

Perceptions of Native-Speaker Teachers, Non-Native-Speaker Teachers, and Team Teaching by Native Japanese-Speaking Learners of Chinese: An Analysis Based on a Descriptive Survey

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Abstract:

Through a descriptive survey, this study aimed to clarify how learners who are native speakers of Japanese and have taken team-taught Chinese language classes perceive the advantages and disadvantages of team teaching and the strengths and weaknesses of teachers who are native (NTs) and non-native Chinese speakers (NNTs). The study established the following points: (i) For learners, NTs' strengths include providing natural and accurate pronunciation, natural expressions, and cultural knowledge, whereas their weaknesses are in areas such as providing grammar explanations and guidance from the learner's perspective and communication. (ii) NNTs have strengths in areas such as providing guidance from the learner's perspective, clear grammar explanations, and explaining points through comparison with Japanese. However, their pronunciation accuracy and cultural knowledge are insufficient. (iii) Regarding team teaching, although the ability to leverage the strengths of NTs and NNTs is valued, lack of consistency and infrequent opportunities for exposure are challenges.

1. Introduction

This paper examines learners' perceptions of teachers who are native Chinese speakers (native teachers; NTs) and teachers who are non-native Chinese speakers (non-native teachers; NNTs) in Chinese language team teaching (TT), based on free-response data gathered via a descriptive survey.

Chinese language education in Japan is delivered in various class formats depending on factors such as the instructors' attributes and whether there is a division of roles. The main formats include the following: (i) classes taught solely by a Chinese NT; (ii) classes taught solely by a native Japanese-speaking NNT; and (iii) team-taught classes with an NT and NNT in a relay format using a single textbook.

When both NTs and NNTs are involved in a class in this manner, what do learners seek from each? Moreover, how are their perceptions of these NTs and NNTs formed?

Research examining expectations regarding NTs and NNTs among native Japanese-speaking learners of Chinese includes Nakagawa et al. (2018) and Nakajima (2021).

Nakagawa et al. (2018) conducted a multiple-choice questionnaire survey of students in the department of Chinese studies at a foreign language university. According to their study, students expect NNTs to be able to speak fluently with correct pronunciation, to appropriately correct learners' pronunciation mistakes, and to be approachable and friendly inside and outside the classroom. Another advantage of NNTs is that drawing on their own experience as learners, they are thoroughly familiar with learners' grammatical errors and what content is difficult and easy to acquire. In contrast, NTs are expected to possess knowledge of Chinese history, culture, customs, and so on and conduct classes emphasizing communication, speaking, and listening.

Nakajima (2021) conducted a multiple-choice questionnaire survey of students not majoring in Chinese. This study established that although NNTs are expected to emphasize classroom atmosphere and communication outside

of class, expectations regarding NTs are concentrated on their knowledge of the Chinese language and instructional methods, such as incorporating copious amounts of communication-focused practice, appropriately correcting pronunciation and grammatical errors, and being proficient in methodologies for teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Furthermore, these findings suggest that these students' expectations differ from those that students majoring in Chinese have in regard to their Chinese language teachers.

Chen (2025) conducted a quantitative analysis of expectations regarding NTs and NNTs in TT through a multiple-choice questionnaire survey. This study established that learners are more demanding of NNTs in terms of their professionalism as Chinese language instructors, whereas in the affective domain, learners tend to seek friendliness from NTs and gravitas from NNTs. Additionally, Chen (2025) compared the survey results with those of Nakagawa et al. (2018) and the non-TT results of Nakajima (2021), pointing out that in TT, the demand for affective support by NNTs (e.g., wanting teachers to be approachable and friendly outside the classroom) is significantly lower than in non-TT settings. The study also argues that in TT, NTs and NNTs have complementary roles and that NTs are more highly expected to fulfill the role of providing affective support to learners than NNTs. Chen also states that in TT, role design based on affective roles is more effective than simple division of roles based on skills or native language.

Therefore, although there is research on what learners expect from NTs and NNTs, it only focuses quantitative studies based on multiple-choice questionnaire surveys. Such quantitative analyses ascertain learners' perceptions based on pre-set questions and multiple-choice answers. This makes it difficult to elicit responses that reflect respondents' individual perspectives and to fully reveal the underlying reasons and contexts and processes whereby meanings are ascribed. Furthermore, no sufficient examination has been made of how learners who have experienced TT perceive the class format of TT per se.

Hence, based on a descriptive survey, this paper clarifies learners' per-

ceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of NTs, NNTs, and the advantages and disadvantages of TT and derives pointers regarding education.

2. Method

2.1 Research Subjects

The research participants were 18 native Japanese-speaking learners of Chinese. They were aged from 19 to 24 years old at the time of the survey (January to February 2025). They were beginner-level Chinese language learners who were not majoring in Chinese and were studying Chinese as an elective subject.

The research participants took Chinese classes team-taught by a Chinese-language NT and NNT for one year⁽¹⁾ (two semesters). Classes were held twice a week for 28 classes each semester, with each class lasting 100 minutes. Of the two classes per week, the Chinese-language NT and NNT each taught one class. The textbooks used were *Hanasu chūgokugo Pekin-hen 1* [Spoken Chinese: Beijing Stories 1] (by Mitsuaki Endo and Dong Yan, Asahi Press) for the spring semester and *Hanasu chūgokugo Pekin-hen 2* [Spoken Chinese: Beijing Stories 2] (as above) for the fall semester. Both textbooks are written in Japanese. Approximately one textbook lesson was covered per class. In addition to the textbook content, memorized recitation assignments were given several times and conversation tests were also administered. Both NT and NNT were responsible for the memorized recitation assignments, but as a general rule, the conversation test was handled by the NT.

2.2 Survey Method

A questionnaire survey was conducted using Google Forms, with responses provided in writing. The survey was conducted in Japanese.

2.3 Survey Content

Learners were asked to provide open-ended (free-response) written

answers describing the strengths and weaknesses of NTs and NNTs, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of TT. The questions of the survey are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Questions Asked in the Survey

Number	Question Details
Question 1-1	Giving examples, describe the advantages of paired classes,* based on your own experience. *Paired classes: Classes conducted by a pair of instructors, comprising a native Chinese speaker and a non-native (Japanese) Chinese speaker.
Question 1-2	Giving examples, describe the disadvantages of paired classes based on your own experience. *Paired classes: Classes conducted by a pair of instructors, comprising a native Chinese speaker and a non-native (Japanese) Chinese speaker.
Question 2-1	Giving examples, describe the strengths of native Chinese-speaking instructors based on your own experience.
Question 2-2	Giving examples, describe the weaknesses of native Chinese-speaking instructors based on your own experience.
Question 3-1	Giving examples, describe the strengths of (Japanese) instructors who are non-native speakers of Chinese based on your own experience.
Question 3-2	Giving examples, describe the weaknesses of non-native (Japanese) Chinese instructors based on your own experience.

2.4 Analysis Method

A qualitative content analysis was conducted on the open-ended response data. First, each response was reviewed and coded based on semantic similarity. When multiple types of content were included in a single response, multiple codes were assigned. Based on this, the frequency of occurrence of each code was aggregated. For example, responses regarding the strengths of NTs were coded as in (1).

(1)

· Participant 2

Answer: "I can hear authentic pronunciation."

Code: Can learn correct pronunciation

• Participant 11

Answer: “I can hear native pronunciation and learn authentic, common expressions.”

Code 1: Can learn correct pronunciation

Code 2: Can learn natural expressions

Responses lacking specificity, such as “Nothing in particular” and “I didn’t really feel so,” were excluded from coding.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Perceptions of Native Teachers

Table 2 presents the results of coding responses stating the strengths and weaknesses of NTs. The number in parentheses represents the number of occurrences in all responses.

Table 2: Codes and Frequencies of Responses Stating the Strengths and Weaknesses of NTs

Strengths	Weaknesses
i . Can learn correct pronunciation (13)	i . Lack of awareness of the learner’s perspective(4)
ii . Can learn about Chinese culture (5)	ii . Concerns about communication (3)
iii. Can learn natural expressions (4)	iii. Difficulty in understanding grammar explanations (2)
iv. Can learn about regional language differences (1)	iv. Difficult to maintain classroom order (1)
v . Can explain differences in nuance (1)	v . Difficulty in listening due to fast speaking speed (1)
vi. Can be exposed to authentic Chinese (1)	
vii. Can benefit from native speaker instruction (1)	
viii. Everything the NT does serves as an example. (1)	

As shown in Table 2, the top-ranking strengths of NTs were “Can learn correct pronunciation,” “Can learn about Chinese culture,” and “Can learn nat-

ural expressions.” These findings suggest that the NT is perceived by learners as a model of the target language.

However, the top-ranking weaknesses of NTs were “Lack of awareness of the learner’s perspective,” “Concerns about communication,” and “Difficulty in understanding grammar explanations.” Learners tend to judge that because NTs have not learned the target language (Chinese) as a foreign language, their grasp of the areas where learners are likely to struggle is inferior to that of NNTs. Additionally, some learners expressed the opinion that they felt anxious about whether they could communicate smoothly in class because the medium of instruction (Japanese) is not NTs’ native language.

In light of the learners’ opinions above, the following points need to be addressed when designing lessons to be taught by NTs. First, the following can be considered as measures to compensate for the NT’s “lack of awareness of the learner’s perspective”: having the NNT instruct the NT on points where learners tend to struggle; increasing the NT’s knowledge of the learners’ native language (Japanese) to enhance the NT’s understanding of the learners’ thought processes; having the NT increase their linguistic knowledge of Chinese to grasp features of the target language (Chinese) from the learners’ perspective; and having the NT understand common patterns of learner error and their causes. Regarding “Difficulty in understanding grammar explanations,” in the case of TT, it is possible for the NNT to handle all grammar explanations. Specifically, the NNT can be responsible for grammar explanations and exercises with set answers, whereas the NT supervises workbook activities and refers to the NNT’s explanations of grammar points as necessary in doing so. An additional improvement measure in non-TT classes would be to use supplementary materials such as videos of an NNT explaining points of grammar.

3.2 Perceptions of Non-native Teachers

Table 3 gives the results of coding responses stating the strengths and weaknesses of NNTs. The number in parentheses represents the number of

occurrences in all responses.

Table 3: Codes and Frequencies of Responses Stating the Strengths and Weaknesses of NNTs

Strengths	Weaknesses
i . Can provide instruction with awareness of the learner's perspective (10)	i . Pronunciation is not accurate. (6)
ii . Grammar explanations are easy to understand. (4)	ii . Has insufficient cultural knowledge (3)
iii. Can explain points through comparison with Japanese (3)	iii. Errors in grammar or content (2)
iv. Can provide explanations and support in Japanese (2)	iv. Limited Chinese language proficiency (2)
	v . Lack of natural expression (1)
	vi. Has difficulty in explaining nuance (1)

As shown in Table 3, the top-ranking strengths of NNTs were “Can provide instruction with awareness of the learner’s perspective,” “Grammar explanations are easy to understand,” and “Can explain points through comparison with Japanese.” Because NNTs are (or were) also learners of the language, they know from their own experience where learners are likely to struggle and how to provide explanations that are easy for learners to understand. Learners appear to recognize this as a strength of NNTs. We can presume that learners see NNTs as fellow-learners who have preceded them in their studies; learners thus feel a sense of trust toward, and confidence in, NNTs as individuals who understand the learner’s perspective.

Regarding “Grammar explanations are easy to understand” and “Can provide explanations and support in Japanese,” NNTs are able to use their native language to provide more detailed explanations because Japanese, the medium of instruction, is their native language. Furthermore, the learner’s and the NNT’s command of a common native language, means that questions and other forms of contact can be conducted without worrying about any difficulties in understanding in a mediating language. Furthermore, NNTs are highly familiar with the thought processes of native Japanese-speaking learners. It appears that learners perceive these factors as the strengths of NNTs.

Focusing on the affective aspect, we can presume that learners feel relieved to communicate with NNTs, with whom they share the same native language.

However, the primary weaknesses of NNTs as perceived by learners were “Pronunciation is not accurate” and “Has insufficient cultural knowledge.”

Chen (2025) reports that overall, learners are more demanding of NNTs than of NTs. The results of the current study suggest that the underlying reason may not be a negative evaluation of NNTs but rather an expectation of instruction based on high levels of expertise and learning experience to compensate for concerns about pronunciation and natural expression due to the NNT being a non-native speaker.

In light of the learners’ opinions above, the following points need to be kept in mind when designing lessons to be taught by NNTs. First, for TT, possible solutions to alleviate learners’ anxiety about pronunciation accuracy include instructing them to listen to the NT’s speech and showing them examples of NNTs’ own successful pronunciation. Specifically, increased learner motivation can be expected when NNTs serve as role models and demonstrate to learners that if they can pronounce Chinese like the NNTs, they will be capable of communicating with native Chinese speakers without issues. Furthermore, in the case of non-TT classes, possible methods include introducing reliable resources such as CDs and online content and including a native Chinese-speaking teaching assistant.

As countermeasures for a lack of cultural knowledge, information-sharing with an NT can be considered in the case of TT classes, while further self-study by NNTs is a possible approach in the case of non-TT classes.

3.3 Perceptions of Team Teaching

Table 4 shows the results of coding responses stating the advantages and disadvantages of TT. The number in parentheses represents the number of occurrences in all responses.

Table 4: Codes and Frequencies of Responses Stating the Advantages and Disadvantages of TT

Advantages	Disadvantages
i . Can leverage the strengths of both NTs and NNTs (11) ii . The combinations of teachers generate diversity and novelty in class. (3) iii. Easy to ask questions (2) iv. Can learn native pronunciation (2)	i . Inconsistent content (6) ii . Low frequency of meeting with a single teacher (2) iii. Different pronunciation on the part of NT and NNT (1) iv. Lack of continuity of content (1) v . Unclear where to make enquiries (1) vi. Difficulty sharing content (1) vii. Inconsistent approaches to instruction (1) viii. Disparity in popularity between NT and NNT (1) ix. It is difficult to leverage the strengths of native speakers sufficiently.(1)

As shown in Table 4, the most frequently cited advantage of TT was “Can leverage the strengths of both NTs and NNTs,” indicating that NTs and NNTs are perceived as having complementary roles in TT. The variety in classes and ease of asking questions were also cited as advantages.

However, as for disadvantages, many points relating to a lack of consistency were cited, such as “Inconsistent content” and “Different pronunciation on the part of NT and NNT.” These disadvantages appear to stem from a lack of collaboration between teachers.

Additionally, “Low frequency of meeting with a single teacher” is cited as a disadvantage. In TT, although students can receive instruction from multiple teachers, the opportunities for exposure to a single teacher become relatively fewer. This can be a major problem in language education. Psychologically, the mere exposure effect (Zajonc 1968) states that increased frequency of exposure toward a subject facilitates the formation of feelings of familiarity and favorable evaluations of that subject. Furthermore, affective factors such as anxiety and lack of confidence are thought to influence second language acquisition, known as the Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen and

Terrell 1983). If it is difficult to reduce psychological distance with the teacher due to a lack of opportunities for exposure, anxiety about asking the teacher questions or speaking in the target language increases, potentially affecting proactive class participation and target language acquisition.

In light of the learners' opinions above, the following points must be addressed when designing TT. First, possible solutions to address the lack of consistency include NT and NNT holding advance discussions in depth to standardize grammar explanations and objectives. Grammar explanations can also be standardized by providing learners with on-demand videos of grammar explanations. Information can be shared through collaborative lesson planning and mutual class observations.

Next, as a way to compensate for the low frequency of exposure, one approach is to create opportunities at the beginning of the course for the two TT instructors and students to gather (for activities such as self-introductions). This implies that relationships of trust can be established even with limited exposure. Furthermore, dividing each class into two halves, with the two teachers each handling half, could be an effective way to increase frequency of exposure.

4. Summary

This study conducted an open-ended survey to determine how learners perceive the strengths and weaknesses of NTs and NNTs and the advantages and disadvantages of TT.

The results can be summarized as follows: Although NTs have strengths in areas such as providing natural and accurate pronunciation, natural expressions, and cultural knowledge, learners perceive them as lacking in the areas of providing grammar explanations, instruction with awareness of the learner's perspective, and communication. Although NNTs have strengths in areas such as providing guidance from the learner's perspective, easy-to-understand grammar explanations, and explaining points through comparison with Japanese, learners perceive them as lacking sufficient pronunciation

accuracy and cultural knowledge. Therefore, the strengths and weaknesses of NTs generally correspond with the weaknesses and strengths of NNTs, respectively, suggesting that learners view NTs and NNTs as compensating for each others' weaknesses.

As mentioned in Section 1, Chen (2025) argues that in TT, NTs and NNTs have complementary roles and that NTs are more highly expected to fulfill the role of providing affective support to learners than NNTs. The results of the current study's open-ended survey indicate that the complementary relation between NTs and NNTs in TT as perceived by learners is seen in not only the affective domain pointed out by Chen (2025) but also the pedagogical domain. Specifically, statements such as "correct pronunciation," "natural expression," and "cultural understanding" were frequently applied to NTs, whereas statements such as "instruction with awareness of the learner's perspective" and "grammatical explanations" were frequently applied to NNTs. Therefore, the division of roles suggested by the quantitative analysis was also demonstrated by the learners' own perceptions based on their concrete experiences.

Learners perceive that although the advantage of TT is the ability to leverage the strengths of both NTs and NNTs, its disadvantages are that differences in content and that limited frequency of exposure may hinder establishing trust.

Based on the above, the following three rubrics can be given as educational pointers regarding TT by NTs and NNTs.

1. Strengthening collaboration among teachers:

The number of preliminary meetings between NT and NNT should be increased, and their methods for explaining grammar and instructional objectives should be aligned.

Information should be shared through activities such as collaborative lesson planning and mutual class observations.

2. Clarification of division of roles:

The NT should primarily act as a model for pronunciation and natural expressions, and the NNT should be primarily responsible for grammar explanations.

3. Promoting the building of trust:

In the early stages of the course, opportunities for interaction between the NT, NNT, and learners should be provided so as to build relationships of trust even through limited exposures.

By keeping the points mentioned above in mind when designing TT classes for NTs and NNTs, we can expect that team-taught lessons will become more effective and better optimized for learners.

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Author's Postscript

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Note

- (1) Of the 18 students, 3 took classes taught by both an NT and NNT for six months.

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