The dynamics of Chinese learning journeys:

a longitudinal study of adult learners of Mandarin in Australia

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Abstract

The dynamics of Chinese learning journeys:

a longitudinal study of adult learners of Mandarin in Australia

This thesis is concerned with the nature and development of adult learners' involvement with learning and using Mandarin Chinese in the long term, in the context of other aspects of their lives. It examines their individual learning journeys for the interweaving and layering of different kinds of learning activity over time. The study looks beyond the relatively homogeneous student groups in the Chinese classrooms and lecture halls of large metropolitan universities, and instead gives a voice to the experience of people learning Chinese who are based in country areas, who choose distance learning, who are older, and who study part-time or independently for many years. The influence and effects of long-term learning Chinese learning, both on individual learners, but also through them upon the various contexts and communities which they inhabit, is considered.

Complexity theory is drawn upon as an appropriate framework for conceptualising the dynamics of the language learning journey: emphasises context, views diversity, change over time and non-linearity as central, and incorporates multiple interrelated timescales.

The enquiry is presented as a multi-layered longitudinal qualitative case study. Two surveys, 5 years apart, provide extensive reflective data from an 'outer' group of 26 participants. In addition, more frequent in-depth interviews and other activities conducted with an 'inner' group of 7 participants yield a complementary set of detailed data with a rich narrative component. The study introduces a method of multiple timeline analysis, and a concept of dynamic activity patterns, to represent and interpret learners' engagement with learning Chinese as it evolves over time. The existence of fallow periods and their role within individual learning trajectories is also introduced, and explored from an identity perspective.

Conceptually, this thesis combines perspectives from adult and independent learning with those of applied linguistics to contribute, to developing perspectives on foreign language learning beyond the classroom and beyond the institution, a particular focus on the longitudinal view. Within the rapidly expanding disciplinary field of Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL), this study offers a better understanding of the efforts, contexts and needs of individual long-term learners.

Certification

I certify that the substance of this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not currently being submitted for any other degree or qualification.

I certify that any help received in preparing this thesis and all sources used have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature:

Table of contents

Acknowledgements ..... ***iii***

Abstract ..... ***v***

Certification ..... ***vii***

Chapter contents ..... ***ix***

Tables, figures and charts ..... ***xvii***

Conventions, abbreviations, acronyms and Chinese terms list ..... ***xix***

Dedication ..... ***xxii***

Chapter 1. Introduction **1**

Interlude. Stella's story **9**

Chapter 2. The landscape **17**

Introduction 17

2.1 The linguistic terrain: prominent features of the Chinese language for learners ... 18

2.2 Shifting contours: developing options for learning Chinese as a Foreign Language 21

2.2.1 Chinese government strategies to promote Chinese learning worldwide 22

2.2.2 Growth and promotion of Chinese learning in countries outside of China 23

2.2.3 Teaching and learning Chinese as an additional language in the Australian school and university context 24

2.2.4 Teaching and learning Chinese as an additional language in Australia outside the school and university context 26

2.3 The spatial dimension: distance and contiguity 27

2.3.1 Geographical distance: learners in regional Australia 28

2.3.2 Distance education in Australia 29

2.3.2.1 Distance education for languages 31

2.3.3 Changing opportunities for access to Chinese linguistic environments 31

2.3.4 Relative positioning of learner, teacher and linguistic resources 33

2.4 The learning modality dimension: scales of structure and informality 35

2.5 The temporal dimension 38
2.5.1 Learner's stage of life 38
2.5.2 Learner's stage of learning 39
2.5.3 Variable intensity of pace of learning 39
2.6 Research Questions 41
2.7 Exploring Complexity 42
2.7.1 Complexity 'visualisation' 44
2.8 Summary 45

Chapter 3. The long view of learning (literature review) 47
Introduction 47
3.1 Trajectories in the life course 47
3.2 Adult learning 49
3.2.1 Five orientations to adult learning 50
3.2.2 Adult learning and human development 52
3.2.3 Lifelong learning 53
3.2.4 The learning journey 54
3.2.5 Learning trajectories and learning careers 55
3.3 The long view of language learning 58
3.3.1 Orientation 58
3.3.1.1 Background: approaches to SLA 57
3.3.1.2 Introduction to long-term language learning 59
3.3.2 Features and parameters of longitudinal research into language learning 59
3.3.2.1 Length 60
3.3.2.2 Tempo 60
3.3.2.3 Setting 61
3.3.2.4 Consistency of learner background 61
3.3.2.5 Proficiency level 62
3.3.3 Proficiency-related longitudinal studies 62
3.3.4 Longitudinal studies centred on learner experience: key concepts 62
3.3.4.1 Identity, agency and investment 64
3.3.4.2 Autonomy 67
3.3.4.3 Emotion 69
3.3.4.4 Motivation 72
3.3.5 Long-term language learning journey studies: beyond the institution 73
3.3.5.1 Specific longitudinal studies 78
3.3.6 Accounts of learner experience of learning Chinese 82
3.4 Conclusion 84

Interlude: Michelle's story 85

Chapter 4. Methodology and design 89

Introduction 89
4.1 Conceptual framework and selection of the methodology 89
4.1.1 Complexity thinking in research design 90
4.1.2 Multiple timescales 90
4.1.3 Longitudinal research 92
4.1.4 Case study 94
4.1.4.1 Case and system 95
4.1.5 Narrative, life-history method 96
4.2 Overall plan of the project 97
4.2.1 Design 97
4.2.1.1 Attrition and intensity 100
4.2.2 Timeframe 101
4.2.3 Identifying the potential participants 103
4.2.3.1 Criterion sampling 103
4.2.3.2 Ethical considerations: connections between researcher and participants 105
4.2.3.3 Procedure followed for contacting potential participants 105
4.3 Strategies and techniques for collection of empirical materials: selection and implementation 106
4.3.1 Preliminary/antecedent stage: student reflective writings 106
4.3.2 Surveys: rationale 107
4.3.2.1 Survey One: design 108
4.3.2.2 Survey One: implementation and procedure 108
4.3.2.3 Survey Two: design 109
4.3.2.4 Activities questionnaire within Survey Two 109
4.3.2.5 Survey Two: implementation and procedure 111
4.3.3 Semi-structured interviews: rationale 111
4.3.3.1 Interview setting and mode: face-to-face and by telephone 112
4.3.3.2 Interview conduct and guides 113
4.3.3.3 Interview 1 114
4.3.3.4 Interview 2 115
4.3.3.5 Interview 3 115
4.3.4 Language activities: rationale 116
4.3.4.1 Language activities: design 116
4.3.5 Self reports and other ongoing informal contact 117
4.4 Data analysis 118
4.4.1 What constitutes analysis? 118
4.4.2 Procedures 119
4.4.3 Inevitable change and evolution in a longitudinal study 121
4.5 Remarks: issues of methodology regarding longitudinal study 121
4.5.1 Questions regarding inclusion or exclusion of partial participants 121
4.5.2 The longitudinal study and researcher as practitioner 123
4.6 Summary 123

Chapter 5. Learning trajectories of the outer group 125
Introduction 125
5.1 Overview of data sets/groups 125
5.2 Snapshot: 41 learners of Chinese engaged in distance learning 126
5.2.1 Demographic and background details 126
5.2.1.1 Age and gender 126
5.2.1.2 Place of residence 126
5.2.1.3 Work and home situation 128
5.2.1.4 Full-time or part-time study 128
5.2.1.5 Language background 129
5.2.2 Timelines of the Chinese learning experiences for the 41 learners 131
5.2.2.1 Beginnings – how did their Chinese learning journeys start? 131
5.2.2.2 Timelines as a graphic interpretive device 132
5.2.2.3 Comments on the data presented so far 136
5.2.3 Looking back – the lessons of experience 137
5.2.3.1 Recognition of the complexity of the task and re-evaluation of time required – acceptance of a long-term commitment 138
5.2.3.2 Recognition of the extent of formal linguistic differences between Chinese and English (and other European languages) 138
5.2.3.3 Recognition of the importance of developing competence in various skills concurrently 139
5.2.3.4 Recognition of the benefits of a relaxed, playful, self-nurturing attitude to learning 139
5.3 Progression: 26 learners followed up 5 years later 140
5.3.1 Overview of the 26 respondents: update of demographic details 141
5.3.1.1 Family connections with China or Chinese 143
5.3.1.2 Time spent in China 143
5.3.2 Extension of timelines through the period 2005 to 2010 144
5.3.2.1 Patterns of engagement between Survey One and Survey Two 144
5.3.2.2 Observations afforded by an overview of the full timelines 151
5.3.2.3 Limitations of the timeline method as used so far 153
5.4 Retrospection: participants look back on their timelines 154
5.4.1 Participants' views of influences on their timelines 154
5.4.2 Events, stages and achievements perceived as significant for their timelines 156
5.4.2.1 Achievements presented as communication-related 157
5.4.2.2 Achievements presented as study-related 158
5.4.2.3 Achievements presented as new understandings and new connections 159
5.4.3 Changing perceptions of challenges and rewards of learning Chinese 159
5.4.3.1 Shifting themes in the challenges reported in the group 159
5.4.3.2 The dynamics of individual perspectives on challenges and rewards 161
5.5 Anticipation: looking ahead to continuing engagement with Chinese 162
5.5.1 Stopping or dropping Chinese 163
5.5.2 Reasons for beginning and continuing Chinese compared 165
5.5.3 Maintaining engagement with Chinese 167
5.5.4 Perceptions and attitudes to continuing Chinese – what does it feel like? 169
5.5.4.1 Feelings about beginning and continuing Chinese, recorded in Survey One 169
5.5.4.2 Introducing metaphor chains 171
5.5.4.3 General description of the metaphors 171

5.5.4.4 Metaphor chains for four individuals 174
5.6 Elaborated timelines 176
5.7 Conclusion 177

Chapter 6. Dynamic contours of engagement with Chinese 179
6.1 Past, present and future practice questionnaire: introduction 179
6.2 Procedures for processing, and first-stage analysis of responses 180
6.2.1 Emergence of concept of 'intentional direction' 181
6.2.2 Emergence of the analytical construct of dynamic activity patterns 182
6.3 Analysis of activity patterns, comparing individuals across the group 184
6.3.1 Second-stage analysis: drawing out single elements of the activity patterns 184
6.3.1.1 Trend up to now 185
6.3.1.2 Likelihood for the future 188
6.3.1.3 Intentional direction 189
6.3.2 Third-stage analysis of activity patterns: comparing composite aspects 191
6.3.2.1 Overall level of intensity of Chinese related activity 191
6.3.2.2 Dynamic contour of ebbing and flowing engagement (past, current, future) 194
6.4 Dynamic patterns of engagement: summary 200

Chapter 7. Individual learning stories 203
Introduction 203
7.1 "It has given me another life" – Brenda's story 204
7.1.1 Commentary on Brenda's timeline 207
7.1.2 Themes in Brenda's story 208
7.2 "Hopefully in the future it does help my business but originally it was a personal choice" – Clive's story 208
7.2.1 Commentary on Clive's timeline 211
7.2.2 Themes in Clive's story 212
7.3 "My momentum fluctuates. There is this underlying fascination with the language and culture that never goes away, then it's sparked by an event or an opportunity" – Michelle's story 213
7.3.1 Commentary on Michelle's timeline 213
7.3.2 Themes in Michelle's story 214
7.4 "It's like two forward, one back, two forward, one back. But that's okay as long as it's always still forward" – Rachel's story 215
7.4.1 Commentary on Rachel's timeline 218
7.4.2 Themes in Rachel's story 219
7.5 "I gave myself a decade. It would be a skill to add to my life in different capacities" – Marty's story 220

7.5.1 Commentary on Marty's timeline 224
7.5.2 Themes in Marty's story 225

7.6 "I would classify it as a lifetime's ambition: I would like to be able to speak it really, really fluently and really well. I sort of feel I might be half way there" – Stella's story 226

7.6.1 Commentary on Stella's timeline 226
7.6.2 Themes in Stella's story 226

7.7 "I am just following in the footsteps of the language" ..... – Stephanie's story 229

7.7.1 Commentary on Stephanie's timeline 235
7.7.2 Themes in Stephanie's story 236

7.8 Summary 237

Chapter 8. Insights from the long view 239

Introduction 239

8.1 Contribution of the complexity framework 239

8.1.1 Multiple levels of organisation 239
8.1.2 Non-linearity 240
8.1.3 Sensitivity to initial conditions 240

8.2 Capturing dynamic trajectories 241

8.3 Ripples of influence: the learner in social context 242

8.4 Alignment of learning opportunities with 'contexts of significance' 244

8.5 Attitudes to developing speaking skills 245

8.6 Aspirations, intentions and rethinking success 246

8.6.1 Learner and user: dynamic, fluid identities 247

8.7 Desire 248

8.8 Gender 250

8.9 The global and the local 251

8.10 Summary 252

Chapter 9. Conclusion 253

9.1 Synthesis 253

9.1 Limitations, and areas for future research 258

9.2 Applications/recommendations 259

9.3 Closing remarks 260

References 261

Appendices 279
Appendix 1. Ethics documents 279
Appendix 2. Prompts for pilot reflective writing 291
Appendix 3. Survey One 292
Appendix 4. Full list of activities 302
Appendix 5. Survey Two 304
Appendix 6. Interview 1 guide 333
Appendix 7. Interview 2 guide 334
Appendix 8. List of Activity Patterns 335
Appendix 9. Elaborated timelines of the core group 338

Tables, figures and charts

List of Tables

Table 2.1: Livingstone's (2001) four categories of adult learning applied to Chinese learning situations 36
Table 2.2: Preliminary mapping of adult long-term CFL in terms of complexity concepts 46
Table 4.1: Summary of the design of the study 99
Table 4.2: The datasets of different lengths 122
Table 5.1: Current working situation 128
Table 5.2: Language background 129
Table 5.3: Languages spoken or studied among the group 131
Table 5.4: Key to interpret the colours on the timeline graphics 144
Table 5.5: The challenges of learning Chinese, as described in Survey One and Survey Two, 5 years apart: 160
Table 5.6: Categories for mapping dynamics 161
Table 5.7: Dynamics in perception of challenges and rewards 162
Table 5.8: Metaphors used by four respondents at four stages 175
Table 6.1: Dynamic activity patterns, worked example 183
Table 6.2: Descriptions of the six levels of composite intensity 192
Table 6.3: Comparing proportions of activities with a high component and with a zero component for each individual 192
Table 6.4: Dynamic contour categories 195
Table 6.5: Rising contour activities for Brenda 198
Table 7.1: Comparison of individual Skype tutoring with university DLL 228

List of Figures

Figure 2.1: Relationship between different modes of language learning 37
Figure 4.1: Schematic diagram of data collected 98
Figure 5.1: Schematic diagram of data collected (repeated) 126
Figure 5.2: The 41 simple timelines compared over their full duration 133
Figure 5.3: The 41 simple timelines compared from 1989 to 2005 135
Figure 5.4: Chain of data collected by looking backwards and forwards at different points in time 141
Figure 5.5: Timelines of group of 26, extended to 2010 145
Figure 5.6: Formal distance study combined with periods in China: Brenda, Clive and Stephanie 145

Figure 5.7: Informal activities: Esther, Nina, Wendy, Xavier, Nick, Sharon, Harry and Marty 147
Figure 5.8: Engagement in self-directed study: Keith, Rachel, Scott and Stella 147
Figure 5.9: Work-related long-term residence in China: Keith, Russell and Sonia ... 147
Figure 5.10: Periods of formal study in China: Clive, Marty, Scott and Stephanie ... 149
Figure 5.11: Periods of face-to-face study: Heather, Russell and Wendy 149
Figure 5.12: Periods of no activity: Lola, Michael-Eddie, Michelle and Mick 149

List of Charts

Chart 5.1: Distribution of participants by age and gender 127
Chart 5.2: Distribution of participants by place of residence and gender 127
Chart 5.3: Distribution by gender and age group among study modes 129
Chart 5.4: Experience with languages other than English and Mandarin, by numbers of respondents 127
Chart 5.5: Year of first experiences of studying Chinese 132
Chart 5.6: Distribution by age and gender of Survey Two particpants 142
Chart 5.7: Distribution by gender and place of residence of Survey Two participants 142
Chart 5.8: Identity in relation to Chinese, past, present and future 164
Chart 5.9: Reasons for beginning and continuing Chinese, 5 years apart 166
Chart 6.1: Trends up to now 185
Chart 6.2: Trends reported for activities actually done leading up to 2010 186
Chart 6.3: Future likelihood 189
Chart 6.4: Intentional direction 189
Chart 6.5: Levels of Intensity 193
Chart 6.6: Dynamic profiles of engagement in Chinese activities 196
Chart 6.7: A closer look at the rising profiles 196

List of Boxes

Box 2.1: Personal anecdote: the changed environment for learning Chinese outside of China 32

Conventions, abbreviations, acronyms and Chinese terms list

Italic font is used when words from Chinese are annotated in the *pinyin* transliteration system.

Italics are used within the text to signal emphasis, and can highlight the introduction of new conceptual terminology.

Bold font is used in chapter 5 to highlight themes emerging from the data for discussion.

The convention of using uppercase font for conceptual metaphors is followed.

In-text quotations are within double inverted commas, unless they are indented as block quotes.

Single inverted commas are used to enclose terms introduced for the first time.

The individual learning stories in Chapter 7, and in Interludes 1 and 2 (which appear after Chapters 1 and 3 respectively) are distinguished by the use of a sans serif font.

Chinese language names and terms

(Note: tone marks are added here for reference, but when these terms are used within English text the tone marks are frequently omitted.)

bopomofo	common name for *zhùyīn fúhào* transliteration system
fántǐzì	繁体字 traditional or full-form characters
guānxi	关系 system of personalised networks of influence in Chinese society
guóyǔ	国语 Modern Standard Chinese or Mandarin (term used in Taiwan)
Hànbān	汉办 China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOTCFL)
hànyǔ	汉语 the Chinese language including its different dialect varieties (mainland Chinese term)
hànyǔ pīnyīn	汉语拼音, alphabetic transliteration system for Mandarin Chinese
huáyǔ	华语 Modern Standard Chinese or Mandarin (term used in Singapore, Philippines, Malaysia); sometimes also used as an equivalent to *hànyǔ*
jiǎnhuàzì, jiǎntǐzì	简化字 or 简体字 simplified characters
pīnyīn, hànyǔ pīnyīn	拼音，汉语拼音alphabetic transliteration system for Mandarin Chinese
pǔtōnghuà	普通话 Modern Standard Chinese or Mandarin (term used in Mainland China)
tàijíquán	太极拳 Tai Chi (Tai Qi), or Chinese shadow boxing
wényán	文言 formal or literary Chinese
zhùyīn fúhào, chu-yin	注音符号 symbol-based transliteration system used in Taiwan

Abbreviations and acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
BALLI	Beliefs about Language Learning Inventory
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
CAL	Chinese as an additional language
CALL	Computer-assisted language learning
CFL	Chinese as a foreign language
CMC	Computer-mediated communication
CT	Complexity theory
DE	Distance education
DL	Distance learning
DLL	Distance language learning
EFL	English as a foreign language
ESL	English as a second language
FSI	Foreign Service Institute (USA)
ICT	Information and communication technology
JFL	Japanese as a foreign language
L2	Second language
LIFE	Learning in Informal and Formal Environments
MA	Master of Arts
MSC	Modern Standard Chinese
MSN	an instant messaging service (and a collection of websites and services)
NA, or N/A	not applicable
NALSAS	National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Strategy
NALSSP	National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools Program
NNS	Non-native speaker
NOTCFL	China National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, or *Hanban*
NS	Native speaker
NSW	New South Wales
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
QQ	Instant messaging service in China
RFDS	Royal Flying Doctor Service
SILL	Strategy Inventory for Language Learning
SLA	Second language acquisition
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
MSC	Modern Standard Chinese
TCFL	Teaching Chinese as a foreign language
TESOL	Teaching of English to speakers of other languages

TL	Target language
TLRP	Teaching and Learning Research Programme (UK)
U3A	University of Third Age
UK	United Kingdom
UNE	University of New England, Australia
US, USA	United States, United States of America
VOIP	Voice over internet protocol
WEA	Workers' Education Association

Dedication

To my father, Tony Tasker, MD, FRCP (1915–2008)