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Title: Intercultural identities of non-native teachers of English: an exploration in China and the Netherlands

Issue Date: 2017-12-06

Chapter 3

A qualitative study into Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers' intercultural identities²

² Manuscript submitted for publication: Chen, D., Tigelaar, D. E. H., & Verloop, N. (under review). English language teachers and their intercultural identities: Studying Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers' self-perceptions in relation to ES cultures.

Abstract

Ideas on teaching about cultures associated with the English language (ES cultures) can be very different among teachers of English as a foreign language (EFL teachers). In this study, we explored how EFL teachers in different countries perceived themselves as teachers in relation to ES cultures: or, what characterizes their intercultural identities. Aiming to learn more about Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers' self-perceptions in relation to ES cultures, and to find out whether there are differences between teachers' perceptions of their intercultural identities in the two national groups, we conducted an exploratory study by interviewing a small number of Chinese and Dutch secondary school EFL teachers. Our research questions were:

1. How do Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers in the interview perceive their intercultural identities?
2. What similarities and differences exist between their perceptions of intercultural identities?

We conducted semi-structured interviews with 10 teachers in China and the Netherlands (5 Chinese and 5 Dutch teachers) to elicit the teachers' perceptions of their intercultural identities. The results offer a relatively comprehensive picture of how differently the participating Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers saw themselves in relation to ES cultures, and of how these differences were connected to their teaching. Our findings illustrate difficulties as well as challenges that EFL teachers may experience in positioning themselves in relation to ES cultures when teaching. Practical implications are discussed.

3.1 Introduction

Teachers who teach English as a foreign language (EFL) nowadays are expected not only to develop students' competences in use of the English language but also their competences in understanding and communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds (Byram et al., 2002). This expectation is based on a development over the last few decades whereby communication across cultures has become more and more important and, as a result, cultural diversity, exchange of meaning in interpersonal communication, and intercultural mediation are currently considered crucial in foreign language teaching (Kramsch, 2014). These new demands of preparing students for future intercultural communication bring challenges to EFL teachers worldwide. Most EFL teachers who teach in a non-English-speaking country are non-native speakers of English (shortened in the following to non-native EFL teachers) (Braine, 2010). They are likely to have learned the English language and learned about the cultures associated with the English language (ES cultures) in their home countries. In this process, they may have acquired stereotypes and biases about ES cultures, which they might not be conscious of, and which may influence their attitudes in culture teaching (Byram et al., 2002). Moreover, EFL teachers in different cultural contexts may have very different ideas about teaching ES cultures (Karabinar & Guler, 2013; Sercu et al., 2005), and they have different notions of themselves as teachers in relation to these cultures (Guerrero Nieto & Meadows, 2015; Menard-Warwick, 2008). Because of these variations in ideas and attitudes among EFL teachers, previous researchers have doubted whether EFL teachers meet the general requirement of teaching intercultural competence (Sercu, 2002, 2006; Sercu et al., 2005).

The current study focuses on the perspectives of EFL teachers themselves, and the ways in which EFL teachers worldwide aim to deal with the present challenges of intercultural language teaching. In particular, this study aims to acquire a better understanding of how EFL teachers in different countries view themselves as teachers in relation to ES cultures, or, how they perceive their *intercultural identities*. Teachers in countries with a smaller geographic and cultural distance from ES cultures normally have more convenient access to ES cultures, more imminent needs for intercultural communication, and gain information about ES cultures more easily than do teachers in countries further away from ES cultures (Kachru, 1990). This means that if we want to explore the phenomenon of teachers' intercultural identities, it is reasonable to consider

cultural distance as an important variable in teachers' intercultural identities. An obvious choice would be to compare the intercultural identities of two groups of teachers from countries that differ substantially in their 'distances' from ES cultures, e.g., China and the Netherlands. As one of the representative cultures in Asia, Chinese culture is very distinct from ES cultures, while in Europe the Dutch culture shares many similarities with British and American cultures, as reflected in previous sociocultural value survey results (Hofstede et al., 2010; Schwartz, 2006). Although English is compulsory in both Chinese and Dutch secondary schools, the proportion of people who speak and use English in China is much lower than in the Netherlands (European Commission, 2012; Wei & Su, 2012). It therefore seems reasonable to assume that the differences in distance between teachers' native cultures and ES cultures could enable us to find meaningful differences between teachers' intercultural identities in different countries.

Recent studies have used identity theories to gain a better understanding of what happens during language teaching in the classroom (Gee, 2001; Norton, 2006). From the perspective of identity theories on EFL teaching, the identity of a language teacher is regarded not only as a determinant in the practice of language teaching, but rather as the key to understanding the sociocultural context of the classroom (Varghese et al., 2005). Earlier reviews of studies about non-native EFL teachers have found that the identities of non-native foreign language teachers are often defined by their native language, and examined in the context of general language teaching, rather than by their experiences with culture teaching (e.g., Braine, 2010; Moussu & Llorca, 2008; Samimy & Kurihara, 2006). Though teaching intercultural competence is becoming an influential approach in EFL teaching nowadays (Kramsch, 2014), there have been few studies about EFL teachers' intercultural identities. Taking into account the findings and approaches in existing research (cf. Chapter 2), we conducted in-depth interviews with Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers, to gain an understanding of possible similarities and differences in their perceptions of their intercultural identities. We expected our findings not only to result in more insight into teachers' perceptions of their intercultural identities in different nations, but also to contribute to an understanding of how EFL teachers deal with the challenges they meet as cultural mediators.

3.2 Identity of EFL teachers in intercultural teaching

In previous research, teachers' intercultural identities have been studied from mainly linguistic and pedagogical perspectives, and often with a focus on teachers who had intercultural experiences (see Chapter 2). By interviewing teachers working in their own countries, we gained knowledge about how non-native EFL teachers regard themselves in relation to ES cultures, and how such identities are formed and connected to their teaching.

From a sociocultural perspective, language and culture are seen as inseparable in EFL teaching and learning, and culture is not only content but also a context of teaching (Kramsch, 2014). This inseparability of language and culture involves both the personal and professional experiences of teachers (Gandana & Parr, 2013; Varghese et al., 2005). In the context of EFL teaching, teachers are exposed to new cultural ideas and practices in discourse with their students and they constantly negotiate their self-perceptions and roles while teaching (Newton, Yates, Shearn, & Nowitzki, 2010). How EFL teachers see themselves and perceive their roles in relation to ES cultures is also referred to in the literature as their 'intercultural identities' (cf. Menard-Warwick, 2008).

Previous studies have shown that non-native EFL teachers in different sociocultural contexts may have different views on their relationship with ES cultures (see Chapter 2). Non-native EFL teachers who study or work in ES countries may be quite aware of their affiliations to both their own and the ES culture, especially when they face a conflict of beliefs or experience or pressure to socialise (e.g., Menard-Warwick, 2008; Ortaçtepe, 2015; Phan, 2007; Phan & Phan, 2006). Non-native EFL teachers who work and live in their home countries often identify with their own culture and see themselves as distinct from their native-English-speaking colleagues (Duff & Uchida, 1997). Their relationships with ES cultures are developed in the context of teaching ES cultures and intercultural competence (Moran, 2001). For example, some teachers became teachers of English because of their interest in British and/or American music or films (Menard-Warwick, 2011). Others adopted ideas from ES cultures to improve their teaching, such as Western communicative teaching methods (Tsui, 2007).

Earlier studies into the identity formation of non-native EFL teachers have shown that teachers' intercultural identities develop based on their sociocultural or intercultural experiences (Menard-Warwick, 2008; Moran, 2001; Ortaçtepe, 2015). For example, a

Japanese EFL teacher (Moran, 2001) reported in a self-reflective article that at the beginning of her teaching career she favoured 'Western ways' when she noticed the differences between Japanese and ES cultures. In the end, however, with her increased knowledge about EFL teaching and her experience in ES cultures, she regarded herself as positioned between the cultures. Li and Guo (2012) compared the values of 14 Chinese EFL teachers and 12 teachers of other subjects in the same college and found, for example, that the prominence of Power Distance between EFL teachers and their students was much lower than that between teachers of other subjects and their students (meaning EFL teachers agreed more with equal distribution of power than teachers of other subjects, cf. Hofstede et al., 2010), which indicates that teachers might change their ideas about the teacher-student relationship due to the influence of ES cultures.

The concept of *intercultural sensitivity*, i.e., the ability to recognize and respect cultural differences, has been used in the literature to define having a successful connection to more than one culture (Hammer et al., 2003). According to Hammer et al. (2003), a person's intercultural sensitivity develops through linear stages, from more ethnocentric (one's own culture is experienced as central to reality) to more ethnorelative (one's own culture is experienced in the context of other cultures; Hammer et al., 2003). Since intercultural sensitivity can be seen as an individual's ability to cope with intercultural experiences, it can be considered an important aspect of teachers' intercultural identities.

For EFL teachers, their intercultural identity is closely connected not only to their intercultural experiences but also to their teaching practices (Menard-Warwick, 2008; Ortaçtepe, 2015). In some studies of non-native EFL teachers, teachers' intercultural identities have been regarded as a social and pedagogical link to both their own and ES cultures (e.g., Duff & Uchida, 1997; Guerrero Nieto & Meadows, 2015; Ilieva, 2010). As mediators between 'source' and 'target' cultures (Llurda, 2004), EFL teachers are expected to consciously avoid any cultural stereotypes and bias in their teaching, so as to cultivate students' intercultural competence (Byram et al., 2002). However, teachers have different attitudes towards ES cultures and culture teaching. They may adopt a critical perspective when considering ES cultures in relation to their own, or they may consider one of the ES cultures, e.g., American culture, as the focus of their teaching and regard themselves as representatives of that culture. Such differences have been found between novice and expert teachers (Guerrero Nieto & Meadows, 2015), and

among teachers from different countries (Sercu et al., 2005). The positions and attitudes that teachers adopt when teaching ES cultures is a manifest aspect of teachers' intercultural identity and closely connected to their teaching practice. However, not much is known about how teachers from countries that differ substantially in their 'distances' from ES cultures perceive their intercultural identities.

3.3 The present study and research questions

We invited Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers to participate in this study, mainly because we considered their distinct geographic and cultural distances from ES cultures as an important variable in determining their intercultural identities. The English language and ES cultures are viewed differently in Chinese and Dutch secondary education (see Chapter 1 for details). There have been a few case studies in peer-reviewed international academic journals about Chinese EFL teachers' inner conflicts and dilemmas in the formation of their identities (e.g., X. Gao & Xu, 2014; Wu & Wurenbilige, 2012). We have not found any research into the intercultural identities of Dutch EFL teachers in international peer-reviewed journals and, to our knowledge, no research has ever been done into differences or similarities between non-native EFL teachers' intercultural identity perceptions in China and the Netherlands, or in other countries with comparable 'distances' from ES cultures.

Aiming to learn more about how Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers perceive themselves in relation to ES cultures, and to find out whether there are differences between teachers' perceptions of their intercultural identities in the two national groups, we conducted an exploratory study by interviewing a small number of Chinese and Dutch secondary school EFL teachers. We focused on secondary school teachers because cultural content (in addition to mere language content) is more prominent at the secondary levels of foreign language education (Byram, 1997). Our research questions were:

1. How do Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers in the interview perceive their intercultural identities?
2. What similarities and differences exist between their perceptions of their intercultural identities?

3.4 Method

We investigated teachers' intercultural identities by conducting semi-structured, individual interviews with a small number of teachers. By using this qualitative method, we aimed to examine teacher identity in depth and within the specific context of language-and-culture teaching (cf. Guerrero Nieto & Meadows, 2015).

3.4.1 Participants

The purpose of the interviews was to elicit different opinions of teachers, so we wanted as much variation as possible. We invited EFL teachers from different secondary schools in China and the Netherlands to participate voluntarily in our study. We limited our selection to teachers who did not have English as their mother tongue and who taught English to non-native speakers of English.

The participants in the individual interviews were five Chinese and five Dutch EFL teachers. The teachers all came from different secondary schools in China or the Netherlands. Table 3.1 presents a brief overview of their backgrounds; all names are pseudonyms.

Table 3.1

Participants in the interview

Name	Gender	Native languages	Years of teaching	Overseas travel
Gu	Male	Chinese	5	None
Wu	Female	Chinese	11	None
Sha	Female	Chinese	7	None
Lin	Female	Chinese	4	None
Chang	Female	Chinese	22	None
Willem	Male	Dutch	20	UK
Ria	Female	Dutch	3	UK
Sanne	Female	Dutch	9	UK, US, Ireland
Lotte	Female	Dutch	20	UK, Ireland
Vic	Male	Dutch	27	UK, US

3.4.2 Interview protocol

The questions in the interview protocol were designed to elicit the teachers' notions of themselves as teachers in relation to teaching the cultures associated with the English language, and their ideas about the influence of ES cultures on their personal and professional lives. Based on the literature described in the Introduction and Chapter 2 of

the dissertation, the questions in the interview protocol focused on the following four aspects: (a) teachers' feeling of connection with ES cultures, (b) influence of ES cultures on their personal or professional identity, (c) their intercultural sensitivity, and (d) their attitude towards ES cultures in teaching. The first aspect examined teachers' general ideas about their relationship to ES cultures. The second and third aspects were more specific and focused respectively on the influence of ES cultures on their personal and professional identities and teachers' sensitivity to cultural differences. The last aspect examined teachers' positions and attitude in teaching ES cultures, as a manifestation of the other three aspects of intercultural identity in teaching practice. The questions are listed in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2

Themes and questions for teachers' intercultural identities

Themes	Questions
(a) Feeling of connection with ES cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● When teaching culture in class, how do you feel about your connection to English-speaking cultures? ● How do you think a teacher of English should maintain an appropriate relationship to English-speaking cultures? Can you describe (and explain) such a relationship?
(b) Influence of ES cultures on personal or professional identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Has how you see yourself and your students in class, such as your relationship to students, how you talk to students, your teaching style, et cetera, been influenced by English-speaking cultures in any way? If yes, can you describe this influence? If no, can you explain why not? ● Have the cultures of English-speaking countries influenced your attitudes towards life and people around you? If yes, can you describe this influence? If no, can you explain why not?
(c) Intercultural sensitivity ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Do you think there are many cultural differences between the cultures of the English-speaking countries and your own? If yes, can you give one or two examples to explain? If not, what do you think might be the reason? ● Have you encountered any difficulties or problems in your life associated with cultural differences? What kinds of difficulties or problems? ● When it comes down to the bottom-line, is it more important to pay attention to cultural differences or to similarities? (If the respondent emphasises the importance of paying attention to similarities, follow up with: What do you think the similarities are?) ● Do you make any specific efforts to find out more about the cultures of the

³ These questions about intercultural sensitivity were adapted from Hammer, et. al., 2003, p. 426 (based on these questions Hammer, et, al. designed a questionnaire to survey intercultural sensitivity of overseas professionals). The questions were arranged from ethnocentric to ethnorelative scales, i.e., denial, defence, minimization, acceptance, adaptation, integration. We used these questions to elicit more from teachers on this aspect.

Themes	Questions
(d) Attitude towards ES cultures in teaching	<p data-bbox="439 274 941 296">English-speaking countries around you? Why, or why not?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="383 302 1092 420">● Do you try to adapt your communication, life attitudes, et cetera, to people from the English-speaking countries? (If yes, does it mean anything to you to look at the world through the eyes of a person from the English-speaking countries? Do you feel you have two or more cultures in your life?) Why, or why not? <li data-bbox="383 425 1092 493">● Has your adjustment to the cultures of the English-speaking countries led you to question your identity? (If yes, do you feel separated from those cultures that you are involved in?) Why, or why not? <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="383 566 1092 657">● If you talk about cultural matters or comparisons when teaching a topic, what kind of position do you take? For example, do you show your preference for the phenomenon or opinions of your own culture or not? Can you explain why you take such a position? <li data-bbox="383 662 1092 729">● In general, what do you think your position is when comparing the English-speaking cultures with your own? As impartial, or preferring one culture? Why? <li data-bbox="383 735 1092 806">● Generally speaking, what do you think is the most appropriate position for a teacher of English to take between the other culture and his/her own when comparing them? Why?

3.4.3 Analyses of the interviews

For the purpose of data analysis, the interviews were recorded, the answers summarized, and characteristic expressions transcribed verbatim. The first step in the analysis of the interviews was to focus on understanding what the teachers had said during the interviews and to identify ‘themes’ (for example ‘connection to ES culture’) by reading the interview transcripts thoroughly. Themes were considered important if they pertained to how the teachers talked about themselves as teachers in relation to the cultures associated with the English language, and/or about themselves as being influenced by ES cultures during their personal and professional lives. Units of analysis were defined by theme, i.e., a unit ended when a new theme was introduced; the complete answer to an interview question was usually one unit of analysis (e.g., a quotation). The information was first summarized under the four headings (themes) in the interview protocol: (a) feeling of connection with ES cultures, (b) influence of ES cultures on personal and professional identity, (c) intercultural sensitivity and (d) attitude towards ES cultures in teaching. In step two, we quoted key words and phrases from the data related to the themes in the interviews. Regarding the key words and phrases under each theme, words and phrases with similar meanings were combined

into categories. In the third step, the content of each category was defined, and a descriptive label was chosen for the category. For example, within the theme ‘attitude towards cultural comparisons’ categories ranged from ‘favourable’ to ‘impartial’.

3.5 Results

In this section, we present the results of the interviews under the four themes of teachers’ intercultural identities. On the basis of our interview analysis, we selected quotations which were characteristic of the most salient differences between the Chinese and Dutch teachers.

3.5.1 Teachers’ feeling of connection with ES cultures

In the individual interviews, the Chinese and Dutch teachers reported different relationships with ES cultures. The Chinese teachers stated that their connections to ES cultures were limited only to their knowledge or profession. As Wu said:

*I don’t think there’s any connection to my real life. ...We are living in different environments.*⁴

Although the Chinese teachers who participated in the interviews had not visited any ES countries, they did talk about aspects of ES cultures that interested them, such as the American dream and cultural diversity (Gu), practical, individualized and life-long education (Sha), or history and culture of Britain (Lin and Chang). However, they kept their distance from those cultures. As Gu said,

I accept the English-speaking cultures, but I don’t necessarily have the same values.

The Dutch teachers described their connection to ES cultures in terms of their affiliation to Dutch culture and their emotional bond to ES cultures, as illustrated by Lotte:

If I stand there talking about England, then I’m still a Dutch woman talking about England. I’m not an English woman. [...] I also respect my own culture. [...] But when I start to talk about England, I just love it.

⁴ Transcription conventions in the quotations: ...: pause; [...]: overlapping or irrelevant speech omitted; [word]: our insertion or paraphrase (of omitted item in the conversation).

Other Dutch teachers also mentioned such a connection, from being an ‘Anglophile’ (Vic), via having an ‘automatic strong connection’ to ES cultures (Ria) or a historical and current cultural connection (Willem), to ‘feeling closer to ES cultures than other foreign cultures’ (Sanne).

Unlike the Chinese teachers, all the Dutch teachers had been to the UK/England. The Dutch teachers who had been to England, Scotland or Ireland stated that they felt ‘at home’ in British/English or Irish culture. Some of them (Sanne and Vic), who had also been to the United States, saw more differences between the American and Dutch cultures than between the British and Dutch cultures. There were aspects of American culture they were not happy with. Sanne thought this was the reason that she took a ‘critical stand’ towards ES cultures and did not ‘idolize’ them:

I think people should live in the way they are taught to live. But I don't usually agree. I see good things, I see bad things, especially in America.... I'm critical of English-speaking cultures.

3.5.2 Influence of ES cultures on personal and professional identity

The Chinese teachers seemed to be more aware of the influences of ES cultures in their lives than were the Dutch teachers. Some of the Chinese teachers, i.e., Gu, Wu, and Chang, talked about the influence of ES cultures on their views of life, or on such aspects as their communication style (Gu and Wu) or religious beliefs (Chang). Most teachers noted such influences in their interpersonal relationships. As Sha said:

I think I've been influenced by British and American classes. I want my students to express their ideas in class as freely as their counterparts do in Britain and America.

Compared with Dutch teachers, Chinese teachers thought their motivation for becoming a teacher had not been influenced by ES cultures that much. Chinese teachers, for instance Wu and Sha, contended that their choice of becoming a teacher of English was because they followed the job assignment of their university⁵ and they considered teaching an ideal job for women because it is devoid of mobility and allows quite a lot

⁵ In the 1990s, Chinese universities assigned jobs to graduates who opted for the teaching profession on admission.

of time to take care of a family.

The Dutch teachers did not mention anything about the influence of ES cultures on teacher-student relationships. However, Willem and Vic thought their communication styles and life style, such as maintaining some distance when talking to people or enjoying English literature and British or American music, might have been influenced by their strong interest in ES cultures. They thought this interest was also connected with their job motivation. As Vic said,

I think it is good for a teacher to like the country if you teach [the language and culture of] it. ...You have to be thrilled by English-speaking cultures.

Most teachers in both groups did not see any influence of ES cultures on their teaching style. Lotte was the only teacher who said her method of teaching was influenced by ES cultures:

I find writing very important. And I think also...it appeals to [the students'] intellect, like [...] they have to do it in American colleges and British universities...

3.5.3 Teachers' intercultural sensitivity

In the interview study, Chinese teachers seemed to feel less easy than did the Dutch teachers in accepting ES cultures. Wu mentioned her lack of confidence in communicating with native speakers of English:

I guess I won't be able to communicate fluently with foreigners. I'll feel awkward. ...I haven't been abroad before. I'm not sure whether I can fit in [in] that cultural atmosphere or not.

Due to the distance from ES cultures, Wu said that it was also difficult for her students to use their knowledge about ES cultures.

Another Chinese teacher, Gu, saw ES cultures as contrary to his own:

Many aspects of the cultures of English-speaking countries are often completely the opposite of what we have in Chinese culture. [...], foreigners often misunderstand China.

However, Gu also pointed out that he tries to find out more about ES cultures through foreign films, broadcasting, and websites. Other Chinese teachers thought this was

unnecessary in their home country.

In contrast, Dutch teachers did not feel uncomfortable in communicating with ES speakers. They showed interest in specific aspects of ES cultures, such as music and sports, and some of them considered it a matter of course to read English newspapers, magazines, and novels, and watch the news about ES countries, beyond their needs to prepare for classes.

For the Dutch teachers, it was also natural to adapt to local culture when travelling in ES countries, because that was part of Dutch culture and education. Sanne:

In our culture, ...we always talk about assimilating when you visit a country. [...] Just because of that ... we learn so many languages here.

In their travels to ES countries, Dutch teachers experienced conflicts between ES cultures and their own, such as the objections to American culture mentioned above. Sometimes such conflicts made them reflect on their own culture. As Lotte compared British and Dutch cultures,

Dutch people... They don't like strict authority. They are really democratic. But, of course, you need authority. Otherwise things become messy. [...] If you look at the British, they are much more authoritarian. [...] And we don't particularly like that, but [it] may be good, you know, in some respects.

This reflection can make teachers more impartial and give them the feeling they are between cultures. As Ria said:

You note the differences. I think it makes you more objective. You're able to step away from your own culture and ...yeah, I think you automatically do that.

This connection was also recognized by Sanne:

I think that teachers are expected to make a link between English-speaking and Dutch cultures.

3.5.4 Teachers' attitudes towards ES cultures in teaching

The Chinese and Dutch teachers provided two reasons for remaining impartial in culture teaching and culture comparisons, i.e., the consideration that all cultures are equal, and the belief that teachers should respect students' opinions. Sometimes the two reasons

were combined.

The teachers considered it important that teachers should present different ideas and avoid imposing their ideas on their students. Sanne considered it important for students to put forward their own arguments, even if these contradicted the teacher's opinion:

When someone says something I don't agree with, [...] I always discuss things. They can say anything they want in my classroom as long as they can provide arguments to support their opinion.

Similarly, Lotte would like her students to give reasons and facts to support their arguments, instead of simply expressing bias against any culture. Lotte found cultural knowledge, especially knowledge about social behaviour, very useful to students' future development:

Since people all over the world are doing more business with each other, it's important that they (students) know the others' ways of behaving.

In addition to the two reasons just mentioned, Chinese teachers Sha and Wu said that they remained neutral because they did not know much about ES cultures. Gu, Lin and Wu thought there was no need for them to be in favour of one culture or the other, because most of the time the focus of their teaching was the English language, not culture, and cultural content is only for students to 'know'. Wu, for example, gave students materials for them to compare and analyse. She did not show preference for any culture. Her purpose of culture teaching was 'to help students understand, accept, and tolerate various languages and cultures.'

Some of the teachers' ideas seemed to contradict their neutral attitude in culture teaching. For example, Sha expected she would appear supportive regarding the issues she considered 'positive'. Vic thought such topics as the American elections were easier for teachers to remain impartial about than others, and it was sometimes difficult for teachers to be impartial because students could 'pick up' teachers' attitudes towards cultures.

3.5.5 Comparison between Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers

Some similarities and differences between Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers emerged

from the interviews. For example: both Chinese and Dutch teachers maintained a strong affiliation to their own cultures, while perceiving themselves as also connected to ES cultures by profession or by personal interest: they noticed the influence of ES cultures on certain aspects of their personal and professional lives; they showed some flexibility and tolerance when facing ideas or phenomena in ES cultures that were different from those in their own cultures, and different abilities in experiencing cultural differences (i.e., their intercultural sensitivity). Both groups tried to remain impartial in culture teaching, but felt it was not always necessary to do so because they often focused only on the teaching of language skills, or not easy to do so because their attitudes might be noticed by students. Table 3.3 summarizes some of the typical differences between Chinese and Dutch teachers from the interviews with respect to the four aspects. Illustrative interview quotations for these typical differences can be found in the sections above.

Table 3.3

Summary of typical differences between Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers' intercultural identities

Aspects	Chinese EFL teachers	Dutch EFL teachers
(a) Teachers' feeling of connection with ES cultures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling connected to ES cultures mainly because of knowledge and profession 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling connected to ES cultures mainly because of interest or emotion
(b) Influence of ES cultures on personal or professional identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling influenced by ES cultures mainly in their relationship with students and views of life 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling influenced by ES cultures mainly in their choice of being an English teacher, interest in English language and ES cultures, and in their life style
(c) Intercultural sensitivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling comparatively more unconfident or awkward when talking to native speakers of English; • Seeing more differences than similarities between Chinese and ES cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling comparatively more comfortable when talking to native speakers of English; • Seeing many similarities between Dutch and some ES cultures (e.g., British culture) but not necessarily for other ES cultures (e.g., American culture)
(d) Attitude towards ES cultures in teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling their knowledge about ES cultures is comparatively limited; • Feeling it is not always necessary to be aware of their attitude towards cultures because they often focus on language teaching only; • Feeling it is necessary to highlight comparatively more of the 'positive' aspects of cultures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling some topics are easier than others for teachers to remain impartial about • Feeling it is not always easy because students can pick up teachers' attitudes

Note. EFL = English as a foreign language; ES = English-speaking.

Table 3.3 shows typical differences between Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers' perceptions of their intercultural identities. In both the national groups, the opinions of the teachers about the four aspects of intercultural identity were consistent within the group and can be interpreted by their sociocultural contexts and the respective distances from ES cultures. For example, the more distant the home culture of the teachers to ES cultures, the less likely teachers were to regard themselves as connected to ES cultures in their personal lives (i.e., the part of life that is the least relevant to their profession), and the less confident they felt in communication with native speakers of English or about their knowledge of ES cultures.

3.6 Conclusions and discussion

Our findings summarized in 3.5.5 are in line with previous related research, such as the studies of Phan and Phan (2006) and Phan (2007), who illustrated how non-native EFL teachers maintained affiliation to their own culture; Moran (2001) and Menard-Warwick (2011), who described the influence of ES cultures on the identities of EFL teachers; and Byram et al. (2002), who sketched the difficulties teachers may experience if they want to remain neutral in culture teaching. The added value of our findings is that the results offer a relatively comprehensive picture of how differently the participating Chinese and Dutch EFL teachers saw themselves in relation to ES cultures, and of how these differences were connected to their teaching.

Our findings illustrate difficulties as well as challenges that EFL teachers may experience in positioning themselves in relation to ES cultures when teaching. For example, our interviews indicated that some of the Chinese teachers felt awkward when communicating with native speakers of English, and thought their culture was often misunderstood by people from ES cultures, while Dutch EFL teachers referred to difficulties in understanding certain aspects of American culture. In such situations teachers may find it difficult to present and interpret (varying opinions about) cultural phenomena to students in an impartial way, because they respond to cultures as 'human beings subconsciously influenced by their experiences'. EFL teachers need to be aware therefore of 'how their own stereotypes and prejudices may influence their teaching subconsciously,' and 'how they respond to and challenge their learners' prejudices, not only as teachers but also as human beings, subconsciously influenced by their

experience of otherness' (Byram et al., 2002, pp. 28-30).

EFL teachers can gain more critical perspectives when reflecting on their knowledge and experiences with regard to intercultural communication (Byram et al., 2002), as is evidenced by previous studies which found that expert teachers or teachers who have travelled in ES countries tended to develop critical views towards those cultures (Guerrero Nieto & Meadows, 2015; Ortaçtepe, 2015; Phan, 2007, 2008; Phan & Phan, 2006).

It should be noted that teachers' willingness to be impartial in culture teaching can be limited by greater distances or enhanced by smaller distances between cultures. The Chinese teachers in the interview related their 'neutral' position to disabling factors, such as their lack of knowledge about ES cultures, their limited need to engage in intercultural communication, and experiences of separation between English language learning and culture learning. These disabling factors can be attributed to the great distance between Chinese culture and ES cultures (Pan & Seargeant, 2012). Dutch teachers, whose culture is closer to ES cultures, may have more experiences with those cultures, see more need for English-mediated intercultural communication, and regard it as more important to develop critical perspectives among their students towards ES cultures.

Teachers in both cultures reported influences from ES cultures on their views of life and teaching, though as cultural distances vary, the influences can also be different. Teachers from a culture close to ES cultures may feel more connected to the language and cultures and may feel more influenced by ES cultures. A case in point is that almost all the Dutch teachers in our interview were interested in the English language and ES cultures, and they acknowledged the influence of ES cultures on their choice of profession. In contrast, the distance and differences between China and ES countries make it difficult for the Chinese teachers to feel very connected to or influenced by ES cultures. However, teachers from a culture distant from ES cultures may be better able to notice the influences of ES cultures on their worldview and their relationship with students. For example, the Chinese EFL teachers mentioned in the interviews that they were influenced by ES cultures in that they favoured an equal status and relaxed relationship with their students, which was in contrast with general ideas in the Chinese Confucian tradition, where teachers are seen as superior to students (Zhou & Li, 2015). Our findings support the findings of others that teachers' identities are more hybrid than fixed (Varghese et al., 2005) and they can be learners of cultures (Moran, 2001). This is

in line with recent conceptualizations of teachers' intercultural identities, such as those of Akkerman and Meijer (2011).

The research instruments we used in our study and its findings may be useful for inspiring EFL teachers to reflect on the positions and roles they take in teaching about ES cultures, and on how they aim to prepare their students for future intercultural communication. However, our findings should not be treated as new stereotypes of teachers in different nations, as Moussu and Llorca (2008) and Serco et al. (2005) have already warned against. As our interview results show, notwithstanding the differences between the two national groups, there are also important differences and variations among the ideas of individuals within national groups, between schools, or between regions of a country.

On the basis of this study, future research could focus on exploring ways to enhance the roles of EFL teachers in promoting intercultural competence among learners. First, our exploratory study focused on teachers' perceptions of their intercultural identities at one moment rather than over a longer period. In future research, it would be interesting to investigate how their intercultural identities develop by means of observations over a period of time (e.g., Ilieva, 2010; Ortaçtepe, 2015).

Second, although our results indicate that sociocultural context plays a major role in differences between teachers' perceptions of their intercultural identities, we still do not know how background factors, such as gender and years of teaching experience, could be related to their intercultural identities. Such limitations suggest that a large-scale survey may be necessary to explore the variables related to the group differences. The results of our study could be used in further research to explore the background variables in teachers' perceptions of their intercultural identities, such as gender, years of teaching, teachers' beliefs and values, student characteristics or society's expectations of the teaching profession.

