

Role-Playing and Role Interaction: A Case Study of Teachers' Roles at ZG Open University in China

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Abstract

The rapid development of Internet technology and online teaching greatly impacts the role of teachers, especially teachers at open universities in China. The paper aims to explore the roles that teachers play at ZG Open University and how teachers interact in these roles; it also examines elements that contribute to teachers' role-playing and interaction. Four chaired professors at ZG Open University were chosen as research subjects for this research. Qualitative research methods, including interview, observation, and object collection methods, were adopted. It is found that the roles that the teachers play are overloaded, but these roles are somehow ambiguous and conflicted. We demonstrate the organizational, technological, personal, and social factors that influence teachers' role-playing and interaction.

Keywords: Teachers' roles, role playing, role interaction, open university

I. Introduction

According to the *NMC Horizon Report: 2013 Higher Education Edition*, massively open online courses (MOOCs) are one of six technologies that will affect higher education in the next five years. MOOCs have created the most rapid change in higher education and have strengthened the trend of online learning. Continuous and high-level learning can be provided for adult learners and professionals to enhance their knowledge and skills for free (Johnson, Becker, Cummins, Estrada, Freeman, and Ludgate, 2013).

The development of technology and online learning urges chaired professors in open universities to shift their roles. With the demand for digital media literacy, chaired professors in open universities are required to master digital skills and tools, to transform their modes of thinking, and to be capable of applying online teaching designs and counseling in the near future.

National medium- and long-term plans for education reform and development (2010-2020) require radio and TV universities in China to be transformed into open universities to serve life-long learning for all. In addition to the traditional characteristics of teaching and learning through distance education, as a new educational form, the open and distance education in open universities can also be characterized as adopting new thoughts, technologies and methods with a spirit of reform and innovation (Li, 2011).

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As a whole, open universities around the world emphasize the application of new technology, serving the community and developing closer contact with society. This emphasis includes transitions from teacher-centered to student-centered learning, from traditionally structured designs to teaching module designs to meet diverse learning needs, and from research personnel training to practical talent training (Li, 2011). This shift challenges the roles of chaired professors in relatively new open universities in China.

Therefore, the research questions are as follows:

1. How do chaired professors at ZG Open University in China fulfill their roles and interact with others during the transition period?
2. What are the influential factors in their role-playing and interaction?

II. Literature Review

With respect to research on the academic profession, less attention has been paid to teachers' role-playing and interaction in open universities in China, and more attention has been paid to research-oriented universities from a sociological perspective (Yang, 2006; Zhang, 2007; Yu, 2009; Meng, 2012). However, we have not fully understood and accurately revealed the different characteristics of teachers outside the context of research-oriented universities (Gumpert, 2013: 119-120).

Role Research for Teachers in Universities Engaged in Distance Education

There is less sociological research about teachers' roles in distance higher education. Without a clear disciplinary perspective to examine the characteristics of distance education, teaching and learning theory in distance education, the development of modern information and technology and the network auxiliary teaching environment, existing research has primarily explored problems such as role orientation, role behavior, role abilities, role model, role identity and construction, role changes and teacher-learner interaction for distance teachers. In terms of research methods, many existing research results are summaries of personal experiences, and few studies have drawn conclusions using qualitative and quantitative research methods.

For example, Weng (2012) indicated that there is crossing and overlapping between diverse roles, such as the chief course instructor, chaired professor, responsibility teacher, tutor and guiding teacher, in open universities in China. The research induced a role model with a teacher role that focused on course material development, teacher-learner interaction, learning and growth support. Some researchers noted that tutors should be able to create and maintain a community, guide and promote learning, integrate and support technology, and design and organize activities (Chen and Feng, 2012). One researcher argued that teachers should fulfill the following roles in a network-assisted instruction environment: knowledge transmitter, instructional designer, instruction organizer, learning guide, evaluator, and manager. Teachers should also take the behavioral strategy of emotional support (Zou, 2006). Another researcher thought teachers should form a role identity or construct their roles using the following aspects: teaching orientation (from controller to guide or designer), working platform (from open to hidden), teacher-learner relationship (from absolute authority to equal cooperation), and role identity (from educator to learner) (Shi, 2006).

Two Types of Representative Role Theories in Sociology

There are two typical role theories in sociology. One is Ralph Linton's structural role theory, and the other is Ralph H. Turner's process role theory. The structural role theory claims that roles are restricted by the social structure.

According to process role theory, role players have much more initiative and innovation and are not strictly confined by external social role expectations. Role-playing and interaction may change with the environment, leading to role adjustment or innovation (Turner, 2003: 366-368).

In conclusion, there are few sociological studies that examine the academic profession and teachers' roles in distance higher education.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' professional evolution, role-playing and potential role transition in open universities in China from the perspective of Turner's process role theory, four chaired professors at ZG Open University were chosen as research subjects to explore the following problems: role-playing, role interaction and role innovation.

In this chapter, role-playing can be understood as a type of role interaction. In other words, according to the role expectations or role norms, teachers adopt corresponding role behaviors and strategies, interact with related personnel and have special feelings in the process.

The role interaction of chaired professors can be understood as interaction with outside experts, administrative staff, technological supporter, learners and other teachers in branches or local learning centers in such specific aspects as role expectation, role attitude and role skills. It can also be comprehended as interaction with the university system, technological environment, and organizational and social environment of the university.

III. Research Methodology

This research adopts a qualitative research method. According to the principle of purposive sampling, four chaired professors from ZG Open University were chosen as research subjects. Table 1 shows background information of these research subjects.

Table 1: Background Information of the Research Subjects

Research Subjects	Years of Teaching	Gender	Major	Does administrative work or other social work?
Teacher Y	More than 20 years	F	Chinese language and literature	No
Teacher S	More than 20 years	F	Pedagogy	No
Teacher T	More than 10 years	F	Medical science	Yes
Teacher H	More than 10 years	M	English language and literature	No

When the researcher entered the research context, an insider gave many suggestions about which teachers could be chosen as research subjects. With the research subjects' permission, semi-structure interviewing, participative observations and object collection methods were used.

Data Collection

Using a brief interviewing outline, four chaired professors at ZG Open University were interviewed on the current situation and their feelings on role-playing and interaction, the recognition of the university environment, and related issues. One of the four teachers was interviewed twice. Each interview lasted from 40 to 90 minutes. Three administrative staff members, an outside expert and one technological supporter were interviewed regarding their role expectations for these four chaired professors, the current situation and characteristics of the four chaired professors' role-playing and interaction, and the current characteristics of the university environment.

Four participative observations were used to assess how Teacher S and her four colleagues worked and interacted over the course of a month. Each two-hour observation took place in their office every Tuesday morning.

In addition, physical material about the research subjects and university were collected (e.g., the school constitution, the construction scheme of ZG Open University, orientation speeches for teaching staff development, teacher management regulations, teachers' qualifications and conditions for open universities, learning materials and online courses developed by the four chaired professors, teacher training materials, the four teachers' personal reflections log and the original record of online tutoring).

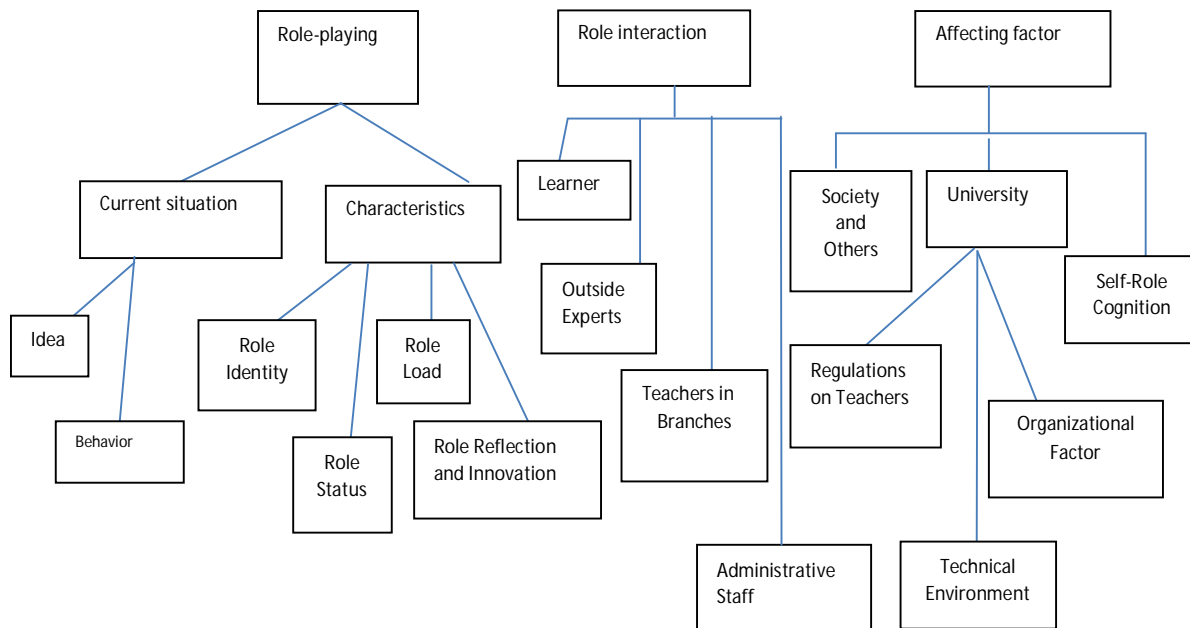
Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the researcher transcribed and organized the material and completed three-level coding. While coding, the researcher sought the native concept, construct concepts and their relationship (Chen, 2000). The coding graph is as Figure 1 indicates.

Category analysis was used for categories such as role-playing, role interaction and affecting factor. Role-playing can be analyzed in two ways: current situation and characteristics. Role interaction can be interpreted in terms of interaction with learners, outside experts, other teachers in branches or local learning centers and administrative staff members. According to the data, factors that affect teachers' role-playing and interaction should include organizational, technical, institution, individual and social factors.

To some extent, the researcher and research subjects could fulfill the data analysis. The manuscript was sent back to each research object to identify and revise.

Figure 1: Three-Level Coding Graph



IV. Data Analysis

Types of Role-Playing and Role Consciousness

Table 2 shows the current situation of role-playing and role consciousness for four chaired professors at ZG Open University.

Table 2. Four Chaired Professors' Current Situation of Role-Playing and Role Consciousness at ZG Open University

Chaired Professor	Type	Native concepts of role-playing and role consciousness
TeacherY	Harmonious	Diverse roles (host of resource construction, director of new media learning, serving students and other teachers), could only be constrained in terms of innovation
TeacherS	Conflicting	Does all, busy as a bee, runs back and forth, like a universal glue, competent at the job but not extremely good, passively working, limited passion, not a purely professional intellectual
TeacherT	Dedicated and confused	A humble clerk, supporting actor, interdisciplinary, falling apart, painful duty, should not pursue extremely modular and standardized work, should pursue integrated, optional and diverse work
TeacherH	Positively expecting	Transition to a new role, such as a facilitator Or psychological counselor in online teaching

Role Load and Status

All four teachers referred to a large workload. They are individually responsible for 3, 3, 5 or 9 courses. Two teachers even chair interdisciplinary courses. There is obvious role overload for teachers at ZG Open University. Teacher H also mentioned that professors would bear a greater workload if they were required to pursue pure online tutoring in the future. Unless each teacher is responsible for less than 2 courses, the quality of online learning and tutoring cannot be guaranteed.

If they are not treated as professionals, teachers speak of low professional autonomy and role status. Teacher S clearly describes herself as a person who handles odds and ends and often worries that her work achievement would be invalidated at any time. Teacher T regarded herself as a humble and supporting clerk. Teacher Y talked about being constrained by the university administrative department in terms of teaching reform and innovation. Teacher H believes that the current university rules and regulations would contradict teaching during the transformation period. Teacher H also mentioned that chaired professors need to communicate more with various administrative departments and different cooperators during pilot course material construction and the online tutoring process.

Current Situation of Role Interaction

1. Interaction between Teachers and Students

Each chaired professor had different feelings regarding and self-involvement in teacher-student interaction. The teachers who rarely participated in face-to-face teaching and who did not excel in pure online tutoring (i.e., only met the lowest criterion of online tutoring) thought that learners passively coped with learning just for the diploma. Their teaching behaviors were thus passive, and they often felt tired and worthless when working.

However, teachers who experienced face-to-face teaching often had a clearer understanding of learners. They thought that besides degree compensation needs, learners also had the desire to learn the necessary abilities. Therefore, chaired professors were required to continually reflect their teaching design and implementation practice.

Teachers dedicated in elaborate online tutoring often knew the loneliness, helplessness and frustration that online learners experienced. By transforming thinking modes, studying online tutoring skills, and indulging in new media and technology use, chaired professors helped learners solve all types of learning problems and achieve better online teaching outcomes. In this case, learners were highly satisfied with teachers.

2. Interaction between Teachers and Relevant Personnel

When discussing cooperation with outside academic experts, three chaired professors (Teachers Y, S, and T) said they could build good relationships with experts, but they just acted as the experts' secretaries and provided services for experts through organization and coordination. They thus felt that they had little right to discuss subject contents and felt an obvious unequal status. Two chaired professors (Teachers S and H) referred to a loose link between chaired professors in headquarters and those in branches or local learning centers.

Teacher Y mentioned her friendly relationship with branch teachers and also confessed that she had learned a lot from them. Teacher H thought the existence of branch teachers somewhat weakened the ability of chaired professors in headquarters to control teachers at local learning centers. If ZG Open University bases itself on a flat and unified teaching platform in the near future (it is currently based on a three-level separate platform), there should be tighter course teaching groups whose members are from headquarters, branches and local learning centers. Teacher T said that cooperation with outside experts urged her to reflect on her professional growth.

Three chaired professors (Teachers Y, S and H) mentioned administrative department restrictions on teachers' work, adding that chaired professors sometimes had to violate the student-centered principle and could not work creatively. Chaired professors often needed to run back and forth, waste most of their energy on communication and coordination and sometimes felt wronged. The rigid administrative regulations sometimes forced chaired professors to violate online teaching rules only to pursue the outer form (not the inner content or process) of online education.

Teacher S said that the administrative department that was in charge of technology did not respect the fruits of her labor. When the new teaching platform was launched, her finished online course was rigidly migrated to the new platform irrespective of her original course design. During the process of online course migration, chaired professors were criticized, and the administrative department imposed many unreasonable requirements on teachers. Teacher S said that the administrative department did not respect teachers' rights to participate in and vote on important matters relating to teachers' vital interests (i.e., adjusting teachers' vacation).

Some technical support specialists, administrative staffers and outside experts were also interviewed for this study. From their perspective, chaired professors at ZG Open University play the following roles:

"The chaired professors lacked initiative, and technology personnel often reversely promoted them to finish the task of learning material development on time" (Interview with one technical support specialist).

"The chaired professors were previously at ease but were very busy and under tremendous pressure during the transitional period" (Interview with one administrative staffer).

"The chaired professors have held 'wait-and-see' working attitude due to the absence of top design and the disordered situation in the university" (Interview with another two administrative staffers).

"The teachers' previous roles in radio and TV universities were very difficult because the university had not provided chaired professors enough growth space and had oriented them as communication coordinators. Most chaired professors could not keep up with the subject content and had no dominating rights in terms of the subject. Outside experts were thus gatekeepers of the subject content. Most chaired professors did not interact with learners face-to-face and thus had limited feedback from learners. They communicated with teachers in local learning centers through branch teachers. The teachers' uneven vocational levels in branches restricted chaired professors in headquarters from flexibly designing instruction materials.

Teacher Y had performed relatively better work in interacting with other teachers in branches or local learning centers, and Teacher Y could obtain significant feedback from other teachers" (Interview with an outside expert).

Role Reflection and Innovation

Role-playing essentially means role interaction. Role interaction links role understanding with role-playing. Role interaction essentially means role understanding and construction. When the role requirements agree with role cognition, role behaviors will be incurred. Otherwise, the role requirements will cause role distance or innovation. In some ways, self role-playing is a type of adaptation or understanding of a role through others' eyes (Turner, 2003:366-368).

Through face-to-face teaching and interaction, Teacher T reflected on her previous instructional material development, evaluation design and teaching implementation practices. By interacting with teachers in branches or local learning centers, Teacher S rethought the role division and chaired professors' role-playing in the new one-level platform. Teacher S also remembered the process during which she communicated with outside experts and reflected on how the university should make better institutional arrangements to explore better cooperation models with outside experts.

Combined with his own online teaching experience, Teacher H concluded that learners are only willing to interact online with the tutors if they really like them. He reflected deeply about the role-playing gaps between traditional distance education circumstances and pure online education circumstances. He concluded that the new ability requirements of online education for chaired professors summarized the role space in which chaired professors could play a role and imagined in which aspect chaired professors could make role innovation and breakthroughs.

V. Conclusions and Discussions

Current Situation and Characteristics of Role-Playing and Interaction

There are differences and similarities in the four chaired professors' role-playing.

The current situation of their role-playing is as follows: to provide service for teachers and learners in branches or local learning centers, to fulfill the material development with the help of outside experts (i.e., to depend on experts and act as experts' secretaries), to perform an executive role and undertake many administrative affairs, to be as busy as a bee, and to bear multifarious work (i.e., do-all, falling apart, like a universal glue).

Teacher Y had gone to mountainous areas and the countryside in her youth and had just retired from ZG Open University. She could be called a harmonious teacher who pursued harmony with administrative staffers, outside experts and teachers in branches or local learning centers. She had little teaching experience before she came to the university. After she came to this university, she had little direct interaction with learners. She felt great pressure and difficulties associated with technology application because of her old age. Although she felt that the management system limited innovation and reform in her work, she approved of the job and university environment. She thought teaching at ZG Open University had changed her life, and it was just a pity that she had not progressed much in terms of professional development.

Teacher S could be labeled as a strongly conflicted teacher who had moved from ordinary colleges ten years earlier. Due to the strong comparison between the former and latter working environments, she could not understand and adapt well to such intricate aspects of the work, including additional administrative affairs, additional communication and coordination work and little respect for teachers' professional autonomy. She highly praised vivid and deep face-to-face interaction. Although she worked hard, online interaction left her without a sense of accomplishment. She was a bit passive and helpless in online tutoring.

Teacher T had been working at this university since graduation and could be recognized as a dedicated and confused teacher. Due to the limited enrollment of learners in her major at the university, she was responsible for eight courses and had a heavy work burden. She was often falling apart, continued learning new domain knowledge and often could not find the main direction of her professional growth. She felt strong role conflict and thought that chaired professors should not work extremely modularly; teachers should instead experience complete instructional work by cooperating with other teachers and related personnel.

When cooperating with outside experts, she always felt like the experts' secretary and played a supporting role. When interacting with administrative staffers, she felt like a humble clerk with little professional autonomy. She undertook faculty management responsibility and was directed by numerous administrative departments. She had to do everything herself and thus thought it was a painful responsibility. Despite the heavy work, she actively participated in face-to-face teaching and interaction and often reflected on her professional shortcomings.

Teacher H had transferred from another famous university to ZG Open University. He chose ZG Open University because he valued the positive outlook of distance education, especially online education.

He could be called a teacher full of hope and positive anticipation. When he worked at ZG Open University, he had an enviable opportunity to take degree courses in Europe on information communication technology and education. As a learner, he experienced online learning in Europe. When he returned to China, he engaged in pure online tutoring. He thought highly of the transition from traditional distance education to online education at ZG Open University. He thought that chaired professors in open universities should continue learning theory, skills for online instructional design and online tutoring. They should also be positive participants and explorers in online tutoring, act as facilitators, focus on students' learning experiences and problems, and become somewhat of a psychological consultant to provide psychological counseling for students. Teacher H finally emphasized that traditional teacher roles should be changed. According to teachers' abilities and interests, teachers should act as online tutors or face-to-face teachers.

The general characteristics of the four chaired professors' role-playing and interaction are as follows:

- 1. Role overloading.** Chaired professors should bear the duties of developing instructional material, instructional design, interaction with others (e.g., outside experts, administrative staffers, technical support specialists and teachers and learners in branches or local learning centers), and participation in face-to-face or online tutoring. They should also be engaged in disciplinary research or distance education.
- 2. Role of clutter.** Chaired professors played cluttered roles, which included the following: subject expert, host of instructional material development, instructional designer, face-to-face or online tutor, accountant, instructional secretary, clerk, and trainer. Teachers felt distracted, weakly supported and unable to find a clear direction for growth.
- 3. Role ambiguity, confusion, conflict and identity crisis.** Teachers were not oriented as pure teachers and lacked interaction with learners. Teachers were forced to undertake administrative duties, and they had not focused on disciplinary and professional development. Teachers worked extremely modularly and did not have a complete instructional experience.
- 4. Role of low status and weak professional autonomy.** Teachers mostly acted in performing roles and were refrained from innovative instructional material development and tutoring.
- 5. Significant difference in teacher-student interaction.** Some teachers approved of face-to-face education and deep interaction and were a bit passive in online interaction. In contrast, some teachers appreciated online education and online interaction with teachers and learners. Teachers did not have a unified understanding of chaired professors' roles in interaction during the transitional period. Some teachers advocated exploration and innovation in role interaction; others felt confused and lacked confidence in role interaction.

Affecting Factors in Role-Playing and Interaction

After interviewing the chaired professors and their interactive personnel and collecting objects (e.g., the school constitution, the construction scheme of ZG Open University, orientation speeches on teacher growth, teacher management regulations, teachers' qualifications and conditions for open universities, teacher training materials, teachers' personal reflections log and the original online tutoring record), we find that the following factors affect role-playing and interaction:

- 1. Organizational factors.** The loose link between organization levels and the present situation of division of duties due to the classification-schooling systems in China's open universities; bureaucratic institutions, administrative powers beyond the power of teaching, the orientation of the university (an organization of material development, not a real university); relative regulations on teachers' work (e.g., the system of project management in the curriculum, the teaching management system, the material development mechanism, and teachers' evaluation and incentive mechanism); teacher configurations and teachers' workload requirements, the orientation of teachers' roles, role supporting, and the education of role adaptation.

2. Technological factors. The university's adoration and orientation of technology (i.e., to make full use of technology, to promote education informatization), the change in the university's network platform (i.e., to integrate the 3-level platform into 1-level technology platform), the influence of MOOCs on open universities and teachers' work, teachers' requirements to participate in technology-related work (i.e., to develop online courses and digital learning material, to build digital learning repository). Teachers should not only participate in the construction of online nuclear courses, micro-lectures, and high-definition video for the Internet but also explore teaching models characterized by the integration of online nuclear courses, online learning evaluation, network teaching teams, network support services, online learning spaces, and network teaching management.

3. Personal factors. The contradictions between the learners' work and study, learners' living conditions, the differences in work attitudes between outside experts and teachers at open universities, the heavy workload and non-specialized role-playing of branch teachers, self role identity for chaired professors in headquarters, and teachers' knowledge, skills, and role involvement.

4. Social factors. The national orientation of open universities (i.e., providing degree and non-degree continuous education for all, public service platforms and the national digital learning material repository for lifelong-learning, promoting the deep fusion of the information technology and education), role identity for chaired professors by interactive others, and public role expectation for teachers in open universities.

Different Angles of Teachers' Role-Playing in Open Universities

1. Division of Labor and Teachers' Role Orientation. Daniel (2010) thought that most of the advertisements for education technology over emphasized the power of the machine and underestimated the key function of the division of labor and professionalization. To understand technology well, we should integrate the three concepts: the equipment, division of labor and professionalization.

Even if there is the pursuit of technological progress in the Open University in the UK (OUUK), it does not neglect the division of labor based on specialization. The OUUK is equipped with the following personnel: subject experts, course managers, instructional designers from the Institute of Educational Technology (IET), new media researchers from the Knowledge and Media Centre (KMC), and part-time tutors. The four chaired professors at ZG Open University seemed to act as do-all clerks, which could be confirmed from the interview of the research subjects and from the construction scheme of ZG Open University. You can observe the plan to foster tens of thousands of full-time teachers to host curriculum projects who are proficient in project management, instructional design, instructional material development, organization of instruction and learning support services in distance education (Construction Scheme of ZG Open University, 2011).

Perhaps due to its managerial perspective (i.e., the pursuit of scale and economy effects through technical progress), ZG Open University attempted to decrease the cost of hiring full-time teachers and encouraged local learning centers to employ part-time teachers to fulfill the instruction. ZG Open University clung to the 30-year-old practice of confusing teachers' orientation; full-time teachers at ZG Open University thus had to bear huge workloads and were wrapped in cluttered roles (e.g., project manager, subject expert, instructional designer, online tutor). Most chaired professors lost their main direction toward professional development and felt helpless in the past and during this transition period. As one scholar mentioned, teachers in higher education were increasingly facing the role of craftsman and employee, and the roles of tutors and scholars were marginalized (Yu, 2009). Chaired professors at ZG Open University tended to be clerks/supporters. The research subjects mentioned that they wanted to know how they could avoid being do-all clerks at open universities in the future.

2. Education and Technology and Technology and Freedom. How should we rationally choose technology based on educational facts? How can we avoid technological alienation? How can we avoid the symbolic violence that technology imposes on teachers and learners? How can we decrease technology's limitations on teachers and learners' freedoms?

New technology is not just a response to a certain demand. An extensive need does not determine the emergence of new technology. Instead, the availability of technology determines the need for technology (Bauman, 2001:150). Teachers S and H clearly stated that they cannot understand their university's pursuit of the newest technology; they instead insisted that the university should adopt the most appropriate technology for teachers and learners—not the newest technology—and referred to OUUK and OUHK as examples. They advocated the pursuit of a deep integration of ideas, content, services and technology based on the situation of learners at ZG Open University. Management's positive propulsion of technology and platform, which had been the predominant discourse during the transformation period at ZG Open University, apparently worked against with the aforementioned teachers' discourses. There is a value conflict in terms of technology cognition between management and teachers at ZG Open University.

Is the application of technology beneficial to us, or does it make us more dependent and/or limit our independence? We should learn how to cope with new technology. Is technology the means by which we achieve our goals, or it is just the aim itself (Bauman, 2001: 148)? If technology does not serve education and education instead serves technology, the phenomenon of technological alienation—the overuse of technology—is unavoidable. Teachers struggle with all types of indicators with instructional material and technology. It is difficult for teachers to analyze instructional content and design according to learners' actual situations. For example, Teacher S did not understand the rationale behind the transition and was frustrated that her just-finished online course had to be immediately migrated and remodeled to the new platform.

Teachers and learners should have the autonomy to choose technology. Teachers must dedicate much knowledge, time, opportunity and psychological cost to learn and keep up with the newest technologies.

In Bourdieu's view, "through the implementation of symbolic violence, any kind of power will force people to think it legal" (Yang and Xie, 2006:176). Blindly pursuing new technology in spite of teachers' and learners' current situations, overusing new technology, and letting technological language and the arbitrariness of technology transcend teachers' and learners' personal choices can all be observed as symbolic violence imposed on teachers and learners.

According to the current situation of learners in open universities around the world, most learners in open universities in developed countries are employed adults who have had access to basic education or elderly learners who seek higher spiritual lives. Learners in developing countries are actually grass-roots professionals or vulnerable groups with special learning needs (Li, 2011:16). Most learners at ZG Open University are individuals with little economic and cultural capital. Moreover, technology costs are much higher than in developed countries. When we make technological choices to help everyone learn, multimedia learning resources should thus be provided on the basis of learners in case that technology becomes a type of symbolic violence.

In the case of ZG Open University, how can teachers adapt to the deep fusion of technology and education, and how can they strike a balance between technology and freedom? ZG Open University has made technology discourse dominant and has required teachers to learn and interact with new technologies. This shift has forced teachers to focus on learning and applying technology rather than on their disciplinary area. Teachers could not keep their traditional modes of instruction based on their own preferences; the choice of technology was to a large extent controlled by technology support, multimedia learning resource producers and university administrators. These factors can clearly explain why most of the interviewed chaired professors at ZG Open University feel tired all of the time.

At the same time, the development of technology makes teachers' job more dispersive. Learners can ask questions from anywhere at any time. How can teachers cope? The time and space boundary of teachers' work has to be vague in open universities, which requires teachers to be more engaged in and acclimated to the uncertainties of asynchronous interaction to better manage their time and energy.

Open universities and teachers must truly consider how to maintain relative time-space independence of teachers, how to promote teachers' professional growth, and how to strike a balance between the restrictions of technology and teachers' development freedoms.

3. Role Reification and Identity Reification. Reification means understanding human phenomena from a non-human or superman perspective. Reification is a form of human beings' own objectification. Role reification means the objectified self-consciousness could be understood as an inevitable fate; one could thus avoid personal responsibility. Role reification could narrow the gap between the individual and role-playing, causing the gap generated by the function of dis-identification to cease to exist, and thus the self-identity might ultimately be reified (Berger and Luckmann, 1967: 73-75). The role reification of chaired professors at ZG Open University stems from the following factors: the obstacle of classification-schooling systems, the barrier of institutions and interests, the excessive pursuit of new technology, the conflict between traditional and online instructional models and instructional platform restrictions.

The reification of teachers' roles at ZG Open University has been demonstrated as follows: In terms of material construction, teachers emphasized the form and appearance of the material and ignored the content design and refinement; Due to the regulation of hiring famous outside experts as chief editors and speakers at ZG Open University, teachers had lost the power of equal academic dialogue and had become the outside experts' secretaries and support system; When interacting with learners, chaired professors were busy coping with junk posts instead of sustainable, in-depth and harmonious interaction; Due to the conflict between traditional and online instructional models (e.g., learners would rather interact with teachers face-to-face than online), the restrictions of the 3-level learning platform (e.g., learners should log in on 3-level platform), and some unreasonable institutions (e.g., there is a number of regulation regarding the online posts of learners), learners coped with useless posts (e.g., "how to learn a lot in this course" and "how to pass the exam") when the end of the semester was approaching. Chaired professors would struggle with those junk posts. It was more severe that this type of role reification of teachers brought about identity reification, and most chaired professors disdained online teaching and felt frustrated when tutoring online.

The system barrier and interest fence (e.g., chaired professors could not directly command teachers in branches or local learning centers; teachers in branches or local learning centers were too overburdened to fulfill the tasks that chaired professors assigned) influenced interaction with teachers from branches or local learning centers. When there was requirement for chaired professors in headquarters and other teachers in branches or local learning centers needed to cooperate in instructional design and implementation, the teacher groups became loose, and consensus fractured. In the chaired professors' eyes, this fracturing is apparent in the major difficulties of establishing course groups.

4. The Development of Non-Degree Education and the Transition of Teachers' Roles in Open Universities

Today's universities face a big challenge in linking the reproduction of culture and technology. One of the university's core tasks is to construct the worldwide identity of cultural citizenship and the technology of citizenship (Delanty, 2010: 190). Open universities should bear the social responsibility of fostering citizens' technology and the duty of fostering cultural citizens through general education, life education and leisure education.

Open universities must respond to the worldwide trend of low birth rate and aging time. According to the constructing scheme of ZG Open University, the university will explore a new model of integrating distance learning support services and social public services to adapt to the needs of the national lifelong education system construction and the construction of a learning society. This adaptation will make full use of online instructional platforms and digital learning repositories at open universities to open online lecture halls, to provide all social members with online courses and retrieval services, subscription and evaluation, and to provide entrepreneurs and communities with all types of public services.

Although the interviewed chaired professors were involved in service jobs of non-degree education (e.g., Teacher H conducted the theory and skills training for the distance education practitioners; Teacher S produced video resources and digital reconstruction for non-degree education), those service jobs were limited to the development of material and online tutoring and were deeply influenced by the degree-education.

How should open universities really face 769 million workers, 120 million rural surplus labor, tens of millions of new labor and 160 million elderly to provide personalized and diversity of learning services? How should teachers in open universities play roles in non-degree education?

During the transition period from modern knowledge to post-modern knowledge, teachers' roles should shift from "the mouthpiece of the knowledge, supreme authority, subject specialist" to "action researcher and reflective practitioner, facilitator of learning, dialogist, and all-rounder having a comprehensive knowledge" (Meng, 2012:18-22). Online education has broken the social stratification structure dominated by identity and status in face-to-face education, and teachers as an origin of knowledge would partly be substituted by networks. Interpersonal communication in cyberspace is speeding up the transformation of the authority role of teacher and ideology (Zhang, 2013:60-65).

Overall, teachers at ZG Open University should step out of the ivory tower and narrow the professional knowledge field, widen their knowledge, pay more attention to social practices and knowledge, weaken their authority status, and equally dialogue with the public. Teachers in open universities should transform from instructors to service providers, counselors and supporters in the current low-birth-rate and aging society.

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