Crossing the River by Feeling the Stones: Understanding and Integrating Social Justice in Chinese Language Class

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Recent global social unrest—anti-Asian violence in particular—was a wake-up call compelling Chinese language teachers to not only reflect on their emotions but also actively incorporate social justice in their curriculum and instruction. Yet, research on social justice in Chinese language classrooms is scarce. Building on recent work on teacher agency, this study investigated 10 Chinese language teachers, originally from mainland China and Taiwan, about their understandings and practices of social justice in their teaching. Findings identified 3 major dimensions that influenced their understandings and practices—namely, community, curriculum, and, more importantly, culture. (Re)shaping their understandings and adapting pedagogical skills were ongoing processes through which the teachers experienced complex feelings, support, and challenges; nonetheless, they drew on their agency to embed social justice in their teaching, manifested through (a) centering social justice topics in curriculum and instruction, and (b) creating a justice-oriented environment. This study explored social justice in the landscape of Chinese language education and provides implications for teaching and teacher education.

Keywords: Chinese; community; culture; curriculum; social justice; teacher agency

SOCIAL JUSTICE EDUCATION HAS BEEN researched for decades (Adams & Bell, 2016; Auerbach, 1994; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2015; Zollers et al., 2000) but it is only within the past two decades that it has become a focus in world language education (Glynn et al., 2018; Osborn, 2005). The volatility caused by the political climate and the social movements over the past 5 years has amplified the urgency of

this topic. As Peña–Pincheira & De Costa (2021) noted, the recent "global social unrest that stems from historical racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic inequality and inequity has elevated the need for language educators to challenge traditional understandings of and practices in the language classroom" (p. 1). To further understand the constituents of social justice in the context of world language education, a growing number of researchers have contributed instrumental scholarship in the field. Some offered guidelines in examining the multifaceted nature of language learning and teaching (Douglas Fir Group, 2016; Kramsch, 2014), some presented what social justice looked like in language classrooms (Pantić, 2015; Randolf & Johnson, 2017), whereas others have investigated teachers' positioning in justice-orientation work (Maddamsetti, 2021; Wassell et al., 2019; Wesely et al., 2021). The existing scholarship underscores the importance of this topic and provides essential groundwork; meanwhile, these scholars have also pointed to the

scarcity of studies and called for more research focused on a wider diversity of languages.

In particular, recent anti-Asian violence was a wake-up call, compelling Chinese language teachers to not only reflect on their emotions but also actively incorporate social justice in their curriculum and instruction. Yet, the literature to date does not include any publications discussing social justice in a Chinese language class. The dearth of studies in this specific context was the impetus of the current study, to participate in the momentum of critical discussion and document world language teachers' (Chinese language teachers' in particular) understanding of social justice in their teaching and its manifestation. To this end, and building on recent work on teacher agency (Marlatt & Barnes, 2021; Peña–Pincheira & De Costa, 2021), this project investigated Chinese language teachers' ($N = 10$) views on social justice and their instructional approaches. It aims to gather more knowledge in the field and offer implications for teachers and teacher educators regarding social justice integration in language classrooms. The research questions that guided the study were:

RQ1. How do these Chinese language teachers understand social justice and understand integrating social justice in their teaching?

RQ2. What do these Chinese language teachers do to integrate social justice in their teaching?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Framework

Building on existing scholarships on teacher agency and social justice education, the current study recognized two fundamental concepts: First, social justice is a goal and an ongoing process. According to Wesely & Thenoux (2021), "social justice is a project to undertake every single day in the language classroom. It is a principle that guides and infuses the entire curriculum. Social justice education is not a moment, it's a movement" (p. 44). Second, teachers' perspectives and agency are influenced by multiple dimensions. These dimensions can be internal (competence, purpose, reflexivity) and external (community, cultural practice, society). In return, teachers' perspectives and agency can also influence such dimensions, which were called structures by Giddens (1984). Both Giddens (1984) and Sewell (1992) suggested a

dialectical relationship between structures and agency. Structures include both tacit schemas (e.g., school norms and unwritten rules) and resources (e.g., strength, knowledge, objects). In particular, two noteworthy studies guided the current research: Peña–Pincheira and De Costa's (2021) ecological model inspired me to consider the internal and external factors that influence teacher agency. Wassell et al.'s (2019) study modeled how to use a dialectical lens to examine the interplay between teacher agency and structure.

When I examined teachers' perspective on and incorporation of social justice, I was intentional in adopting a dynamic and developmental lens to connect moments and examples that they shared, and I interpreted the data as a holistic picture. In addition, the dialectical relationship reminded me to approach my RQs in a thoughtful and interactive manner.

Teacher Agency

The last decade has witnessed a growing body of theoretical research and empirical studies on teacher agency. Numerous researchers argue against the intuitive notion that agency is confined to the borders of individual bodies; rather, they contend that agency should be viewed and approached in a dynamic framework. As Enfield (2017) aptly noted, the unit of agency is a social unit, and "social units are often compound persons, grounded in joint commitments entailed by social relations of many kinds and navigated on the fly through fission-fusion processes" (p. 11). The physical processes, as a metaphor, reflect both the changeability of agency and the massive amount of energy that agency can produce. The power of teacher agency is seen in various scholarship, where the teacher is viewed as a public intellectual (Giroux, 2009), as a civic agent and producer of knowledge (Mirra & Morrell, 2011), and as an active social advocate who can transform a teaching classroom into a critical setting where "the first steps toward empowerment and positive social change can be taken" (Akbari, 2008, p. 280). Teachers' roles extend beyond the four walls of a classroom; rather, teachers are charged with a larger mission to create an impact in educational settings and social settings.

Although there is no one fixed definition of teacher agency, existing literature reveals three major characteristics of teacher agency. First, teacher agency is active and dynamic. It is not a quality that teachers have, but "something that is *achieved* [emphasis in original] through engagement with very specific contextual conditions"

(Priestley et al., 2013, p. 188). Teachers are agentive policy makers in their own right (Menken & Garcia, 2010), as well as the center of school and classroom change (Wassell et al., 2019). Second, teacher agency needs to be understood in conjunction with professional and personal histories, as well as social, cultural, and material environments. Priestley et al. (2015) developed an ecological approach to unfold a variety of dimensions that influence teacher agency and that contribute to the achievement of teacher agency. The three major dimensions are iterational (life histories and professional histories), practical–evaluative (cultural values, social structures, and material recourses), and projective (long- and short-term orientations for action). Priestley et al.'s model recognized the sociocultural influence of teacher agency and drew from Emirbayer and Mische's (1998) work on agency to present a holistic and integrative approach to understand teacher agency. Third, teacher agency should be examined with work on teacher identity (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Edwards & Burns, 2016; Wang, 2021) and teacher emotion (Benesch, 2018; Gaines et al., 2019; Wang & Hall, 2021; Wolff & De Costa, 2017). Researchers discover that teachers' identity and emotion facilitate teachers' engagement in exploring the profession (Yang et al., 2021); in turn, teacher agency can guide identity construction (Kaplan & Garner, 2017) and catalyze identity shift. Yang et al (2021) conceptualized "the interplay of language teacher emotion, identity development, and teacher practice" (p. 10), and their conclusion also concerned the first two characteristics as listed before. In other words, Yang and her colleagues concluded that the complex interplay "is anchored in action, manifested in temporal dimension, and mediated by sociocultural contexts" (p. 10). In summary, teacher agency should be viewed as relational, dialectic, evolving, and complex; therefore, it should be approached and studied in relation to these dynamic aspects. These three characteristics lay a conceptual understanding for the current study.

According to Campbell (2012), "teachers are seen as alternatively agents of socialization as well as change agents, whose choices and actions variably reflect the implementation, interpretation, adaptation, alteration, substitution, subversion, and/or creation of the curriculum contexts in which they work" (p. 185). In this statement, Campbell delineated multiple roles that teachers play: one role as agents of socialization when teachers have the capacity "to use professional discretion in their pedagogical and curricular practices" (p. 185) and another role as agents of

change when they conduct subversive work to impact the larger system. One of the major domains where teacher agency is observable is the curriculum and instruction. Priestley and Drew (2019) agreed that a recent shift to curricular models is emphasizing "local flexibility in curriculum making, positioning teachers as autonomous developers of the curriculum and hence agents of change" (p. 154). Over the years, a number of theoretical and empirical studies have emerged to advance the discussion of teacher agency in the landscape of world languages. These studies unveil an array of areas where teacher agency is making a difference in curriculum and instruction.

Some studies have described language teacher agency in transforming teaching and learning by challenging the traditional curricular content and pedagogical practices. For instance, Baker–Doyle & Gustavson (2016) conducted an ethnographic study on a community of public-school English teachers in the United States and considered how they "used permission-seeking moves as strategic and agentic tools to change their school curriculum and challenge norms of teaching" (p. 51). Their study documented the teachers' subversive work to become "transgressive educators" (p. 52), as they achieved and expanded their agency through the cultural tool of permission seeking (and giving). Yang (2015) conducted three case studies to examine English teachers in mainland China and their pedagogical agencies. Her analysis illuminated the importance of curriculum reform that strengthens teacher capacity and innovation at the classroom level.

Some studies analyzed language teacher agency from a dialectical and relational perspective. Kalaja et al. (2016) explored the interconnectedness of beliefs, identity, and agency from both learners and teachers' perspectives. Their work accentuated the dialectical characteristic of teacher agency. Similarly, Miller & Gkonou (2018) examined the role of English language teacher agency and its interplay with emotion labor and emotional rewards. Their study stressed the importance of "developing teachers' awareness of their potential for exercising agency relationally" (p. 57) and the importance of ongoing reflection.

Despite growing examples of research in teacher agency, there is a void in studies of teacher agency in world language classrooms and contexts. Wassell et al. (2019) discovered "no studies that explicitly examined teacher agency in a U.S. K–12 world language context" (p. 266); therefore, they conducted an interpretive multiple case study to investigate 12 world language teachers on

their agency in incorporating social justice into their curriculum and instruction. Their study offered a significant contribution to advance the research of teacher agency in relation to social justice and provided an important example for the current study; however, the participants in their study were teachers of Spanish, Latin, Portuguese, and French—other historically less commonly taught languages, such as Chinese, were not explored. As Wassell et al. noted, more studies are needed to "zoom out to explore the landscape of world language teachers" (p. 281). Given the unprecedented popularity of Chinese learning in the United States and the recent social–political movements such as anti-Asian hate, it is important and necessary to explore if and how Chinese language teachers play the agentic role in language teaching. This article seeks to fill that gap and to contribute to the existing scholarship.

Research on Social Justice Education in Language Teaching

Social justice, in the context of language teaching, refers to both the equitable sharing of social power and benefits within a society (Osborn, 2006) and the curricular elements, as well as the instructional choices implemented to aid in that endeavor (Randolph & Johnson, 2017). Language classrooms provide an ideal context for entering critical dialogue and welcoming the discussion of social justice (Nieto, 2002). In other words, language classrooms should encourage teachers and students to "challenge, confront, and disrupt misconceptions, untruths, and stereotypes that lead to structural inequality and discrimination based on social and human differences," and to "promote critical thinking and agency for social change" (Nieto, 2010, p. 46). It is worth noting that social justice in the language classroom is not limited to the discussion topics and additional activities; nonetheless, Nieto (2010) reminded us all that social justice is "a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity" (p. 46). Social justice is a broad concept that includes, but is not limited to, equity, respect, privilege, justice, advocacy, and diversity. It requires concerted efforts from all stakeholders of the educational settings as well as a supported environment and substantial resources.

While the call to incorporate social justice in language classrooms is loud and clear, many language teachers wonder how it should be done. Overloaded curriculum (Randolph & Johnson, 2017), a lack of professional knowledge

on curriculum and instruction, time constraints, insufficient understanding of social justice, and students' capacity for critical thinking can all account for the challenges faced by the language teachers. For nearly two decades, language teachers in the United States have been guided by the five C's: communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and cultures (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 2015). The breadth and depth of these curricular goals could take language teachers years to accomplish, leaving little to no capacity to consider additional elements such as social justice. Moreover, the teachers' main focus on developing students' language proficiency may lead to unintentional negligence of social justice. Some teachers claim that a social justice approach is more feasible among postsecondary students who have greater cognitive maturity for critical discussion (Giroux, 1988), while others propose the importance and document the success of planting a seed at a younger age (Harrell–Levy et al., 2016; Wade, 2007). To respond to the aforementioned concerns, Randolph and Johnson (2017) argued that social justice concepts not only support language proficiency goals and the five C's but also can be achievable at all levels of the world language curriculum with attention and intention. They considered social justice as "the thread that ties together the other curricular elements" (p. 101). Their argument encouraged increasing empirical studies to examine what incorporating social justice would look like in language classrooms.

Bell (1997) noted that social justice is a process that includes and affirms human agency; therefore, to better comprehend how teachers embed social justice in language classrooms, teacher agency naturally becomes an integral research focus. Li & De Costa (2019) traced the practices of one particular teacher in China and discovered his enactment of teacher agency through negotiation with contextual constraints and resources. This teacher's agency was manifested through his self-identification as a rule-breaker and an advocate for learner autonomy. Leal & Crookes (2018) adopted Pantić's (2015) social-justice–oriented model to explore an in-service LGBTQ English teacher's agency for social justice from four aspects: sense of purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity. Their study illuminated the use of identity as pedagogy and the value of favorable conditions in making a change. Drawing on Pantić's model and the renowned transdisciplinary framework of second language acquisition proposed by the Douglas Fir Group (2016), Peña–Pincheira & De Costa (2021)

created an ecological model to examine teacher agency for educational justice–oriented work. Their study focused on one English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) teacher from Chile and navigated her teacher agency through a complex combination of teacher purpose, competence, autonomy, and reflexivity, as well as taking into consideration the influence from micro-, meso-, and macro-level factors. Another noteworthy study was done by Wassell et al. (2019), who investigated and presented the supports and impediments that shaped world language teachers' agency to enact social justice education. In particular, their case study analyzed the dialectical relationship between agency and structure and reported their findings from three categories: the professional community, students' perspectives and contributions, and the curriculum and curricular resources. Their study was one of the first to examine world language teachers' agency in social-justice work, particularly in curriculum and instruction. It has not only advanced the research agenda in teacher agency, but also greatly inspired the current study.

METHOD

This is a multiple case study (Stake, 2013), considering each participant as an individual case to explore their specific conditions and contexts, in the meanwhile discovering themes across the cases to deepen understanding. In this section, I outline the research methods of this study, beginning with a description of the context and the participants, followed by the details of the data collection, and finally an explanation of the data analysis procedure as well as my own positionality.

Context and Participants

The current study was part of an ongoing research project to examine world language teachers' perspectives and approaches to integrating social justice in their teaching. I have co-instructed for many years in multiple teacher professional development (PD) workshops. My involvement in the field gave me incredible opportunities to meet many world language teachers who came from a variety of backgrounds, including Chinese language teachers. The participants were recruited in three ways: through volunteering after participating at PD workshops, through direct invitation as they had already been in my professional network, and through an open call for participants in professional communities. The current study focuses on the data from the Chinese language teachers whose first language was Chinese and who were currently teaching in the United States. The reason for these criteria was that this group of teachers was able to provide insights on intercultural experiences on personal and professional levels. I hoped to elicit their comparisons and connections between cultures in facilitating and/or inhibiting their understanding of teacher agency when incorporating social justice in their teaching.

Ten Chinese language teachers currently residing in different regions of the United States volunteered to participate in this study. They were all women with between 5 and 25 years of teaching experience (see Table 1). It is worth noting that the teaching experience here refers to teaching Chinese within the United States. Some participants had taught EFL or English as a second language (ESL) before moving to the United States. Although the teaching skills might be transferrable, these EFL and ESL experiences were not closely relevant to the focus of this study; therefore, these experiences were not included in the profile description. Three participants came from Taiwan and seven from mainland China. At the time of the research, two were teaching in the elementary setting, four at the middle or high school level, and four at the college level. Due to the fact that some school districts did not have a fully developed Chinese program, several teachers were shared between multiple schools. The majority of the participants reported little diversity in their classes, with mostly white students and a few heritage speakers—except for Annie, Betty, and Jenny, who reported a greater amount of diversity in their classes, especially in the higher-level Chinese classes, where they saw more heritage learners.

Data Collection

Semistructured interviewing was the primary method to collect data. Each participant engaged in a 1-hour interview via Zoom, when they were asked questions about their view and approach to integrating social justice in their language teaching. In particular, they were asked to define social justice as a person and as a teacher, explain examples of integrating social justice in class, and share the support and challenges in their practice. Some example questions were:

1. What does social justice mean to you as a person?
2. What does social justice mean to you as a teacher?

3. What does social justice look like in your teaching?
4. In what way(s) does your view on social justice influence your instructional approach?
5. What support/challenges do you see in integrating social justice in your teaching?
6. Do you feel comfortable/confident/competent in integrating social justice in your teaching?

These questions were designed to dissect the participants' insights on the topic from their personal, professional, cultural perspectives. Inspired by Priestley et al. (2015), I hoped to obtain substantial details to understand their teacher agency through cross-dimensional connections.

After each interview, I emailed the participant with my appreciation of their time and invited them to share with me any materials to further exemplify their integration of social justice in curriculum and instruction. The materials could include PowerPoint slides or texts and videos used in class, as well as their personal posts on social media relevant to their understanding and approach to social justice.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was a continuous process that involved multiple stages of deductive and inductive analysis (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021). The first stage dealt with individual interviews. After each interview, I immediately downloaded the transcript automatically generated by Zoom. If the participant chose to use Chinese in the interview, I transcribed the interview recording. Then I organized this participant's interview notes by highlighting keywords in two areas: this teacher's view on social justice and influential factors of their view and this teacher's practice of integrating social justice in class including their principles and examples. I then adopted a deductive analysis by applying some theoretical concepts in existing ecological models (Pantić, 2015; Peña–Pincheira & De Costa, 2021; Yang et al., 2021) to code the data, including competence, reflexivity, autonomy, micro level, meso level, macro level. At the end of analyzing each interview, I wrote a short summary to reflect on the interview and to make connections and comparisons with other interviews.

The second stage was an inductive thematic process (Bingham & Witkowsky, 2021) revisiting all of the interview notes and identifying reoccurring codes across all cases and generating themes. I paid careful attention to identify patterns, organize categories, and generate themes across cases (Yin, 2014). I revisited the data along with the additional materials offered by the participants after the interview to confirm the themes; moreover, I was mindful to consider each participant's description within the realm of various contexts—also referred to as structures (Sewell, 1992) and dimensions (Priestley et al., 2015)—such as institutional environment, students' reaction, professional training, and personal cultural values.

As a researcher, a Chinese language teacher, and an immigrant in the United States, my positionality was threefold: As a researcher, I was cognizant that perspectives are mediated by social, historical, geopolitical, contextual, and cultural dimensions. As a world language teacher, I was trained in my PhD program to confront inequity, to empower marginal voices, and to advocate for social justice. Last but not least, as an immigrant, I felt empathetic and related to the participants in this study. I especially related to the participants' complex feelings as they shared their stories of

TABLE 1
Participant Profiles

Pseudonym	Place of Origin	Level(s) Taught	Years Teaching Chinese
Mandy	Mainland China	Elementary	6
Sammy	Mainland China	Elementary	7
Yolanda	Mainland China	Middle school	6
Wendy	Mainland China	Middle school and high school	6
Jenny	Mainland China	High school	25
Lily	Taiwan	High school and community college	20
Annie	Mainland China	College	9
Betty	Mainland China	College	8
Cherry	Taiwan	College	5
Linda	Mainland China	College	13

adjusting to new professional expectations and the divided political climate in the United States. My academic training, assumptions, and identities gave me privilege to connect with the participants and to offer sensible analysis from a cross-cultural perspective.

FINDINGS

In this section, I will share the findings in response to the two RQs. First, I will present teacher participants' understanding of social justice and the influential factors that shaped their views. Following that, I will share teacher participants' practice of integrating social justice in instruction as well as support and challenges.

Understanding Social Justice and the Importance of Integrating Social Justice in Teaching

Importance of Social Justice in Society and in Teaching. All participants considered social justice as important in society and in a teaching context. As individuals, they considered social justice as an ideology where all human beings should enjoy the same status in the world, regardless of their race, color, gender, age, background, and income. Some repeated concepts included fairness (Lily, Yolanda, Sammy), equal opportunities (Annie, Jenny, Betty), and equity (Linda, Cherry, Mandy, Wendy). Although several participants expressed that this concept was abstract and they were sometimes confused, they all emphasized the importance of equitable access to resources.

Their understanding of social justice as individuals in society also translated to their teaching context. The participants said that social justice in schools referred to equal access to resources such as "social, economic, and cultural capital" (Annie), learning opportunities (Yolanda, Linda), and "personal needs" (Sammy). In addition, students should be treated fairly and respected (Mandy, Lily) despite their backgrounds, in order to foster students' inclusive worldview to build a better society (Jenny, Betty) through sustainable efforts (Cherry).

Understanding the Importance of Integrating Social Justice in Language Teaching. When asked about the importance of integrating social justice in language teaching, all participants unanimously gave a firm and positive answer. They all noted that it was very important to integrate social justice in class. A couple of participants did mention that social studies as a subject might be a more natural fit to embed social justice topics

(Wendy, Lily), yet they all agreed that language teachers should be charged with a larger mission to not only teach languages but also promote social justice, as language and culture should be interwoven, and social injustice was often a result of ethnocentrism and xenophobia toward other cultures. Annie pointed out that "teachers need to be advocates and take a stance to advocate for each student." Mandy called it a "privilege to share social justice with kids through language teaching." Cherry further explained:

> Language is not just words or a component of words. Language is a social practice because you have to interact with people and that's how you become who you are. Language learning is an action, and identity cannot separate from language. Language is how you construct, how you conceptualize your view of thinking.

That being said, the nuances in their interview data revealed that their understandings varied and could be organized in three categories. The first category concerned social justice as both the teaching content and the classroom culture. Several participants (Jenny, Linda, Annie, Betty) explicitly stated that integrating social justice in teaching should include discussing social justice topics through authentic materials as well as constructing a social-justice-oriented environment. The second category was placing more emphasis on the social-justice-oriented environment than the social justice as content per se. Some participants (Sammy, Mandy, Yolanda) stressed the importance of building a respectful and equal environment for their elementary and middle school students to interact with each other; for young learners, placing social justice as discussion content was too "tricky" (Yolanda) due to their limited language proficiency and cognitive development. This understanding was not limited to primary and secondary school teachers. Cherry, who taught adults in college, echoed that creating a comfortable and appropriate environment could help to "take away the labels of people of colors." The third category was a more ambiguous description of integrating social justice in teaching. These responses mentioned "teaching students to appreciate the beauty of Chinese language through poetry and literature" (Lily) and exposing students to "what's new in the world" (Wendy). These participants' responses did not provide an explicit answer on the exact area to incorporate social justice in the teaching context; rather, they underscored the significance of showcasing cultural diversity to students.

Influential Factors Shaping Their Understandings

All of the participants reported that their understanding of social justice and integration of social justice in teaching have been continuously shaped and reshaped by various factors, including personal and professional experience, social movements and political climate, academic training, and reflection.

First, many participants shared that personal and professional experiences in the United States made them more aware of the concept of social justice. For instance, Lily recalled that when she first immigrated to the United States many years ago, she was sharing her classroom with another teacher who taught a different language—but she received considerably fewer resources and less attention than the other teacher. She felt like she was being treated in a condescending way by the school and her colleagues. Similarly, Mandy shared that her first few years in American schools were challenging as she found her colleagues expressing friendliness on a superficial level, yet few reached out to lend support or engage her in the community. The feeling of "having a wall" between her colleagues and herself made her feel lonely and excluded. Although what Lily and Mandy shared seemed like small incidents at the time, cumulative incidents inspired them to think more about equity and inclusivity in the perimeter of social justice.

Some participants also talked about academic coursework that helped them see social justice as a buzzword in education in the United States. Academic coursework was helpful to introduce social justice in a historical context (Annie, Betty), explain the major conflicts between races (Linda), and engage discussion of social justice through a sociolinguistic lens (Cherry). Professional meetings and extensive talk on diversity, equity, and inclusivity made these teachers realize that this is an important yet contested issue to address in teaching.

Last but not least, the most salient factor was social movement and political climate in the United States. All 10 participants shed light on this factor. They all shared that the political divide within the United States, the clashes between groups, and social movements over the past several years had the most profound impact on their understandings. Two cases were mentioned repeatedly in their responses: the murder of George Floyd and the anti-Asian hate movement. Annie shared that she originally perceived social justice as an abstract theory, but these two cases, in particular, brought racial conflicts to life. The events in U.S. society over the past 5 years bridged the gap between theory and reality, and she felt that the concept of social justice, reality, and her professional identity converged. She stated, "now the three dimensions are converging I feel like you know it's hard for me to go back and you know, keep a distance from social justice issues." The urgency of discussing social justice was also felt by Lily, as she had been robbed multiple times in the past. The news coverage on physical and verbal attacks on the Asian population, especially women, amplified her fear for her personal safety. She said this feeling was much stronger in the past 3 to 5 years. The same sentiments were true for other participants as well—feeling sad, unsafe, confused, scared, helpless, and hopeless. They constantly worried, "Am I being targeted? Am I being discriminated?" (Yolanda). They became more aware of the ignorance of a large American population (Linda, Wendy), felt frustrated about the tacit hypocrisy camouflaged by the lip service of promoting equity (Linda), and felt hopeless in achieving real social equity due to the sociopolitical divide (Mandy). This factor served as a ticking clock to urge the participants to stand up for themselves and to take some action to address social justice issues.

It is important to note that these factors listed in the last section collectively triggered profound reflection within the participants. Some reflected on the meaning of social justice (Cherry, Sammy, Wendy, Linda), some on the manifestations of social justice in China and the United States (Annie, Sammy), some on their role in the social justice movement (Annie, Mandy, Yolanda, Lily), and some on the philosophical distinction between teaching and education (Jenny, Sammy, Betty).

Practices of Integrating Social Justice in Chinese Language Class

As previously discussed, participants understood that integrating social justice in teaching could entail (a) placing social justice as teaching content, and (b) creating a social-justice–oriented environment. In this section, responding to the second RQ, I share findings on the participants' self-reported practices in social justice incorporation. It was evident that the participants' practices aligned with their understandings. In other words, their practices were manifested in two major areas: embedding social justice in curriculum and instruction, and creating a social-justice-oriented class culture.

Practice. Embedding Social Justice in Curriculum and Instruction. This line of practice included a thoughtful and systemic integration of social justice in curriculum design (Annie, Jenny, Linda, Betty), involving students in critical discussion on topics at the spur of the moment (Annie), and expanding the selection of teaching materials (Wendy).

Systematic integration of social justice in curriculum design and instruction required a tremendous amount of time spent on thinking and planning; sometimes it involved coordination with colleagues if the teacher was not the only Chinese teacher in the program. Yet Annie, Jenny, and Linda considered these efforts worthwhile and necessary. In particular, Annie and Jenny offered extraordinary examples.

Annie shared two examples in the interview. One was integrating discussions of Black Lives Matter and anti-Asian hate in lower-level Chinese classes. She recognized the potential challenge resulting from students' language proficiency, but she was willing to try. According to Annie, social justice incorporation should be consistent; therefore, to help students build a foundation, she had a vocabulary-matching exercise at the beginning of the semester. The activity included 14 phrases in both Chinese and English for students to match including, "to abolish," "people of color," "police violence," "reform," "a slave," "slavery," "life," "equality and equity," "Latino Americans," "equality," "African Americans," "Black people," and "White people." After students learned these essential phrases, they were given a chance to expand learning to interpret meanings of sentences and even engaged in conversations. For instance, Annie listed these sentences for students to translate and respond to:

1. "警察制度需要改革吗? [Does the police system need reform?]"
2. "美国白人和有色人种是平等的吗? [Are white people and people of color equal in the United States?]"
3. "在我们学校怎样可以做到公平公正? [What can we do to achieve fairness and equity in our school?]"

These sentences allowed her students to apply the vocabulary to interpret meaning and offer their proficiency-appropriate input. Moreover, Annie also integrated other social justice topics in her higher-level class with a theme of contemporary China, including educational inequity, low-income and rural Chinese families, and the impact of COVID-19 on China.

A similar curriculum design was shared by Betty, who designed a project for her 300-level students to take on a different role to address social justice issues overseen by that role. For instance, some students took on a role as the college president to address the lack of diversity on campus, some addressed gender inequity, and some the lack of support for international students. Betty said that giving students options to choose a social justice issue could elicit genuine interest and motivate language production.

Jenny also devoted tremendous efforts to embed social justice in systematic curriculum design and instruction. She made a chart to align her textbook topics with all sorts of social justice topics ranging from identities to justice action. For example, in discussing identities, she engaged her students, many of whom were Asian Americans, to discover ordinary Asian Americans and their achievements. When all her students could only allude to Jeremy Lin (a famous Taiwanese–American NBA basketball player) as an exemplary Asian American, Jenny decided to expand students' horizons and restore a sense of pride through extraordinary people in all walks of life—rather than only glamorous celebrities. In addition, Jenny integrated the 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) proposed by the United Nations to inspire her selection of social justice topics. For instance, on the topic of rooms and dormitories, she integrated SDG 11 (sustainable cities and communities) in her project-based teaching. The project allowed the students to visit the local city and low-income affordable housing. Then students were required to make a housing plan for their family with a fixed budget. This language project involved budgeting skills, creating an LGBTQ-friendly family, and taking into account the goal of sustainable cities and communities. Further, Jenny also followed good practices from other teachers to promote advocacy work in her class. When she knew that her colleagues in the Japanese program involved students in the Onigiri Action 2021, a world campaign against hunger responding to SDG 2 (zero hunger), she engaged her students to participate. She was pleased to see her students' enthusiastic participation and considered it as an exceptional opportunity to cultivate students' social justice mindset through action.

Practice: Creating a Social-Justice-Oriented Class Culture

All 10 participants reported their efforts to create a social-justice-oriented class culture.

Echoing their understandings of social justice in the classroom, they hoped to construct a safe and respectful environment where students' needs were met and their backgrounds (identity, culture, language, etc.) were celebrated. Some common practices included:

1. calling students by the name and the pronoun they preferred (Annie, Mandy, Yolanda, Sammy, Betty),
2. creating ground rules with the students to instill a sense of community (Annie, Mandy),
3. using inclusive language in the syllabus and e-mails to students (Annie, Lily, Linda),
4. avoiding gender-dichotomy language such as "boys" and "girls" (Mandy, Yolanda, Sammy),
5. inviting students to share their home culture without singling out anyone or making stereotypical comments (Mandy, Wendy, Cherry, Jenny), and
6. making accommodations to students' needs, such as preparing both electronic copies and hard copies for students during the hybrid teaching caused by COVID-19 (Yolanda, Mandy, Annie).

All 10 participants stressed the importance of teachers as role models. Annie said she demonstrated her compassion and support to her students, as well as openly sharing her vulnerability. As she noted, she wanted her students to know that "we are all in this together. We are all human beings." Several other participants also shared that showing students their vulnerable feelings, especially about attacks on the Asian population, helped to build rapport with their students.

Some participants also shared their innovative approach to introduce the concept of social justice among young learners. Sammy taught elementary students, and she found two activities particularly useful in the pre-COVID era. One activity was distributing band-aids to all students, regardless of whether they were injured or not, to help students understand that everyone may need a different extent of help; the other activity was asking students to put their feet in other classmates' shoes to explicate the meaning of "put yourself in someone's shoes." These activities were age appropriate and less confrontational and did not require high language proficiency. Nonetheless, the impact was lasting among young learners. Sammy reported that she and her students often revisited these activities during the school year to review the difference between

equity and equality and to remind her students of empathy and compassion.

Support and Challenges in Integrating Social Justice in Teaching

The findings revealed that support came from two areas: institutions and national organizations. Institutional support included some degree of autonomy from the school administrators to embed social justice, as well as some PD workshops organized by schools and districts to introduce the importance of social justice. National organizations also provided some free and paid workshops to share effective practices. Several participants highlighted the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL), and a couple mentioned the Chinese Language Teachers Association (CLTA). These workshops offered some overarching guidance on addressing sensitive topics and presenting more diverse teaching content.

In contrast, the participants reported the challenges in greater length. These challenges were external and internal.

School and Colleagues. Although schools explicated support for social justice, many participants felt that the support was limited to providing emotional support to teachers and students. For instance, several schools had a committee in the name of social justice, but the extent was limited to inviting teachers and students to share their unjust experiences. Such support provided emotional care and empathy but was not effective in pedagogy. All participants shared that their schools did not allow them to share their personal views on politics and religion.

Insufficient Professional Development. Over half of the participants felt that they were not aware of training with an exact focus on incorporating social justice in Chinese teaching. Some pointed out that the current PD offered some generic suggestions, but they needed clear guidance and templates. Jenny, Annie, and Wendy did share some specific transformative workshops centering around Chinese teaching. Jenny, in particular, was a respected language teacher, and she had shared her practice through multiple workshops. Nevertheless, she agreed that increased PD resources would be necessary.

Individual Limitations. Most of the participants mentioned that their individual limitations impeded their integration of social justice in teaching. The biggest limitation was insufficient knowledge of the history of social justice and

racial conflicts. Although they were aware of the history of slavery and anti-Asian history in the United States, they felt uncomfortable, unconfident, and incompetent to have an in-depth conversation on such provocative topics because they felt their knowledge was not profound enough. When these topics emerged in class, they felt apprehensive and tried to make a general comment or divert the discussion to other directions. Another limitation was from the participants' religious belief and cultural values. In this context, the topic of LGBTQ issues was emphasized by several teachers. For instance, Mandy said her religious beliefs required her to negotiate between faith and professionalism. Yolanda and Sammy felt that the excessive emphasis on gender fluidity could confuse young students. The educational culture where they grew up expected teachers to present knowledge and clarify confusions, but the school administrators did not allow them to tell any students if they were boys or girls, and they were not even allowed to use these two words (i.e., "boys," "girls") in class. In their mind, this was a basic fact that they were not allowed to tell the students. Additionally, several participants reported that their harmony-oriented cultural values made it difficult for them to confront anyone.

Political Divide

Last but not least, the extreme political divide within the United States created fear among the teachers to integrate social justice. In addition to the pushback from families and students, most participants emphasized that the political correctness and the "cancel culture" in the United States added an extra layer of ambiguity and risk in their teaching. Very often, they did not know what was the right thing to say or do and to what extent they should or could discuss social justice, and they did not want to jeopardize their career. They hesitated to address social justice issues in class and outside the class; having to use a second or third language in such heavy discussions was even more difficult.

DISCUSSION

In this study, the teacher participants perceived social justice as equal access to power and resources regardless of race, age, languages, background, and social economic status. This understanding largely aligned with Nieto's (2010) notion that considered social justice as "a philosophy" and "an approach" to treat people "with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity" (p. 46). Their perception was shaped and continued to be reshaped by personal and professional experiences, academic work, and mainly the current sociopolitical climate in the United States. They all acknowledged the importance of promoting social justice in language class, yet many found the implementation challenging. The actual integration was manifested in two major areas: direct inclusion of social justice in curriculum content and creating a social-justice–oriented environment. While the participants shared some support, the impediments were significant and alarming.

The theoretical framework for the current study considered teachers' understanding and teacher agency in social justice integration as an ongoing process influenced by an array of aspects, also called structures (Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992) and dimensions (Priestley et al., 2015). Informed by this framework, I took a broader view of the process of teacher agency, making connections with their understandings and tracing elements that facilitated or impeded their perspectives and practice, as illustrated in Figure 1.

The analysis revealed that teachers' perception and agency of social justice were informed, supported, and constrained by three major elements: community, curriculum, and culture. These three elements structured a context for the Chinese language teachers to form their understanding of social justice as a person in society and as a language teacher. Although these three elements have been discussed in other studies in slightly different terms (including dimensions, Priestley et al., 2015; and structures, Sewell, 1992), in the current study, culture was the most salient and unique, and will be discussed last.

Community

Community was discussed across micro (individual context), meso (school context), and macro (national context) levels in Peña–Pincheira & De Costa's study (2021). In the current study, community included the participants' school and colleagues, students' engagement, and society; however, the individual context had a greater connection with culture, which will be discussed later.

First, the teacher participants felt some degree of support from their schools and colleagues, reflected through school committees to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion, and colleagues' outreach to show support during the anti-Asian hate movement. This support reinforced the societal attention to address social justice and empowered teachers with courage to share vulnerable feelings yet did not provide any specific tactic

FIGURE 1
Influence of Community, Curriculum, and Culture [Color figure can be viewed at wileyonlinelibrary.com]
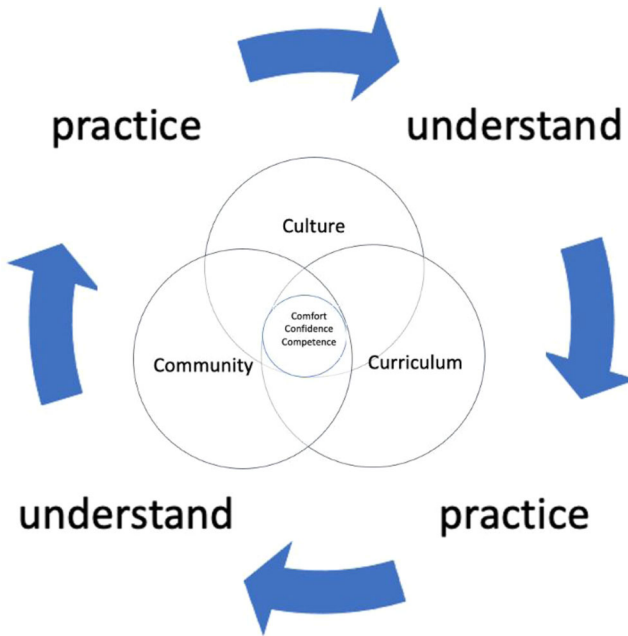
to support them pedagogically. Although few participants had actually experienced any backlash in integrating social justice in class, several mentioned seeing their colleagues being reprimanded for incorporating the Black Lives Matter movement in art projects. Their observations reflected the contested nature of the content and pushed the teachers to play on the safe side. This finding is similar to what Wassell et al. (2019) discovered in their study, where teachers felt the need to stay with safer content and "avoid certain topics altogether" (p. 278).

Second, teachers' agency in integrating social justice was greatly influenced by students' reaction to and participation in such topics. Some teachers found students' participation empowering. For instance, Jenny's projects that involved the discovery of extraordinary Asian Americans in students' neighborhoods and the sustainable housing plan were successful examples of using real-life cases to empower students to become "ultimately part of the solution to injustice, both as youth and as they grow into adulthood" (Gutstein, 2003, p. 39). Annie, a college professor, drew on her agency to introduce social justice language in lower-level Chinese classes and discuss equity topics in higher-level Chinese classes. Her example overcame the obstacle of language proficiency but related to "students' deeply felt emotions and val-

ues" to study "real-life, relevant issues" (Gutstein, 2003, p. 39). Yet, it was important to point out that both Jenny and Annie reported more diversity in their student body, which could account for the success of their practice. Other participants reported fear of family complaints, discouragement by some students' response, and mostly unease in teaching toward social justice. Several teachers in this study mentioned that while they wanted to address the inequity of people of color in the society, they felt the need to be thoughtful of the White students' reaction and did not want to offend them or their parents. "I don't know if I am doing it correctly" and "I don't want my White students to feel that I target them" were two statements shared by many participants in this study.

Further, some teachers felt pressure related to political correctness and cancel culture. The findings suggested that integrating social justice in teaching was walking a fine line. The participants felt the need to address equity and inclusivity, especially a stronger desire to do so during the anti-Asian attacks, but they were afraid of being accused of promoting hatred and further dividing their classroom. The fear of ostracism fueled the teachers' feeling of incompetence and lack of confidence, strengthening their desire to be sensitive and to avoid errors (Wassell et al., 2019). As a result, the teacher agency was mostly manifested

through presenting cultural diversity, organizing activities to foster empathy, and offering equal access to materials, and less seen in critical discussion of social justice issues per se.

Curriculum

The teacher participants in the current study alluded to time, space, and "an appropriate fit" in the curriculum for them to explore topics, which was considered as "vital to the ecology" of teaching for social justice (Wassell et al, 2019). However, teachers accentuated the professional expectations and a lack of curricular resources. They described that education in the United States was jeopardized by the political divide along with involvement of parents with differing political views. These teachers made an agentive effort to navigate these stakeholders and structures to make Chinese language class a potential context to instill a social justice mindset. Many constructed a social-justice–oriented classroom through modeling empathetic behaviors and promoting inclusive language, which was achievable despite students' age and language proficiency. Only a couple—Jenny and Annie—made social issues the centerpiece of their units and dove into critical discussion.

An advanced level of curricular knowledge and experience could explain Jenny's and Annie's agency in explicit and profound integration of social justice in class. Both teachers were not only experienced in language teaching, but also reputable teacher educators delivering professional training in the nation. In other words, they both had expertise in curriculum design and thus had the knowledge and skillset to integrate social justice more deliberately and systematically (Ennser–Kananen, 2016). Their creativity and effective examples were similar to the findings in some current studies, stressing the power of teacher agency in utilizing available capital (Tan, 2016), enabling students' agency in sharing feelings and in inquiry (Wesely et al., 2016), emphasizing advocacy (Wade, 2007), and supporting the argument that social justice can be achievable at all levels of language proficiency (Randolph & Johnson, 2017). In particular, they modeled to students that language learning was more than linguistic achievement; they integrated ACTFL's language learning standards, social justice standards, and the United Nation's SDGs, to construct a subversive and innovative curriculum. Jenny and Annie, through their subversive work in curriculum and instruction, achieved their agentic goal to be what Priestley & Drew (2019)

called "autonomous developers of the curriculum and hence agents of change" (p. 154). Nonetheless, not many teachers were prepared with such breadth and depth of curricular knowledge, nor did they have ample time to start from scratch. Ennser–Kananen (2016) said that "common pedagogical tools are bound to be insufficient" (p. 560) as social justice questions involved a large magnitude of pain and unsettling. In this study, many participants expressed the feeling of loneliness as they were the few navigating in the darkness, as metaphorically expressed in a Chinese idiom "摸着石头过河 [crossing the river by feeling the stones]." They continuously pondered what should be included in teaching for social justice in a language class and what such teaching looks like. Their confusion was described by Wesely & Thenoux (2021) as various myths to be clarified. As a result, the plea for specific examples of "exemplary curriculum units and lessons that take up social justice education in a language context" (Wassell et al., 2019, p. 281) was loud and clear.

Culture

Culture stood out as a significant and salient factor in the current study, including cultural values, religious beliefs, and educational background. First, the teacher participants felt that their cultural background valued harmony, respect, and collectiveness, all of which are being contested in the current political divide in the United States. While they understood that education should advance critical thinking, they felt uncomfortable to directly address or confront others on social-justice–related topics. For example, several teachers originally from mainland China understood that China as a country had many issues, but they expressed that Chinese people were more focused on celebrating the current economic achievements and prioritized harmony over challenging authority. The Chinese were more hopeful, peace seeking, and united. Yet U.S. culture valued partisan debates, and the differing interpretations of democracy and freedom partly resulted in unprecedented polarization. It took these teacher participants time and effort to overcome the feeling of being a "cultural outsider" (Marx & Moss, 2011, p. 45) and to process these cultural contrasts through an ethnorelative lens—and thus limited the teachers from taking a more progressive approach to teach for social justice. Instead, their teacher agency was often displayed in a nonconfrontational way and stayed at the periphery of social justice,

through presenting cultural diversity, modeling respect, and promoting a peaceful environment.

Furthermore, traditional Chinese education considered teachers' mission as "传道授业解惑 [to propagate the doctrine, impart professional knowledge, and resolve doubts]"; yet multiple teacher participants had doubts about applying this mission in the U.S. context. Take social justice teaching for instance: Teachers were not allowed to share any personal views, not allowed to use gender-binary vocabulary, and not even allowed to tell students if they were a boy or a girl when asked. Several participants found the gender-equity approach not serving its mission to resolve basic doubts. As a result, the teachers continued to explore the boundaries and the extent of social justice.

Moreover, when teachers had a certain religious belief, it added an additional complexity and delicacy in their understanding and practice. Several teacher participants in this study shared their constant negotiation between religious beliefs (especially on LGBTQ topics) and professional responsibilities. For instance, Mandy, on the one hand, felt extremely comfortable to approach social justice by cultivating kindness, love, faith, and inclusion in students because these values closely aligned with her religious beliefs; on the other hand, when this inclusion extended to acceptance of different sexual orientations and gender identities, it was against her religious beliefs and thus required a lot of negotiation and reflection. The participants in this study demonstrated deliberation in separating religious beliefs and professional obligations, yet the reconciliation process was exhausting.

Cultural values, educational background, and religious beliefs are tacit yet important structures for teachers to navigate. The process was more grueling as teachers had to confront their history and identities. Although teachers stressed the importance of social justice and endorsed implementation, their understanding was more focused on respect and understanding, less on advocacy; their implementation, in alignment with their understanding, was more through building a positive environment and presenting cultural diversity—and less through critical discussion. Their approach might be interpreted as on the periphery of social justice without touching the core of social justice; yet following the Chinese idiom "潜移默化 [an imperceptible influence]," teachers in this study drew on their agency to expand students' learning from language to cultural appreciation, cultivate a sense of compassion, and treat others with humanity. Their

pedagogical decisions and actions might not be subversive in daily instruction, but Campbell (2012) reminded us that these teachers' choices and actions reflected their agentic role in "adaptation" and "alteration." The cultural influence has been lacking in existing literature, nor was this article's goal to support one view or the other; however, it was identified as a significant factor to understand Chinese language teachers' position and practice in social justice integration.

An Ongoing Process of Understanding (Reflection) and Practice (Trial)

The analysis indicated the power of consistent reflection, propelling teachers to uncover more depth of social justice and to embed social justice in class. All of the participants alluded to their constant "historically grounded" and "politically engaged" (Kramsch, 2014, p. 98) reflection (thinking and questioning) to make sense of social justice and inform teaching. Connecting with the three characteristics of teacher agency and the ecological dimensions (Priestley et al., 2015) discussed in the literature section, I could see that these teachers adopted reflection as an important agentive tool to develop understanding toward change. Some participants (Mandy, Yolanda, Wendy, Lily) reflected on the substances of social justice, which fits in the practical–evaluative dimension; some (Linda, Sammy, Cherry) on their role in promoting equity, which relates to the iterational dimension; and some (Jenny, Sammy, Annie, Betty) on the mission of teaching, aligning with the projective dimension. They were engaging with people around them, with academic readings, with their professional context and personal histories, and their own positionality to "achieve" their agency (Priestley et al., 2013, p. 188).

These reflective moments might be scattered and unobservable to others, but they collectively fostered a multifaceted understanding of social justice and inspired the teachers to act in a way that made them feel comfortable and effective (Noormohammadi, 2014). Through a dialectical lens, I noticed that three elements mentioned earlier in this section (community, curriculum, and culture) interacted with teacher agency to influence each other. On the one hand, these elements collectively stimulated and constrained teachers' understanding of social justice. These teachers confronted their own bias, examined their identities (De Costa & Norton, 2017; Edwards & Burns, 2016), tested their willingness and persistence to undertake a larger task to redesign curricula, and

challenged their instructional skills to balance time, difficulty, content, and language.

On the other hand, these teachers galvanized their agency to navigate through overt and tacit structures to integrate social justice. Some teachers placed social justice content at the center of their curriculum, and some constructed a social-justice–oriented environment. Their effectiveness might vary—and it may be arguable that a teacher's respectful attitude alone cannot truly reflect social justice or lead to social change—but these teachers were creating or aiming to create a subversive impact on the system and the structures within their unique capacity. These teachers recognized their limitations (knowledge, pedagogy) that contributed to the feeling of discomfort and a lack of confidence; however, it was obvious that despite these challenges, they continued to reflect, to deepen understanding, and to practice.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The Chinese language teachers in this study shared their understanding of social justice and demonstrated their agency to integrate social justice in their Chinese language classrooms. Their understanding of social justice was historically contingent, temporary situated (Priestley et al., 2015), and influenced by sociocultural dimensions and through interacting with individuals and materials. Community, curriculum, and culture were significant elements in shaping their understanding of integrating social justice in teaching. According to their understanding, social justice education, on the one hand, illuminated the importance of respect and inclusivity to promote a fair and equitable environment; on the other hand, not all topics underneath the umbrella aligned naturally with teachers' own beliefs. Teacher agency to integrate social justice in Chinese language classes was evident, and in alignment with their understanding. In other words, the participants felt much more comfortable, confident, and competent to enact social justice education through creating a safe environment than by directly addressing social justice topics.

Some readers may argue that a respectful and inclusive attitude reported by some teachers is not an evident demonstration of social justice. In some teachers' contexts, modeling an inclusive attitude was the most secure and comfortable approach that they could find through navigating various structures, and they considered it a breakthrough. For that, their efforts to try and impact the structures were applaudable. However, it might also reaffirm the constraints of structures (community, curriculum, culture) collectively impacting—limiting, to be more accurate—the teachers' willingness and freedom to take subversive action. Therefore, readers are encouraged to interpret the findings of the study with caution and criticality.

The findings in this study have several implications for pedagogy, teacher education, and research on teaching for social justice. First, teachers are encouraged to think outside of the box, positioning language teaching within interdisciplinary discussion. Connecting language learning with social studies, politics, and history can inspire students to discover social issues. Social justice may seem like an overwhelmingly abstract topic, but the Social Justice Education Standards (Learning for Justice, 2018) helped to unpack this concept into identity, diversity, justice, and action. The breakdown created a pathway for teachers to start matching their units with the four domains. Second, teacher education, including both academic programs and PD opportunities in the field, need to support teachers in "creating a more systematic, global integration of social justice issues" (Wassell et al, 2019, p. 281). It is important for such support to transcend superficial, generic suggestions; rather, more targeted support can include language-specific examples, lesson plan templates, mentors, and guidelines. More importantly, teacher educators need to have cultural empathy and patience to allow teachers, especially those from different cultural backgrounds, time and space to process, to experiment, to fail, and to grow within the U.S. context. Zollers et al. (2000) had already warned us that teachers' understandings of social justice ranged along a "continuum of beliefs" (p. 1); hence, it would be incredibly helpful for the teacher educators to have a sense of where teachers' understandings are located on the continuum. Last but not least, the existing scholarship (Kalaja et al., 2016; Kaplan & Garner, 2017; Miller & Gkonou, 2018; Yang et al., 2021) has paved the way for further research to survey the diversity of world language teachers' perception, experiments, agency, and emotions in teaching social justice in classrooms. Integrating social justice in world language education is a large topic and a long journey, but I wanted to end this article with a quote from Laozi's (1972) *Tao Te Ching* "千里之行始于足下 [A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step]." As the title of this article suggests, we are crossing the river by feeling the stones, but if we take one step at a time, we will move toward our goal.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information may be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of the article.