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A Transdisciplinary Approach to Chinese and Japanese Language Teaching: Collaborative Pedagogy across Languages, Disciplines, Communities, and Borders

Edited by **Nobuko Chikamatsu** and **Li Jin**. New York: Routledge, 2023. 225 pp. Hard Cover \$160.00, Paperback \$44.95.

Reviewed by Shigeru Osuka

A Transdisciplinary Approach to Chinese and Japanese Language Teaching (hereafter *TACJLT*) is a collection of twelve essays plus an introduction and coda (conclusion) from the 2021 Teaching China and Japan Symposium at DePaul University. The leading specialists in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Chinese and Japanese language educators from Canada, China, Japan, the United Kingdom, as well as the United States, contributed both theoretical and practical models of Transdisciplinary insights of collaborative approaches that can benefit second language education in the next decades. The following background information was provided to explain the reasons why *TACJLT* was published: (1) With the advancement of technology (e. g., ICT, IoT, DX) and the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic from 2020 to 2023, the number of opportunities for online interaction has increased, and social infrastructure has been developed, making it very easy and possible to communicate and interact across space, regions, and countries. (2) Due to the recent emphasis on STEM education and the reduction in the number of required credits for foreign language courses in education, there is a trend for the number of foreign language learners and courses to decrease. For instance, recently U. S. colleges and universities tend to place less emphasis on foreign languages and reduce a second language requirement from two years (four semesters) to one year (two semesters), or even only one semester. (3) There is a growing sense of crisis that the recent development of AI translation technology may result in a weakening in the importance of foreign language education in present curricula. Current AI translation technology is not perfect, but in a few years, the accuracy of AI



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foreign language translation will be improved, and it is expected to be commonly used in society. The four skills of foreign language education (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) will be handled by AI, and the position of foreign language study may shift from acquiring language proficiency to more intercultural understanding, collaboration skills, and personal growth in a global society. These three factors were the driving forces for the authors to compile this edited volume.

TACJLT consists of five sections and a total of fourteen articles/chapters that show a strong theoretical foundation of multilingualism with a variety of collaborative methodologies and a detailed review of previous studies and references. One of the excellent characteristics is that all fourteen articles utilize the same theoretical framework from the article, “A Transdisciplinary Approach Framework for SLA in a Multilingual World” (Douglas Fir Group, *The Modern Language Journal*, vol. 100, issues S1, 2016. 19–47). The framework proposes a transdisciplinary approach in which SLA educators should cross disciplinary boundaries and engage in three levels of social activities: micro level, meso level, and macro level. At the micro level, L2 teachers should expand learners’ opportunities to access various semiotic resources (e. g., multilingual and multimodal resources for meaning-making). At the meso level, L2 teachers should create increasingly complex meaning-making contexts for learners to use newly gained resources to engage with others in classrooms, social institutions, and communities. At the macro level, L2 teachers should understand what kinds of content and how to teach the content will impact learners’ development of L2 performances and their motivations, investment, and agency for L2 learning. Therefore, L2 teachers need to adopt a variety of instructional approaches that can facilitate communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Today’s multilingualism (versus monolingualism or conventional language education) is interacting with a variety of socioemotional, sociocultural, sociopolitical, and ideological factors.

The following are summaries of five sections and fourteen articles, highlighting a methodology employed in each chapter that describes how the framework has effectively achieved L2 learning outcomes, as well as improve the learner’s motivation and future L2 collaborative activities.

Section one has three chapters that establish a theoretical foundation. Chapter 1, “Introduction: Collaborative Chinese and Japanese Language Teaching from a Transdisciplinary Perspective” by Li Jin and Nobuko Chikamatsu, introduces the purpose of this volume and accentuates that a

transdisciplinary approach can benefit particularly Chinese and Japanese with four aspects: translanguaging, multimodal semiotic resources, identity and motivation, and cognitive development (4–5). Chapter 2, “Teaching and Learning of East Asian Languages in the Era of ‘Trans-’” by Junko Mori, examines the “trans” theory in detail and displays very a readable history of East Asian languages course offerings in the U. S. educational system and presents how she envisions the future of language education (31–33). Mori presents strong arguments for the importance of the “trans” vision and its potential for increased collaboration as well as the theoretical foundation of this volume. Chapter 3, “Translanguaging and Co-Learning at the Interface of Language and Culture” by Li Wei, claims that the landscape of language teaching and learning has fundamentally changed now by increased diversity in learning conditions and motivation (45). Therefore, second language educators need to train the learner to be bilingual and multilingual as well as intercultural by providing opportunities with co-learning activities. Without understanding culture and context, the author argues, language studies are not effective.

Section two, “Across Disciplines,” reveals examples of the transdisciplinary collaboration between the content specialists and the language educators. Chapter 4, “Translanguaging with Food and Ethics: Translating Languages, Enhancing Agencies, and Expanding Horizons” by Yuki Miyamoto and Nobuko Chikamatsu, highlights the importance and opportunity of the Foreign Language Across Curriculum (FLAC) model by presenting a course that involved two faculty members’ collaboration using the translanguaging pedagogy. The course is designed to be taught by the two instructors (language and content specialists) under the same themes whereby the learner of the second language (L2) acquires knowledge through content learning in the first/stronger language (L1). The FLAC course is a full-credit course, but the course titles are based on the affiliation of each instructor. They are entitled “Religions and Ethics in Japanese Foodscape” (REL/L1) and “Food and Ethics in Japan” (JAP/L2), which are aimed at advanced Japanese learners. The course is organized with themes on food and occupational discrimination in Japan, food and nationalism, and food, health, and illness. The content course taught in L1 offers historical and philosophical knowledge of Japan, and the L2 course offers opportunities for students to use primary sources to enhance reading and discussion of topics. The authors suggest the importance of constant communication between the two instructors. They also point out that one of the weak points of the FLAC course was less L2

input for L2 learners (62); however, one strong point is that learners are given greater access to multimodal and multisensory resources.

Chapter 5, “Teaching Chinese through Classic Literature: A Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration” by Jinai Sun and Stuart Patterson, examines the collaboration between Chinese classical literature and Chinese language courses and argues that language instructors should be open to adopting literary and other “high” cultural materials for lessons, which will support motivation of learning of the target language (78). Chapter 6, “Promoting Translingual and Transcultural Literacies in a Collaborative Content-Based Japanese Classroom: Audiovisual Translation as Pedagogy” by Saori Hoshi and Ayaka Yoshimizu, exemplifies how Critical Content-Based Instruction (CCBI) is applied to a course that combined Japanese media and translation for advanced Japanese language learners. The course was offered by two instructors: one is a Japanese language instructor, and the other is a media/cultural studies instructor. The course contains two thematic units that focus on sociological, cultural, and sociolinguistic issues of gender and sexuality, and colonialism, race, and identity (84). They argue that Japanese teaching materials, such as textbooks, provide very limited or no resources about language varieties such as alternative and non-normative usage of gendered language that could expand learners’ linguistic repertoires (93).

In Chapter 7, “Wellbeing and Chinese Language Study: A Case of Cross-Disciplinary Teaching” Chieh Li, Ann Cai, and Dongying Liu, present two projects: the Bilingual Guided Meditation (BGM) Project and the Bilingual Cultural Comparison (BCC) Project. The BGM Project is a collaboration between a language professor and a psychology professor, in which meditation is implemented at the beginning and/or the end of classes. The BCC project is part of a study abroad program, serving students to develop interdisciplinary and cross-cultural understandings of wellbeing. There are two parts of the BCC Project: pre-departure and at the study abroad sites. In the pre-departure part, each student explores Chinese culture. During the study abroad program in China, students are paired with language partners at the host institution and they study quantum physics, evolutionary psychology, and Buddhist philosophy to gain an understanding of Chinese culture. The authors admit that meditation during class periods is time-consuming, but meditation helps cultivate a mindset for studying the subjects (105). Overall, section two presents various projects involving two instructors’ collaboration with interdisciplinary approaches, demonstrating meaningful attempts and

enhanced language learning. The above four chapters not only provide ideas for interdisciplinary collaboration but also report the effects of the learner's long-term cognitive development.

Section three, "Across Communities: Language and Community Partner Collaboration" presents two studies on internship programs that argue that L2 should be provided in concrete real-life situations and socializing experiences. Chapter 8, "Negotiating C2 Expectation and Third-Space Personae in Transdisciplinary L2 Learning: Collaboration with Chinese Professionals in Advanced Chinese Language Curricula" by Xin Zhang, presents a collaborative project between a Chinese language educator and a career service manager at the joint-venture university. This university offers a Chinese resume-building workshop and a mock interview opportunity to develop skills to be successful in the Chinese job market. With success stories, Zhang emphasizes the importance of situating L2 learners in appropriate societal contexts and argues that teaching materials and curriculum should be grounded in real-life settings between the L2 learners and their instructors (126). Chapter 9, "Internships at Japanese Orphanages: A Case Study of a First-Year Japanese Language Student's Growth" by Nobuko Koyama, also presents success stories for a ten-week volunteer (internship) experience at affiliated children's homes (e. g., orphanages) in Japan through the university's internship program. To be eligible for this internship, students must have completed at least one year of a university-level Japanese language course. The interns are paired with a partner whose Japanese is at a lower or higher level and sent to one of the children's homes throughout Japan. The volunteer work includes basic housekeeping, daily interaction, and activities such as assisting with a summer festival and summer camp, assisting staff, and teaching English. In exchange, the children's home provides free room and board. Koyama reports that L2 learners gained impactful language learning opportunities and cultural experiences which resulted in L2 learner's holistic growth (139). The success of these projects is crucial to teamwork among educators, school administrators, and communities across borders.

Section 4, "Across Languages: "Chinese-Japanese and Multi-Language Collaboration," examines the possibility of collaboration between Chinese and Japanese courses. Chapter 10, "An Experiment of Cross-Language and Cross-Disciplinary Collaboration: Integrating Xu Bing's Text-Based Arts into Chinese and Japanese Classrooms" by Noriko Sugimori and Leihua Weng, introduces a course project in which students

of Chinese and Japanese create artworks using *hanji* and kanji. The students of Chinese in this course have learned 260 *hanji* while the students of Japanese have learned 540 kanji prior to this project. To facilitate learning of *hanji*/kanji, the instructors used the theory of Culture and Language Across Curriculum (CLAC) and utilized text-based *hanji*/kanji artworks by Xu Bing (e. g., *Book from Sky*, 1987–1991; *Living World*, 2001; *Book from the Ground*, 2003; *Art for the People for the Met*, 2020). There are four steps to complete the project: (1) introductory lecture on Xu Bing’s artworks (twenty minutes), (2) creating one’s own square words (twenty minutes), (3) between class correspondences (after-class assignment), and (4) student presentations (seventy-five minutes). Sugimori and Weng report that through this project the students showed positive signs of understanding of East Asian studies and success in forming L2 learning communities for students of Chinese and Japanese (156). Chapter 11, “Cross-Language and Cross-Disciplinary Collaborations in a Mandarin CLAC Course” by Yan Liu, presents a Chinese course collaborating with environmental faculty in which students learn about environmental issues by reading articles both in English and Chinese. This is a half-credit tutorial course, meeting seventy-five minutes a week. Liu reports that the Chinese CLAC program will help increase the number of Chinese language learners as well as promote the enhancement of Chinese interdisciplinary courses (172).

Section 5, “Across Borders: International Collaboration” contains three studies, two of which are about international telecollaboration with an online magazine project and the third is a Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) project. The last study presents the potential and importance of meso (semiotic) and macro levels of trans-language pedagogy for future L2 language education. Chapter 12, “The United States–Japan Online Magazine Project: International Telecollaborations as Translanguaging Spaces” by Yuri Kumagai and Momoyo Shimazu, presents an experimental collaborative project of making an online magazine, through which they challenge notions of monolingualism and native-speakerism. The project facilitated the opportunity to produce meaning-centered activities, allowing L2 learners to engage in the negotiation of linguistic and cultural meaning. Students in a third-year Japanese course at a U. S. university and students in a seminar course at two Japanese universities participated in the project. The project successfully achieved the primary goals that students connected with each

other and effectively attained their shared objectives through collaborative work (179–180).

In chapter 13, “Transcending Borders and Limitations with Digitally Enhanced Pedagogy: Language Learning-focused COIL (LLC) for Japanese Learners and Prospective Teachers,” Keiko Ikeda and Nobuko Chikamatsu present a collaboration between the U. S. and Japan that took advantage of the pandemic learning situations, where advanced communication technology (such as video conference and applications to exchange written and recorded messages) became prevalent. The students in a Japanese translation course at a U. S. university and students in a teacher-preparation course at a Japanese university took part in this telecommunication project to produce accurate and complete translations of original Japanese literary works into English. The goals of American university students were to interpret the original Japanese works and translate them into English, understand different cultural and new linguistic perspectives, as well as to develop communication skills with any accessible resources. For the students in Japan, the goals were to interact with learners of Japanese outside of Japan, experience teaching Japanese to L2 speakers, and build their intercultural competence by working as part of an international team (200). Through the pedagogical theory of Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL), the students in both countries had positive learning experiences beyond the classroom setting.

In Chapter 14, “Coda,” Nobuko Chikamatsu and Li Jin summarize each chapter’s key points and reiterate the following five points for the future development of a transdisciplinary approach. First, institutional agenda along with administrative support and selection of project methodology (e. g., COIL, FLAC, Community-Based Learning, etc.) are essential for successful implementation of the transdisciplinary approach. Second, the selection of common themes equally interesting or appealing to diverse student groups is essential for a successful collaborative project. Third, all collaborative projects must assess sustainability by checking enrollment, instructional support, and faculty teaching load, including such factors as course credit, faculty availability, and their commitment to sustainable projects. Fourth, although all projects presented in this volume involved the upper levels (third year and beyond) of Japanese at the college level, the collaborative projects could be available for lower-level L2 courses at both K–12 and post-secondary institutions. Fifth, they argue that it is a time of change from the conventional language-literature curricular

model to an area-studies model in which language education is embedded in the integrative curriculum combined (or in tandem) with other humanities, business, international relations, sciences, health, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses in the university. Given the declining enrollments in upper levels of second/foreign language courses at the U. S. college level, Chikamatsu and Jin suggest that FLAC will help enhance the visibility of second/foreign language courses and shift the status of language courses from being technical skill/L2 acquisition to the cultivation of critical and analytical thinking skills (215–216).

The editors of this volume set the counterpoint to a conventional L2 curriculum that aims at the acquisition of the four skills of foreign language (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) with an emphasis on learning vocabulary and grammar, and they strongly urge the need to change the narrowly focused curricular model (213). Successfully implementing the transdisciplinary approach, however, may require a teacher's strong motivation and time-consuming effort as well as administrators' understanding, institutional resources, and optimal environment. All the transdisciplinary projects presented in this volume were successful, but some teachers may have concerns due to their academic position, institutional vision, and resources. For example, even if the teacher wants to try, there may be cases where their supervisor does not understand the transdisciplinary approach and requires them to follow a conventional curriculum. Similarly, a teacher may not get consensus from their colleagues or their institution. In these cases, however, teachers could incorporate cultural studies into the curriculum with limited flexibility, for example, by showing videos and/or implementing cultural activities in the classroom. Even if it is on a very small scale, it is possible to incorporate an interdisciplinary approach into a curriculum focused mainly on language acquisition. Interdisciplinary collaboration projects introduced in this volume are all at the college level, but further research on collaboration and interdisciplinary practices at the K–12 levels would help promote the transdisciplinary approach. Overall, *TACJLT* suggests the possibility of richer course designs and enhanced learning experiences through collaboration among teachers, institutions, and overseas exchange programs. With the editors' convincing argument for this innovative approach along with a well-coordinated lineup of studies founded on the transdisciplinary theoretical framework, *TACJLT* makes a unique and significant contribution to the field of Japanese language education.