difficulties in real practice because of their insufficient and unsystematic knowledge of autonomy and the unsupportive educational and institutional context. Not all teachers sustained motivation and efforts to reform their teaching to make it contribute to the development of learner autonomy. Therefore, the study does not suggest that teacher autonomy should necessarily include the teacher’s commitment to learner autonomy (Benson, 2011; Shaw, 2008; Smith & Erdoğan, 2008).
9.1.2 Documenting the long-term development of teacher autonomy

This study viewed teacher autonomy in a long-term process instead of a short-term process. It also highlighted the interaction between the personal and social aspects of teacher autonomy (Benson & Cooker, 2013; Chuk, 2010) and hence examined the multiple dimensions of teacher autonomy instead of one dimension. Taking these issues into consideration, the study investigated the long-term development of teacher autonomy of four language teachers in a particular tertiary education context of China which was government-controlled and administration-dominated.

The study made the following contributions to an in-depth understanding of the long-term development of teacher autonomy: 1) It described four Chinese EM teachers’ lived experiences in the whole course of their careers from their own perspectives with a focus on the critical events that affected the development of teacher autonomy; 2) Through an analysis of stages of autonomy development in aspects of teaching, research, and administration, it highlighted that teacher autonomy was of varying degrees and its developmental process was characterized by unevenness; 3) It revealed that teacher autonomy was not solely affected by either individual or contextual factors. Instead, whether it could develop or not was determined by how teachers interacted with their working, learning, and living contexts which were replete with constraints and opportunities. Teachers’ sustained effort to change and develop themselves or working environments (Bailey, Curtis, & Nunan, 2001; Johnson & Golombek, 2011) was crucial to the ongoing development of teacher autonomy.

9.1.3 Linking teacher autonomy with teacher identity

Identity is recommended as a linking concept between sociocultural theory and the theory of autonomy (Benson, 2007; Huang, 2009, 2013; Huang & Benson, 2013). However, few studies have explicitly discussed the relationship between the two concepts in the field of second/foreign language education. This study
adopted the concept of teacher identity as a lens through which the dialectic between individual and social perspectives of teacher autonomy was addressed. It also provided an opportunity to gain a better understanding of the meaning and characteristics of teacher autonomy and identity and their relationship.

This study contributed to the current understanding of teacher autonomy and identity by providing a conceptual framework (see Figure 2.2) to illustrate their relationship and providing rich empirical evidence to verify it. The conceptual framework shows that teacher identity strongly affects the development of teacher autonomy. Aligning with Norton Pierce (1995) and Weedon (1987), teacher identity was multiple, dynamic, and in conflict. Each teacher participant constructed multiple identities throughout their careers and lives, including professional identities such as the EM teacher identity, researcher identity, and administrator identity as well as personal identities such as the mother identity, breadwinner identity, and religious identity. These identities were of “varying degrees of importance or relevance given any one time or place” (Danielewicz, 2001, p. 4) and were of various types (fragile, rigid, and negotiable). These characteristics were proven to have a close relationship with the teachers’ exercise of degrees of autonomy on different aspects of work and the uneven developmental process of teacher autonomy. The conceptual framework also illustrates that teacher autonomy is also crucial to the formation, change, and development of teacher identity.

The inquiry into the interrelatedness between teacher autonomy and identity suggests that the development of teacher autonomy and the construction and reconstruction of teacher identity are in the same process. It may be inappropriate for researchers to discuss which functions as the origin and which functions as the outcome when linking the two concepts (see Benson, 2007; Huang, 2013). Instead, it is more reasonable to focus on their reciprocal relationship.
9.2 Limitations of this study

Three limitations of this study are acknowledged in this section. The first is concerned with participant sampling. As noted in 3.3, I selected seven prospective participants by taking into consideration that some might not work well. Only four of them were reported in this thesis because they provided the richest information and they were representative of the teachers recruited in different phases. I was well aware that the other three teachers also had their own unique experiences, so I roughly analyzed the data sources collected from these teachers. I found that they shared the similar characteristics of autonomy that were reported in this study. Therefore, reporting four cases does not affect the trustworthiness of this study.

The second limitation has to do with data collection. This PhD study adopted a multiple case study method in order to collect rich data and capture the complexity of each case (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013, p. 11). Although I made efforts to establish a trusting and collaborative relationship with the teacher participants and they were generous enough to share their life stories most of time, they were reluctant to uncover everything when discussing sensitive topics such as publishing articles and books, gaining awards, and promotion. Some also exposed their unwillingness to let me observe their teaching for a second or third time. Following the guidelines of ethics in case study research, I completely respected the teacher participants. But at the same time I was unable to explore more deeply into certain aspects of their work and life.

The third limitation of this study might be the transcription and translation of the data sources. I employed multiple forms of data collection tools and collected a good amount of data, most of which were in Chinese. It was a huge task to transcribe and translate all the data into English verbatim all by myself. Although I tried not to distort the meanings the teachers conveyed in their first language in my translation and returned the research findings of each case to the specific teacher participant as a form of member checking, there might still exist inappropriate interpretations.
9.3 Implications for teachers, institutions, and future research

This study investigated how language teachers took control of multiple aspects of work across time and contexts. The teacher responsibilities (teaching, research, and administration) highlighted in this study are shared not only by most foreign language teachers in the Chinese tertiary education context (Bai & Hudson, 2011; Bai & Millwater, 2011; Dai, 2008; Hao, 2011; Shu, 2004; Wang & Han, 2011), but also by teachers who work in other disciplines and other sociopolitical and institutional contexts (Borg, 2007, 2009, 2010; Henkel, 2000; Marsh and Hattie, 2002). Therefore, although there were only four case study participants in this study, the findings may apply to quite a large population. It is hoped that more teachers care about autonomy and struggle for autonomy within constrained contexts. Without teacher autonomy, it is difficult for teachers to seek ongoing professional development.

The study also hopes to convince teacher educators and institutions that the long-term development of teachers is crucial to the long-term success of the programmes in which they work (Richards & Farrell, 2005, p. 1). They should help teachers gain a good understanding of teacher autonomy and sustain motivation and efforts to exercise autonomy. For example, as suggested by Johnson (2009, p. 25), teacher educators can strengthen teacher collaboration by using “informal social and professional networks” such as teacher inquiry seminars, peer coaching, cooperative development, teacher study groups, narrative inquiry, lesson study groups, and critical friends groups. They also need to help teachers engage in reflective practices in order to bring the tacit conceptualization of teacher identities to the level of awareness (Farrell, 2011, p. 55).

Institutions also need to initiate various activities based on teachers’ needs and particularities. It is important for institutions to listen to teachers’ voices in policy-making (Lai, 2010). In this study, the institution made research almost the only criterion for promotion. It neither contributed to the development of productive research cultures, nor supported in an optimal manner teachers’
professional development (Borg & Liu, 2013, p. 295).

Future research is recommended to examine teacher autonomy in the long term. Our understanding of the long-term development of teacher autonomy can be enhanced if research can target at language teachers in Chinese HEIs which are ranked differently and in other educational and institutional contexts. It is suggested that future research should contribute more to the link between teacher autonomy and teacher identities. Gender difference may be another interesting topic in future research on teacher autonomy.
References


Cheng, X.T., & Sun, X.H. (2010). Zhong guo ying yu jiao shi jiao yu yu zhuan ye...


Dai, W.D. (2010). Di si jie gao deng xue xiao wai yu zhuan ye jiao xue zhi dao wei yuan hui zhong qi gong zuo bao gao [Mid-term report on the working progress of the fourth Foreign Language Major Teaching Committee of
Chinese higher education institutions]. *Foreign Language World*, 3, 2-6.


Lortie, D. (1975). *Schoolteacher: A sociological study*. Chicago, IL: University of


Thavenius, C. (1999). Teacher autonomy for learner autonomy. In D. Crabbe & S. Cotterall (Eds.), *Learner autonomy in language learning: Defining the field and effecting change* (pp. 159-163). Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Peter Lang.


Appendix 1: Informed consent form

I. Research participation information
I am Nana LONG. I am doing my PhD research project on the autonomy of teachers of English majors in Mainland China. I want to know your working history and your present working situation as well as your thoughts, actions and expectations. My research needs your participation in interviews and (auto-)biography writing as well as your permission to let me observe your classroom teaching. You are being invited to take part in this study because I feel your attitude towards your work, your values and your actions will contribute to my understanding of teacher autonomy in the Chinese tertiary context. You may also benefit from it by reflecting on your working experience. Participation in this research project is completely voluntary. You have the right to say no. You may change your mind at any time and withdraw. You may choose not to answer specific questions. This investigation will start from January, 2013 to July, 2013. I will not use your real name and all your information will not be shared with anyone expect my supervisors and the board of examiners of my PhD thesis. I will first share with you the findings of this study, and will then share them more broadly through my PhD theses, meetings, and other forms of publications. You will receive gifts and will be invited for dinners for being in this study.

II. Informed consent form
I understand I have been asked to take part in the PhD research project of Nana LONG. I have read the foregoing information about research participation and I have had the project explained to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions about it and any questions I have been asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent voluntarily to be a participant in this study.

Your signature below means that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

Participant name:

Signature:

Date:
Appendix 2: The first-round interview questions

1. When did you commence your teaching profession? Did you receive any training on how to teach English before and in service? Did you have any internship?

2. How did you feel when you become an English teacher? What subjects did you teach? How did you prepare the lessons and how did you teach? Did you have any discussions with colleagues? How did you feel about your teaching? What changes did you make in your teaching?

3. What working conditions were you in?

4. How did you feel when your university became a benke-level university? What changes took place on the university and what changes did you have?

5. When did you obtain your postgraduate diploma/master’s degree/doctor’s degree? In what circumstances did you plan to further your study? What benefits did you gain?

6. What are the qualities of a good EM teacher (knowledge, teaching skills, teaching methods, teacher-learner relationship, assessment of the self and the students)? How do you evaluate yourself as an EM teacher? What are your teaching goals? What improvements did you make during these years of teaching? How do you always organize and manage your classroom teaching (teacher role, learner role, resources, activities)? How do you assess your students? How do you evaluate your teaching? What are your motivations to teach? What are the main constraints in your classroom teaching? How do you address them?

7. What do you think of research? What do you think of the research appraisal system of the institution? How do you evaluate your capacity to conduct research? How do you feel about this? What are the opportunities that are provided for you to develop your ability to do research? Have you tried to find opportunities by yourself? If so, what do you do? What are the main difficulties for you to conduct
research? How do they affect your attitude and emotions? What do you do to address them? What do you plan to do to improve your research ability and make research achievements?

8. What do you think of the relationship between teaching and research?

9. What other work do you do? How do you like it? What can you gain from it? What difficulties do you have? How do you generally evaluate your role in your work (active, passive, neutral)? What do you want to do to seek further development (self, relationship with students, colleagues, and others, top-down system, etc.)?

10. Would you please talk about your opinion about professional title promotion and the current academic culture of your institution and the tertiary education circle?

11. Do you think that your family life affect your career development? Does your career affect your life?
Appendix 3: The second-round interview questions

1. Do you have any plan for this semester?
2. What improvements have you made in your teaching? What problems do you have? How do you plan to deal with them?
3. The dean insists on the importance of conducting research and promoting professional title? What is your attitude towards this? What efforts are you making now?
4. Do you like to attend the meetings and seminars that are organized by the school and institution? All the teachers are required to attend them. What is your attitude towards it?
Appendix 4: Questionnaire

1. 您认为合格的英语专业教师应该具备哪些知识、技能和素质？作为英语专业教师，您可以从这几方面评价一下自己吗？

2. 您认为英语专业教师的教学工作应该仅限于课堂教学吗？为什么？

3. 在承担课程方面，您认为以下哪种方式更利于自身教学能力的提高：1）尽量多地承担英语专业课程；2）固定几门课？为什么？

4. 由于学校招生政策的变化，近几年贵校的生源质量呈现逐年下降的趋势。作为英语专业教师，您愿意从哪些方面作出努力尽可能多地帮助学生进步和发展呢？

5. 在教学过程中，您更倾向于 1）根据学生特点改变教学方法，还是 2）让学生产生您的教学方法？为什么？（可以根据具体的课程特点和学生情况回答）

6. 您在教学上的满足感主要来源于什么？它可以足以让您保持教学热情吗？

7. 您在教学过程中出现过倦怠情况吗？如果有，能说说具体表现吗（例如：不愿上课、不愿改善教学方法、烦躁等）？您又是如何看待这一现象的呢？

8. 您渴望自身的教学获得外界的认可吗？如果是，您更多地希望获得哪些人的认可（例如：学生、同事、领导、学校、社会）？您如何看待当前学校和社会各种形式的“名师工程”和“面子工程”？如果不是，您对自身教学效果的期待是什么样的？

9. 您认为大学教师应该搞科研吗？为什么？

10. 您倾向于专攻一个领域做科研还是涉猎多个领域？为什么？

11. 您目前对待科研的态度是：1）这是任务，不得不做；2）这是大学教师应该做的事情；3）我喜欢做的事情；4）不喜欢；5）其他（请做具体解释）？（您可以多选，但是请解释一下原因）

12. 现在大学教师的工作不仅仅限于教学，还有科研、论文指导、行政工作、社会工作等等。社会、学校和个人对“教师职业发展”和“教师个人发展”的诠释也不统一。就您自身而言，您寻求什么样的职业发展和个人发展？
CURRICULUM VITAE

Academic qualifications of the thesis author, Miss LONG, Nana:

- Received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Dezhou University, China, July 2005.

- Received the degree of Master of Arts from Beijing Institute of Technology, China, July 2007.

October 2014