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LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN
CHINESE AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE: THE DEVELOPMENT
OF TEXTBOOKS AND THEIR
CULTURAL CONTENT

Thesis for the Degree of MA (Ed)

by

Yannan Guo

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LANGUAGE AND CULTURE IN CHINESE AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE: THE DEVELOPMENT OF TEXTBOOKS AND THEIR
CULTURAL CONTENT

(MA Abstract - January 1997)

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This thesis focuses on the issue of cultural content in foreign language learning materials. In it I first surveyed the studies on the issues concerning cultural and language learning: the relationship of language and culture, language use and language learning, the influence of culture on language learning and intercultural competence, and the implications of cultural learning for the general aims of foreign language education. These studies form a theoretic framework for the issue of language and cultural learning. On the basis of this framework I carried out an examination on the two sets of learning materials for Learning Chinese as a Foreign Language, which I have used for teaching for a few years, from the point of view of intercultural competence development.

The survey shows that the process of language learning involves both cognitive development and affective development, therefore in the learning both of the aspects have to be addressed adequately if the aims of language learning shall include producing an intercultural competence rather than merely acquiring language skills, which is far from enough for cross-cultural communication and for real understanding of the target language.

The analysis of the learning materials is developed after a survey of criteria for evaluating the cultural dimension of textbooks. The analysis indicates that although the importance of culture to understanding meanings and, to some degree, for the understanding of the perspectives of the native has been recognized in both of the coursebooks, yet the role of culture in the affective development of the learner does not seem to have been fully appreciated, particularly in one of the coursebooks, without which it is not conceivable that learners would observe the world from the native's perspectives and appreciate the differences between their own culture and the target culture. The analysis also suggests that more efforts are needed, particularly in one of the courses, to create better chance for learners to understand the relationship between social behaviours and social roles and social environment.

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January 1997

Yannan Guo

INTRODUCTION

A culture is a unique force which unifies a community as well as separates it from others. Each culture is expressed in its unique ways of thinking and behaving. And the specific characteristics of a culture, through which the members of a community identify themselves and share meanings, would often be difficult for people outside to understand and/or to appreciate. For instance, every society has its own standards of sense of right and wrong, which could either be totally different from others' or just have slight divergence, and specific rules and meanings for social etiquette. Without knowing the specific meanings and the specific behaviours required in a culture anyone from outside it would have a lot of difficulties to understand the people of that community and to communicate successfully with them.

It is not an unusual experience for many people that language communication breaks down because of culture barriers. This can be illustrated by an anecdote of a Chinese professor who came to Britain to do some academic research work. This professor was invited by his British counterparts to work on a project. When he met his British colleagues in a welcoming party he was requested to say a few words to introduce himself and his work experience. Not being aware of the culture differences between them he didn't talk much about what he had done and his experience in his field, instead he stressed that he came to learn from his hosts, which is what would be an expected behaviour in a situation like this in China. And to show his modesty and as a sign of showing respect of others' opinions, he did not express much of his own for the first few days. He soon found out that he had been suspected of being incompetent to do what he had been expected to do because he did not appear confident enough to his hosts, and had therefore not been trusted to do what he had been expected to do. Here the linguistic ability may not be the cause of the problem, at least it is not the main one. The cause of this failure in communication, in a large degree, is because both sides

acted and interpreted each other's behaviours on the basis of their own cultural norms of social behaviours. That is, they were both unaware of the existence of other meaning(s) of the social behaviours they had both demonstrated. In this case the Chinese behavioural norm, upon which this Chinese professor acted, which requires people to demonstrate their modesty by understating whatever they may have achieved, was not understood by the British colleagues of this professor, so the embedded meaning was not picked up.

This example demonstrates that a knowledge of a culture forms a kind of conceptual framework, through which people regulate their behaviours and understand each other. Therefore to communicate with people of a different cultural and social environment requires, on top of the things like linguistic abilities, willingness to be in touch with each other, etc., a good knowledge of the culture involved.

In the traditional approach language was treated somehow as a self-contained independent entity and language learning was focused on constructing sentences, which are meaningful in their own right because the learning is aimed at mastering linguistic structures, but less meaningful in terms of social interactions (Widdowson, 1984, pp. 1-2, 18-20). For instance issues of social relationship, social context, and so on which, as we are going to see, affect the way language is used in real communication, cannot be tackled at sentence level. And studies of anthropologists, sociologists, sociolinguists and psycholinguists have shown that people's linguistic behaviours are the outcomes of the interactive act of various factors; linguistic and extralinguistic, such as that of sociocultural, sociological and psychological, etc. (see Hymes, 1964, 1971; Pride, 1974). Therefore only when the extralinguistic aspects of language use (contrast with usage, cf. Widdowson, 1978, pp. 3-4) is addressed alongside the linguistic aspect in the language learning can one be expected to be communicatively competent. The emergence of the communicative approach has provided a powerful means to address the issue of language use.

The above quoted incident indicates clearly that intercultural communication requires an awareness and understanding of the cultural constraints on the linguistic behaviours of the target language group, and this goes beyond an understanding of social roles and social context in a general sense. That is learners should be made aware of the impact of profound conceptual differences in intercultural communication, and be informed of those specific characteristics which have dominant influence on the behaviours of the members of the target community. From the communicative point of view learners should then be helped to develop the ability to understand and respond appropriately when contacting the native.

Yet teaching a foreign language involves a great deal more than simply facilitating learners in their acquiring the skills and knowledge for communication. It should, as argued by Byram, also be a process in which learners are provided with the chance 'to acquire a greater depth of vision of the world, another dimension of experience...' (Byram, 1989, p. 14). As he points out, a utilitarian approach is not only unfeasible, but also reduces the educational values of foreign language learning. (*Ibid*, pp. 11-23) Learning a foreign language is also a process which inevitably involves the participation of learners' emotions. What is meant is that learners will necessarily come across some different concepts and different sets of standards of values in learning the target language, some of which may be in conflict with their own. This on the one hand will broaden their vision of the world, and on the other will affect them consciously or sub-consciously either in a positive way or a negative way. The term 'culture shock' (see Brown, 1986) is used to describe the discomfort learners may feel when they are in contact with a culture that appears strange to them. It may affect their attitudes towards that culture, or even towards the learning itself. This is not a matter that can be avoided, or should be, in teaching a foreign language, rather it should be tackled by leading learners to be more aware of their own culture base and therefore to be encouraged to see the other culture in light of its own virtue (Byram, 1989, pp. 102-19), so that the

culture and the learning itself may become more positive and meaningful.

Nevertheless, under the term of 'culture' is a concept which covers a wide-range of human life experience. Which part(s) of culture is(are) relevant to the purpose of language learning? In what way and to what extent could a sociocultural perspective benefit language learning? And how to incorporate language and culture in the learning? In this thesis I will first discuss the relationship of the two and look at it from the perspective of language education. On the basis of that I will look into some of the Chinese language textbooks to see if attention has been given to the cultural aspect of language learning, and if the answer is yes, how much learners could benefit from it. But first I think it is useful to give a general background by providing a brief picture of the state of affairs of the field of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (TCFL).

§0.1 The Development of the Field of TCFL

The field of TCFL has been developing at a fast speed since the end of the 1970s as the direct result of China's open door policy in 1978. Since China opened her door there have been more and more contacts between Chinese people and people from all over the world. While Chinese people embrace with enthusiasm the world which was closed to them for a long time, the rest of the world also shows great interest in getting to know and in touch with the people and their culture. The uniqueness and richness of this civilisation, the beauty of the country and the fast development of her economy have inspired all sorts of interests. Thus for different purposes more and more people in the world have taken interest in learning Chinese language and culture.

To meet this increasing demand, there has been a steady development in the field of TCFL. This development is reflected both in the growing size of this business and, more significantly, in the way TCFL is perceived and practised. The latter involves the changes TCFL has gone through in every aspect of the teaching procedure, from the educational theory, teaching policy down to the way the

language is taught and tested. Of course these changes are the result of constant efforts made in improving the teaching quality and in bringing this learning to meet the demands of the society. But more specifically they are due to both the impact brought to language education by researches made world-wide on language, language learning, language and society, etc. as well as the efforts made in understanding the characteristics of TCFL. Yet in particular, it is the introduction of the communicative approach that has contributed the most in changing the direction of its courses. It has changed the entire way of thinking of what Chinese language learning should be about and how it should be carried out.

Text materials have been an important part of this change, for textbooks decide, to a large degree, what learners are to learn about and how to learn it. Even if teachers can alter partly the contents of a book(s) they are using or the order of the contents to suit their needs, or emphasize different parts in class, nevertheless what they can do is restricted by the structure of the book(s). As for students, particularly at an early stage, they have to rely a great deal on their textbooks. In this sense textbooks play a key role in leading the direction of learners' development. In order to implement the new ideas into Chinese language learning a lot of efforts have been made in constructing new TCFL learning materials, and consequently quite a number of new textbooks of various kinds have been produced. In this thesis I would like to analyse from a cultural perspective some of the textbooks produced in the early 1980s and still used today for the purpose of promoting communicative competence. I think, as an important instrument to fulfil educational aims, learning materials can be viewed as a kind of precursor of the development of a field of study.

§0.2 The Booming of the Field of TCFL

First of all there have been many expansions of teaching organisations and research organisations in and out of China for TCFL. For instance in mainland China the number of universities and other organisations which are involved in

TCFL increased significantly, from a very few to about a hundred by 1990 (Lü, 1990, pp. 8-11). In the UK several centres of Chinese studies have been set up in recent years. And besides the expansion of those universities which have offered courses of Chinese studies for many years, there have been more universities offering Chinese language courses of various kinds either as degree courses or as optional courses, for instance, in Westminster University, in Lancaster University, and in Luton University, etc., even though this growth compared with that in, for instance, Australia, America, Japan, etc. is not very fast.

There has also been the establishment of some national and international organisations for research and for exchange of information and experience in TCFL since the early 1980s, such as China's Research Association of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (中国对外汉语教学研究会), the International Association of Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (世界汉语教学学会), and the Centre of International Exchange on Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (世界汉语交流中心), etc. (*Ibid.* pp. 15-6). These organisations have provided opportunities for cooperations in research and in teaching in this field, and have done a great deal for the development of this field. Furthermore some journals for researches in TCFL have also been established.

More importantly an examination board - The Committee of Chinese Language Proficiency Test (the committee of Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi, HSK for short) has been set up to encourage and standardise Chinese language learning world-wide. Since it started to operate in 1990, it has carried out examinations in many countries. Now there have been established 34 test centres for TCFL all over the world, including UK, Germany, France, and Italy in Europe (*《人民日报·海外版》 People's Daily - Overseas' Edition*, 31 Oct. 1995). Its establishment shows not only the increase in the demand for learning Chinese as a foreign language, but also the fact that the field of TCFL has set up a form of standard for Chinese language learning world-wide for the first time. It implies that TCFL is no longer a business which relies mostly on an individual's experience,

rather it is becoming an independent system which has its own policy and which should be capable of providing a general guidance for learning and teaching both theoretically and practically.

But what is more profound in this development is the change of the aims of the learning and consequently the change in the approaches to learning, which form the basis for the contents of and the way of the teaching and the testing.

§0.3 Shifting the Emphasis of Learning in TCFL: from Learning the Language Skills to Fostering Communicative Competence

Roughly speaking, TCFL was mainly dominated by structuralism until the late 1970s when the communicative approach was introduced into this practice, bringing a lot of changes to it. (Lü, 1990, pp. 27-30) It was the tradition of Chinese language learning to concern itself mainly with the written form of the language. Until before the Second World War the learning emphasised almost entirely the classic form, because the purpose of learning the language was largely associated with the need and desire to understand the tradition of Chinese culture - the part of culture which has been written down to show the development and the achievements of this civilisation, such as Chinese philosophy, Chinese history, Chinese arts and literature and so on. Everyday language used by people in the streets was regarded as vulgar, therefore not worthy of learning. So the major concern was to acquire the knowledge of the language structures so as to decipher the linguistic codes rather than to know how the language is used in real life situations. Modern Chinese came into Chinese language learning around the time of the Second World War (Zhang, 'Preface' in *The Programme Of The TCFL Development*, 1990, pp. 1-2), but then the emphasis in the learning was again very much structure oriented, and often, classic Chinese was still an important part of the learning, because the focus of the learning remained the same - gaining access to written works of academic value.

This tradition of Chinese language learning has obviously little to do with

the everyday life of the people. The learning centres on the structures and vocabulary of the language, and the language samples for learning were often sentences with little meaning in them. Although, for instance, in mainland China some efforts were made to promote the practical use of the language (not exactly in the communicative sense) since the early 1970s (Lü, 1990, pp. 40-3), it was not until the communicative approach was introduced into Chinese language teaching in China by the end of the 1970s and early 1980s that this situation was changed and attention was gradually turned from teaching the knowledge of the language into teaching how to use the language for practical purposes. The most obvious factor contributing to this change is that with more and more direct contacts between Chinese people and other peoples it was becoming clear then that the traditional structural approach cannot satisfy the demand of the society for cross-cultural communication. On the other hand in the middle of the 1970s the concept of communicative competence gradually came into China and attracted some attention in the circle of TCFL teachers there. As a result, around the beginning of the 1980s the first attempt was made to change the way LCFL had been carried out by producing new learning materials and improving the teaching methods. Since then communicative competence has been made a main objective of TCFL.

It has to be made clear here that although a lot of what has been said about the changes is based on information of what has happened in mainland China, yet to a large extent, in my opinion, it reflects the general situation of the field of TCFL both in and out of China. Because although there could have been some differences between different Chinese language teaching institutions in the world, yet the general trend in the entire field of TCFL would have inevitably been influenced by the increasing attention China has attracted, and the changes which have happened there, particularly when the teaching materials, especially at the elementary level, have been provided by institutions in China in most cases. And furthermore there has not been an independent system outside mainland China which has as much influence on the development of this field in a systematic way as

the organisations in China have.

§0.4 The Problems which Need to Be Tackled

The importance of the introduction of the communicative approach was commented on by Yu Congyang, a member of China's national leading group for TCFL:

The end of the 1970s and the early 1980s was a turning point for the TCFL in China, which was marked by the introduction into its practice the communicative principle, and by the fact that it has been set as the fundamental aim of the teaching to develop communicative competence in the learner. (Yu, 1991, p. 56, my translation)

With this new focus of learning, changes have been brought to every aspect of the teaching - the way in which the curriculum is designed, classroom activities are organised, the learning materials are constructed as well as the manners in which tests are carried out and so on. Nevertheless as I have said earlier, communicative competence is not a simple concept and there are so many aspects which have to be balanced in the learning, to implement it in the teaching is by no means an easy task. According to Yu Congyang, it is a common phenomenon in the field of TCFL that the concept of communicative competence is often confused with that of language skills. Therefore although fostering communicative competence is clearly stated in many syllabi and curricula, yet there is generally a lack of guidance of what should be done to meet this target. (Yu, 1990, pp. 57-8) As for learning materials, the general situation can be seen from the following observation:

Some of the teaching materials at the present time, which claim to have their emphasis on the communicative competence, have only paid attention to the functional aspect of language, ignoring or caring very little for other aspects. This is obviously not adequate for developing communicative competence. (*Ibid*, p. 58, my translation)

The culture element is one of the aspects which need to be given more attention (Lü, 1990, p. 30).

In this thesis I will first discuss the significance of cultural studies in terms of communicative competence. In Chapter 2, I will look at the wider significance of it - its contribution to the over-all development of a learner - by examining what

is involved in foreign language learning. I am going to try to define the relationship of language and culture, the influence of culture on language learning, and the importance of creating culture awareness. Then I will try to establish criteria for selecting culture content. In Chapter 5, I will apply the criteria to some textbooks I have chosen to see how far the culture element of language learning has been explored and been integrated in TCFL.

CHAPTER ONE

A SHIFT OF EMPHASIS ON FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING - FROM DEVELOPING LINGUISTIC ABILITY TO DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

It is significant to the development of foreign language teaching to introduce into its practice the concept of communicative competence. Significant, because it has brought a lot of changes to the concepts of language and language learning, and has, in no small degree, changed the way language teaching is conducted. That is, by examining the way language functions in real life a great deal more has been learned about the complex nature of language and language learning. Thus instead of taking language as a self-contained, independent system attention has been given to the relationship of language and various social factors which affect the way language is used for various social purposes in various social contexts. It has been recognised that language learning involves much more than acquiring a knowledge of linguistic structures, therefore in teaching practice focus has been gradually shifted from mainly explaining and practising some linguistic structures - morphological and grammatical structures, lexical features of a language etc. - to helping learners to understand how language functions for social communicational purposes, so as to enable them to develop the abilities to use the target language appropriately and effectively in real social communications.

As we have seen from the example in the introduction cultural understanding has a very important role to play in cross-cultural interactions. In terms of intercultural communication it means that in language teaching attention has also to be paid to those sociocultural aspects which are significant in influencing the way communication is conducted in the target culture and to the issue of raising a culture awareness in learners as well (see Byram, 1989, pp. 142-

4), which will be dealt with in the next chapter. In order to see the significance of cultural studies for the development of the communicative abilities in learners in language learning it is necessary for us to have a look first at the main ideas of the communicative approach.

§1.1 The Assumption of the Structure-Oriented Approaches

It can be said that traditionally the main concern of foreign language teaching was to assist learners in their acquisition of the knowledge of a language system, not the knowledge of how to use it for real social purposes. A quick look at the history of foreign language teaching will reveal that before social, sociocultural and psychological dimensions of language phenomena were formally recognised in this discipline various approaches had been developed with this focusing point in mind (see Stern, 1983; Strevens, 1977; Wilkins, 1972). The grammar-translation method, the direct method, the audiolingual method, and the cognitive-code approach, etc., though based on different theories and with different emphasis on teaching, as we are going to see, are all developed on more or less the same assumption - language learning is mainly about the acquisition of a set of linguistic skills or habits, and once learners have acquired a sufficient knowledge of how the structural system is operated, and simultaneously grasped its underlying meanings, they could either go on to understand and to produce infinite sentences through synthesising (see Wilkins, 1976, pp. 1-14) in the cognitive point of view or react naturally in response to stimuli in the behaviourist point of view. Hence there should be no problem for learners to use it once they are familiar with the language system. Thus the objectives of language learning are set to acquire basically the linguistic skills.

The grammar-translation method and the cognitive-code approaches basically have their foci of learning on developing learners' abilities to understand grammatical and lexical structures of a language. That is, with these methods learners are directed to the issues first of how a language is formed at different

levels of the linguistic system to transmit meanings, and secondly of its intrinsic patterns. They would thus be able to know how the linguistic system works, and therefore, it is assumed, to be capable of getting the information being transmitted and also getting across their own ideas through this linguistic means. Since it is the case that for a long time in the past the main aims of foreign language learning were linked with the abilities to get access to literature of various kinds in the target language, the grammar-translation method cares mostly about the skills of reading and, less importantly, writing. The other language skills, namely: listening and speaking are often largely ignored in this approach, but given more attention in other approaches.

The direct method, as the name suggests, emphasises learners' not using their native language as a medium in the process of learning, but responding directly to the target language that they are exposed to. '...it advocated learning by hearing the language spoken, forbidding all use of the learner's native language in class;' (Stevens, 1977, p. 3) This direct experience is to be internalised and to be re-activated once learners are under similar circumstances. Learning is somehow treated as a process of acquiring a set of new linguistic habits through being exposed to the target language directly and repeatedly, so much so that the use of learners' native language is to be avoided for it is considered as an interfering factor interfering with the forming of the new habits. But this view is different from the cognitive point of view where learning is assumed to be a process of developing the cognitive abilities of analysing and analogising, not forming a set of linguistic habits. But again it is the structures that matter, so linguistic habits are not often presented with clear connections to their social contexts.

Attempting to encourage the development of listening and speaking skills in learners so that they would be able to conduct face-to-face interactions, in the 1950s 'the audio-lingual method was consciously developed on the theoretical bases of the findings of Bloomfieldian structuralist linguistics and of behaviourist psychology, ...' (Stevens, 1977, p. 3). In this approach the skills for engaging in

direct interactions, which were previously ignored in grammar-translation, are given much more emphasis so learners are encouraged to listen to and speak the target language as well as learn to read and write. The value of this method lies in its emphasis on the practical use of language for direct social encounters rather than on structural aspects of language. Although social contexts from everyday life are presented as the backgrounds for language activities, yet what is aimed at is largely acquisition of linguistic habits and skills. The social aspect of language encounter is only dealt with incidentally.

Whatever the theoretical differences between these approaches, the focus of learning is basically the same: about language per se rather than about language use - that is, the social aspect of language behaviour and social influence on language behaviour are not recognized. Therefore how to develop the abilities to communicate in the target language for the purpose of social interactions with the native seems almost irrelevant to language learning either from the descriptive linguistic point of view or from the behaviourist point of view, since it is believed that once learners have got sufficient knowledge of a linguistic system, or in other words, know how to operate the linguistic system, they either would respond spontaneously to stimuli or would be able to produce whatever they wish. The view on potential linguistic abilities held by descriptive linguists is summarised by Hymes when he criticises the transformational-generative view of linguistics competence:

Linguistic competence is understood as concerned with the tacit knowledge of language structure, that is, knowledge that is commonly not conscious or available for spontaneous report, but necessarily implicit in what the (ideal) speaker-listener can say... It is in terms of such knowledge that one can produce and understand an infinite set of sentences, and that language can be spoken of as 'creative' as *energeia*. (Hymes, 1971, p. 7)

But the belief that this linguistic competence will lead naturally to the actual use of the language leads to the grammar-structure view being adopted widely in foreign language teaching, as pointed out by Widdowson:

The assumption that the language teacher appears to make is that once this basis [knowledge about sentence production] is provided, then the learner

will have no difficulty in dealing with the actual use of language: that once the competence is acquired, performance will take care of itself. (Widdowson, 1979, p. 89)

Since all the above mentioned approaches have committed their attention to the acquisition of linguistic skills or habits, or to the learning of knowledge about language, they can be described, in general terms, as structure-oriented approaches as opposed to the communicative approach which we are going to discuss below, and in this thesis I will use this term with reference to such a contrast.

The principle taken by the structure-oriented approaches is how to teach most effectively the structures of a language. (see Wilkins, 1983, pp. 82-90) This is reflected clearly in the design of syllabuses and learning materials for the structure-oriented approaches, in which each learning unit is organised around a single or a few grammar items, and drills and texts are created or chosen to strengthen the learning of this (these) grammar item(s). Sentences given as models are usually unrelated in meaning, but bear the same grammatical features. Usually grammar and lexical items are very carefully selected and graded in a way so that learners can build up their knowledge of the language gradually and efficiently. But the problem is that little information is given on how the language functions in its sociocultural environment.

Consequently as learners start applying what they have acquired through this kind of course to practical use, they are likely to be confronted with a lot of problems which they would not expect. For example, they may feel difficult in asking their way around in strange cities where the target language is used in spite of the fact that they have the linguistic means at their disposal. Or as the example shown in the introduction, one could be incapable of communicating with the native simply on the ground that s/he has no idea what linguistic behaviour is expected for a given situation in the target culture. In a word, there are social and sociocultural barriers which prevent him/her from entering into the native's world.

This inadequacy of the learning has led us to two important questions. First, what are the differences between the language used in real social contexts and the

language learners are encouraged to learn in the structure-oriented approaches? Or to put it from a different angle, what is or are the factor(s) causing the difference between the native's abilities and that of the learner? And secondly, how can language teaching be improved in this respect? These we shall discuss below.

§1.2 The Limitation of the Structure-Oriented Approaches

Any decision to what to teach and how to teach a language has to be based upon an answer, either explicitly or implicitly, of one kind or another to the question of 'What is language teaching about?'. And that will lead to another question: 'What is language?' As we have seen above, in regard to the first question it is assumed by the structure-oriented approaches that once learners have mastered a sufficient knowledge of the linguistic structures/habits of the target language they would then have no problems in applying them to real use whenever necessary. It seems to suggest that language is basically a set of linguistic structures and rules to which meaning is attached. If that were the case language learning would logically be a process of mastering the linguistic structures and rules.

Now let us take a deeper look at this assumption. If we assume that once learners have acquired enough linguistic knowledge they could then use it meaningfully and effectively to deal with problems they encounter in given social contexts, then we have to agree that language is an autonomous system which is independent of other social factors and is constant in meaning. To state it in another way, we have to agree that there exists an exclusive corresponding relation between meaning and linguistic structures. Thus when learners learn to operate the linguistic structures they would simultaneously pick up the meaning attached to them, but not from elsewhere. Furthermore, since sentence structures are given most attention in the structure-oriented approaches, it is argued that it is only legitimate to centre our learning on sentence structures if we can agree that meaning making is confined to sentence level.

Firstly, examining the way language is dealt with by the structure-oriented approaches reveals that language is regarded as an independent body which by nature is separate from social factors. It is quite a conviction of those who hold the structuralist point of view that the problem of language can be solved once the generic properties and the inherent laws of language are fully understood. To them language is an autonomous abstract entity which exists in the form of grammatical and lexical structures, and with which various social and cultural ideas can be expressed. According to some structural linguists what people actually produce, which varies between people and which could be imperfect, are variants of the abstract linguistic system. For example Saussure (1916) uses '*la langue*' and '*la parole*', and Chomsky (1965) uses '*linguistic competence*' and '*linguistic performance*' to distinguish the difference between the abstract body of language knowledge and individual's actual use, or utterance of language. To them what language learning should be based upon is the abstract body of '*la langue*' or '*competence*' which is consistent and perfect, not the '*la parole*' or '*performance*' which is based on an individual's acts, hence irregular and imperfect. With these contrasts the authors try to demonstrate the independence and autonomy of language system and the value of the structural approach. With these contrasts the influence of sociocultural and other factors on language is brushed away as irregular outcomes of individual's 'performance'. By transformational-generative grammar Chomsky tries to define the underlying body of knowledge which he calls '*deep structures*', and with which, it is believed, one is able to generate infinite sentences.

But problems come when we have to face the language reality: language behaviours differ between social groups as well as in different social circumstances. There are regional differences, social-economic differences, age differences, sex differences, religious differences and ethnic differences, etc., and each has influence on the way language is used. People may have different language behaviours when they assume different social roles. For example, with a friend a lawyer's language

will be very different from that with a client. How can that be accounted for when the learning concerns little about anything else other than the formation of structures? Clearly the theory of structuralism cannot provide adequate explanations to the questions of why and how people should adopt different linguistic expressions and when and where they do that, because the complex issue of language use is not what it is concerned with and capable of explaining.

One reason for being so could be that it has taken meaning for granted. That is, it is believed that meaning is largely derived from lexical and grammatical structures. Therefore from the structuralists' point of view the main task is to know how to handle the structures, which as we shall see further, is inadequate in solving the problem of meaning.

Then where does meaning come from? Of course this is not at all a simple question and is not uncontroversial. We are not going to discuss it in any detail. But according to Halliday meaning comes both from within and beyond the linguistic system (see Halliday, 1973, pp. 27-44). He stresses that we have to recognise the important contributions of sociocultural factors and social settings where language actions take place in the forming of meaning. He says:

First, there are the specifically social aspects of language use: the establishment and maintenance of the individual's social roles, the establishment of familiarity and distance, various forms of boundary maintenance, types of personal interaction and so on. These are largely independent of setting, but relate to generalized social contexts, ... Secondly, there are the situation types, the settings, in which language is used... Here we are concerned not with behaviour patterns that are socially significant in themselves but with socially identifiable units - transactions of various kinds, tasks, games, discussions and the like - within which the behaviour is more or less structured. (Halliday, 1973, pp. 34-5)

Take an example, in examining Javanese code-switching from one language to another Tanner finds that in deciding what option of languages to use in a given situation a Javanese has to consider things like how close the relationship is between him/her and the people s/he is interacting with and what their social status is in order to choose the appropriate language, because each language is designated with certain social roles and associated with certain meanings (quoted in Pride,

1974, p. 28). Clearly a certain meaning is signalled the moment the choice is made. As we can see from this example, meaning comes not only from the linguistic structures themselves, but also from people's understanding of the social structure, that is, their understanding of the relationship of language and social factors. In the view of sociolinguistics meaning can be defined only in its social and cultural contexts since meaning takes its existence not only in linguistic structures, but also in social and cultural structures, like social distance, social position and social environment, etc. It is rather an integrated complex existence which depends heavily on circumstances.

So what is unconvincing in the structuralist point of view is that it ignores the fact that language is never used in isolation of social and cultural contexts in real communication. As Ferguson criticises the descriptive linguists in 1959 they 'fail to provide even the most elementary data about the sociocultural setting in which the language functions' (quoted in Pride, 1974, p. 2). And similar opinions are also expressed by other people. As Hall states: '...ultra-structured grammar will lose touch with linguistic reality, which is that of individual humans speaking to and responding to the speech of other individual humans in the context of their social relationships' (quoted in Pride, 1974, p. 2). With the structural approach the factors which form the social structures, or context of language interactions are largely eliminated in the learning, such as what we have mentioned above: social roles, social distance, different functions of language use, etc. Inevitably learners will gain little understanding about how different people's linguistic behaviours could be when they have different social positions, assume different social roles and act for different social purposes, such as parents' giving orders, or business men trying to convince customers on business deals, or scientists explaining their subject matters, etc. The truth is that the difference of these social aspects signals or influences people's attitudes, and thus results in different linguistic behaviours. Dealing with language in such a context-free fashion (Bernstein's term, 1971) will no doubt deprive learners of the knowledge of the social characteristics of

language and part of the meaning. It is wrong to assume that what is sound in one cultural context will be equally well accepted in another culture. A simple example is that telephone manner differs from culture to culture therefore even people from Denmark or Germany could find the telephone manner of some people in the UK too straightforward, or improper to their ears. Due to the fact that standards of behaviours vary across social groups and cultural groups it is necessary for learners to be aware of them and to know how to deal with them.

On the other hand knowing the linguistic forms does not necessarily imply knowing how to use it for practical purposes. One linguistic structure can be used for different purposes or one purpose can be achieved through different linguistic means. As Hymes states:

What is grammatically the same sentence may be a statement, a command, or a request; what are grammatically two different sentences may as acts both be requests. (Hymes, 1971, p. 16)

Thus whether a question form is used for putting forth a question or for other purposes can only be understood through the context where the language is used. So the actual meaning intended in each social incident can only be traced if the sociocultural context is known. The point is that being able to use a language appropriately and efficiently means knowing much more than linguistic structures. As far as language learning is concerned, it should not only show how a language is formed but also show for what social purposes and under what sociocultural contexts and constraints different linguistic forms are employed. Only in this way will it be possible for learners to understand how to use language more effectively and meaningfully.

Yet this cannot be well achieved with the structure-oriented approaches, because in general the learning is confined to the level of sentence production in such kind of approaches; therefore there is lack of means to tackle meaning sufficiently. What does this actually mean? First as we have discussed above meaning-making depends as much on the knowledge of the sociocultural structures and the social contexts of the language incident as on the knowledge of the

linguistic structures, but teaching sentence formation, as we have discussed, does not include teaching the social knowledge. Secondly a knowledge of the social factors means having an overall understanding of how to conduct social interaction with language, as the above discussion shows, and that also means that the meaning from the social factors goes beyond the boundary of the sentence. For instance, language activity is an interactive activity, particularly in oral form, and it involves constant assessment of the context that one is in and the intention of the other side, and then to plan his own action and send out his signals (see Pride, 1974, pp. 56-60). Only teaching sentence construction could by no means handle meaning at this level.

Of course, the decisions on what manner to be adopted, even what language or dialect is to be used to signal social relations and attitudes are based upon the user's sociocultural and sociological knowledge of how to handle the overall situation. Yet even at the phonological level or semantic level, what pronunciation to be used and what vocabulary to be chosen is not always simple. As studies of sociolinguists have shown, different social groups could have different accents or use different sets of vocabulary, therefore people could employ different accents or vocabulary for different social communicational purposes (see Labov, 1963, 1966). It depends on how the user interprets the social context which s/he is in, such as who s/he is contacting and how s/he wants to project her/his image, etc. As we can see, how the language structures are operated for social functions is not an issue of pure linguistic concern at all. The influence of the social aspect on linguistic features is profound and is at every level. To base language learning on sentence structures only will not reflect the reality of how language is used in social communication.

Sociolinguists have been trying to identify various social factors which contribute meaning at various levels and to locate their distributions. What is stressed in their studies is that language is a social phenomenon which should not be dissociated from its sociocultural contexts. Hymes suggests that grammar rules

are controlled by a set of rules of use. In his theory at each level of linguistic activities the movement is subject to the control at a higher level. That is, the phonology is dominated by the rules of syntax, the syntax is dominated by the semantic rules, and the 'linguistic as a whole' should be dominated by a set of 'rules of speech acts' (see Hymes, 1971, p. 15) - rules of use. In theory if this set of rules of use is implemented in the learning learners could develop a knowledge of when and where to use what. In other words, they would know better how to use the target language appropriately and effectively.

To summarise, structuralism fails to provide learners with the true or full picture of language. The problem lies in the fundamental error of understanding the nature of language - ignoring the sociocultural properties of it and holding only to the linguistic properties, treating it as a neat, self-contained system. This is unjustifiable because firstly when language is abstracted from its social and cultural environment, it is deprived of much of its meaning - the part which depends much on sociocultural structures and social contexts. And secondly language only becomes meaningful when it is used, and the rules for how to use a language for various social functions are often not available in the structural approach. Then there is a gap left to be filled up by learners themselves, most likely with their experience with their own language. As we are going to see later, this will create barriers in communicating with the native.

§1.3 Developing a Communicative Competence

The view held by structural linguists is strongly opposed by sociolinguists. Based on their research works and those done by sociologists, anthropologists, and researchers of other relevant disciplines they are able to point out that language is far from being static and self-contained, and on the contrary it is a dynamic social process in which various social factors are involved (see Pride, 1974, p. 5-11), and these social factors and the linguistic factor are interdependent in meaning making. So in their view what is significant to language learning is language use, which, as

has been said earlier, is the outcome of understanding of the relationship of language forms and various social factors. It is then important for them to incorporate in language learning the social aspects which indicate the relationship of the interlocutors, their social positions and the social context of the interactions alongside the linguistic aspect. Learners could then be expected to acquire knowledge of how to handle various social situations ‘... as to when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when, where, in what manner’ (Hymes, 1971, p. 15).

Being critical of Chomsky’s linguistic competence which, in his view, is concerned only with language structures and has nothing to do with language use which is significant to people in their social life, Hymes proposes the concept of ‘communicative competence’ to define the ability that the native possesses, and with that the native conducts meaningful social communications under social and sociocultural constraints. In his view this competence should be taken ‘... as the most general term for the capabilities of a person’ and it ‘... is dependent upon both (tacit) *knowledge* and (ability) for *use*’ (Hymes, 1971, p. 19). In defining his ‘communicative competence’, he lists four sectors which in his view have to be included as the underlying parts of the concept, namely: *possibility*, *feasibility*, *appropriateness* and *whether something is done* (*Ibid*, pp. 21-4). Roughly speaking the first two sectors can be regarded as the part concerned with language use from the grammatical and semantic points of view. They are standards with which to judge whether something is grammatically right or not, and whether something is making sense or not. While the third and the fourth can be understood as those relevant to the sociocultural knowledge and pragmatic rules. Under these sectors the issues regarding social situations, social functions and social positions, etc. are to be tackled in the light of sociological and ethonographical studies, such as what behaviour is appropriate in a given situation in a given cultural environment.

The introduction of the concept of communicative competence (or preferred by some people as ‘communicative abilities’. See Widdowson, 1984, pp.

23-8) has opened the gateway for a sociocultural perspective in language learning. With this theory the importance of the influence of a wide range of extra-linguistic elements on language use and the functional variety of language use are recognised, and room is provided for these issues to be dealt with. Therefore in language learning attention could be given to how to guide learners to communicate in a given situation as well as teaching how to form correct sentences. To make it more clear, it means that viewing language as interactive events which are socially significant and which are dependent upon their social contexts, teachers or other language workers in theory can help learning go beyond sentence-making level by providing learners with all necessary knowledge to interpret various sociocultural environments and human relations so that they would be able to adopt appropriate manners in given situations. On the other hand being shown how various language forms can be used for achieving different social functions, learners would be able to develop an ability to adopt relevant strategies and language behaviours for different tasks. The ability learners develop in this way is thus an overall ability to handle a communicative event by using language purposefully and effectively.

The strength of the communicative approach lies in its commitment and capacity to deal with language reality by bringing both the social aspects and the linguistic aspect together in an integrated way. Many previous approaches differ from each other largely in teaching methodology, but the communicative approach can be said to have totally changed the traditional view of language teaching. Since it was first introduced in the 1970s it has had much impact on the discipline of foreign/second language teaching. The most obvious change is that the social characteristics of language and language use are now widely recognised, and consequently in designing syllabuses and courses for foreign/second language learning, communicative competence has now almost always been set as one of the main aims of learning unless the learning is designed for some other purposes. A great deal of effort has been devoted to the research on how to implement

communicative theory into practice. As far as teaching practice is concerned a lot of change has been brought into it: quite a few new teaching techniques have been introduced into the classroom and a lot of new ideas have been put forward on how to develop learning materials for communicative purposes.

Yet as we can see from the complexity of the nature of language use, to help learners to develop a communicative competence is by no means a simple task. On the one hand we need to have better understanding of language and language use. The more we understand the language phenomenon, the better position we will be in to tackle it. And the understanding depends a lot on the development of all the relevant disciplines. On the other hand, to be able to assist learners in developing communicative competence there has to be a better understanding of how a learner learns a foreign language so as to develop appropriate teaching methods. In one word, in foreign language learning we have taken an important step forward in dealing with language reality, yet it will be a long journey to go.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INTERRELATION OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE & THE IMPLICATIONS OF AN INTERCULTURAL PERSPECTIVE IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

In the first chapter we have briefly discussed the social properties of language use and its implications for language learning from the perspective of language pragmatics. The key argument of the discussion - language is a social phenomenon which is dependent upon social and sociocultural environment where it exists, and because of this there should be no justification in language learning to dissociate it from its broad social and cultural contexts - will be the basic foundation of our further discussion. And in this chapter we will discuss, from both a pragmatic perspective and a wider educational perspective, the issue of in what way an intercultural perspective could influence language learning.

In this chapter I will first go, in some detail, into the issue of the relationship between language and culture. And I hope, the discussion will enable us to see how much our language behaviours are the reflections of our cultural experience. And then on the basis of that we are going to explore the issue of why an intercultural perspective will be necessary in foreign language education.

A discussion on how language and culture are related is very necessary for several reasons. First of all, language pragmatics differs from culture to culture (including sub-culture), so if language can be said to be socially patterned linguistic behaviours, then culture can be taken as the dominant force in forming these social patterns. Secondly what we say is normally what occurs in our minds (except being instructed to say things as told), or our understanding of things around us or about us. It can be said then that language reflects our perception of the world, therefore difference in language also shows difference in our perceptions of the world. And thirdly the relationship between language and culture is very peculiar, it is

impossible to understand in much depth language without culture or *vice versa*. I will start the discussion by defining the concept of culture adopted in this writing, because though the word culture is so familiar to our ears there is no universal agreement on the definition of this concept (see Byram, 1989, p. 43).

§2.1 The Concept of Culture Adopted in This Writing

Culture is a term used very frequently in our life, and at the same time it is also a term ambiguous in meaning. We could find from people around us, from books and from mass media that it is used variously to refer to different aspects of a wide range of human experience. For instance, it can be used with the connotation that we understand as, in Valette's words, 'history of civilization' (see Valette, 1977) of a people or a community, such as arts, literature, history and philosophy, etc. It can be used to refer to the special customs or conventions of a nation or a community. And it is also very frequently used in connection with various aspects of our daily life, such as: food, fashion, leisure, sports, etc. This wide range of association of this term with various aspects of life may give us some idea of the richness and complexity of the concept of culture.

Though the term is used widely and frequently, people who use it may not agree with each other on the exact definition of it. That is, the term can be used to denote a wider or a narrower range of meaning. For example, when it is stated by some traditional approaches that to enable the learner to understand or to get access to the target culture is one of the main educational aims of the learning, what is meant here by the term culture is mainly what can be classified as the intellectual achievements of a nation or a community - the part of culture understood as 'history of civilization' (see below). In this view culture is about the high achievements of a people - about things like religion, philosophy, music and visual arts, literature, history, geography and science, etc.

For some other people, culture has a much wider meaning. One example can be found in Gans's efforts to defend the position of 'mass culture' in the USA.

In his book entitled *Popular Culture and High Culture* he argues against the narrow definition of the concept of culture. He is very critical of the view held by: 'particularly those claiming that only high culture is culture, and that popular culture is a dangerous mass phenomenon' (Gans, 1974, p. vii), and asserts that mass culture is as equally important and valuable to our human experience as the 'high culture', which is academically valued 'history of civilization', and therefore should by no means be excluded from the concept of culture or be discriminated against. Although his arguments are made mainly from the point of view of the part of culture which he has named as 'taste culture' - the creative activities and products for spiritual consumption, yet clearly in his view culture should have wider implications than the elite of our creations, and the part of human experience classified as 'mass culture' should be no less significant than that which has been appreciated and admired for their academic values and high achievements. The arguments made in defending 'mass culture' or 'popular culture' reflect not only the different attitudes towards different sections of human experience, but also the discrepancy in interpreting the concept of culture.

On the other hand, as has been mentioned above, we can also find that the concept of culture is very frequently used to refer to our daily life. For example, when a motor-car manufacturer in the UK talked about what the public have expected from and required of them, and about people's general behaviours on the motor-way, he concluded these behaviours and concepts as 'a culture'. To most Chinese people this part of culture may be less familiar, but they would talk more frequently about food as a significant part of their culture, for instance. They would spend more time and a much bigger portion of their income on food than some other peoples and they enjoy that. They would explain, not without a note of pride, that eating is a part of Chinese culture. What is referred to as culture in these cases is different from what has been referred to in the examples quoted above, in which the concept is restricted to the creative activities and spiritual products, not the way people carry out their everyday practice. Obviously in these latter examples

culture is interpreted in a much wider sense, which includes our manners and life patterns in our everyday life.

Then what is culture? According to anthropologists, culture covers almost every aspect of human life. As Berger explains, culture is 'the totality of man's product' (quoted in Wuthnow, 1984, p. 35). This is further defined by Wuthnow as 'not only material artefacts, non-material social-cultural formations, but also the reflection of this world as it is contained within human consciousness.' (*Ibid*, p. 35) From this wide anthropological view, culture covers all aspects of human experience except the physical existence itself and intuitive activities determined by nature. In other words, that is, the whole part of life which is developed by human beings in interacting with other members of the community concerning both the environmental constraints upon their existence and their innermost experience as well. Thus culture connects the world of reality to human beings through shared understanding of meanings.

This anthropological view is defined in more detail by Valette. According to her the wide scope of culture can be viewed as being formed by two parts. She observes:

Culture in the broad sense has two major components. One is anthropological or sociological culture: the attitudes, customs, and daily activities of a people, their ways of thinking, their values, their frames of reference. Since language is a direct manifestation of this phase of culture, a society cannot be totally understood or appreciated without a knowledge of its language. The other component of culture is the history of civilization. Traditionally representing the "culture" element in foreign language teaching, it includes geography, history, and achievements in the sciences, the social sciences, and the arts. (Valette, 1986, p. 179)

The view she holds is similar to that held by Berger and Wuthnow, though she tries to explain it by dividing it into different levels and in more detail: the part which is common to our everyday life and the part which represents the creations and development of human beings. In this way she could specify the special position of language in human life, and in this way it seems to me there are more clues for us to see the connections linking the past with the present and abstract

thought with the actual phenomenon. The coverage of the two parts given in her definition is wide enough to include almost all aspects of our human life.

Now as we can see, from the anthropological view, that 'all our activities, either concerning our daily routines or concerning those which represent a more creative part of life, either trivial or significant, are all kept under the same category - culture. But by what principle(s) are they classified together? What is/are the common feature(s) of them?

First, culture by nature is subjective. That means it exists subjectively on the cognitive level of human activities. For instance, when people talk about a culture of food, fashion, what is concerned is not some concrete items of food or clothes. It has more to do with the way people perceive them. That is about the way these products are consumed and the ideas or ideology for doing that. The ideas or ideology are the basis of individuals' behaviours and at the same time are the common experience of the members of a group. For Chinese people food often means much more than daily necessity. One idea attached to it is that eating good food is a way of enjoying life, and that idea can be traced back about two thousand years ago to the Chinese philosopher Confucius who said something to the effect that the more fine the food is cooked the better it is. What Confucius said still rings in our hearts today and for generation after generation Chinese people have never got tired of perfecting their cooking skills and enjoying good food. But it is the attitude towards food that has been the centre of this tradition. So it can be said that culture is about a system of values, beliefs and norms which is possessed by individuals and which guides them in their course of actions and behaviours. In this sense culture is the fundamental basis for understanding human behaviours, of course, including language behaviours.

But the subjectivity of a culture depends on a mutual understanding between every member of a community. Culture is not an individual's property, but it is a system of values, beliefs and norms, etc. shared by members of a group. It is the nature of being shared among members of a community that makes the

existence of culture possible. Thus it is the subjective ideas, such as the value system, beliefs, etc. that forms an indexical knowledge which guides members in their actions, and in understanding and co-operating with each other. This collective property of culture has been commented upon by Quinn and Holland in their *Culture and Cognition*:

For nearly three decades, cognitive anthropologists have been pursuing the question of what one needs to know in order to behave as a functioning member of one's society. (Goodenough 1957:167). This school of anthropology came to stand for a new view of culture as shared knowledge - not a people's customs and artefacts and oral traditions, but what they must know in order to act as they do, make the things they make, and interpret their experience in the distinctive way they do. (Quinn & Holland, 1987, p. 4)

As it is made clear in the above quoted remark, besides being subjective, culture can only survive as common experience of a group of people. This quality of being shared among the group thus has the function of keeping the community in unity and separates it from others.

Now we may answer the question raised earlier. It is the subjective understanding of the ideological system which is shared by group members that keeps various different aspects of human experience, either trivial or important, within the frame of culture. In another word, it is the tacit knowledge of the general values, beliefs, rules required in the social life of a community that keeps different parts of life in a recognizable order. And it is the characteristics of being shared that makes communication possible among the members of a group, and that creates barriers for outsiders as well. This wide interpretation for culture is what this investigation will be based upon.

§2.2 Culture, Language, and Language Learning

According to the anthropological view we have just discussed, language is one of the components of culture. Actually in Chinese language, the word culture can be used to refer to language, but with an implication that language is the carrier of the 'history of civilization'. So illiterate people are referred to as 'not cultured'

in Chinese language, and learning to read is expressed as 'learning culture'. Yet language is a special part of culture. It differs from other components in very important ways.

A special characteristic of language is that it always stands for things other than itself - it is used to refer to or express the physical world around us, events happened to us, and ideas and thinking occurred in our minds. As it is stated by Byram:

Language differs, on the other hand, from other cultural phenomena in that it is used to refer to other phenomena and has usually to be used to refer beyond itself. ... one cannot speak the dialect, use the vocabulary, without referring to something else. Often, in fact, the language is transparent, inconspicuous. (Byram, 1989, p. 41)

The semantic properties of language relate the outside world to the inner world of human beings by referential meanings, and the social functional properties of language - pragmatic rules- bring members of a group in unity through applying shared meanings, values and beliefs, and social rules. Thus the symbolic nature of language makes it possible for people to understand the outside world and understand each other. But language is different from other objects or behaviours which may also carry symbolic meanings with them. For instance, it is different from pictures, crafts, clothes, etc., for it is much better structured, therefore being capable of transmitting much more complicated ideas and can do it much more accurately. That is, language is such a sophisticated product of human beings that with it our experience is not accumulated in a random way, but classified according to various rules - linguistic rules, social pragmatic rules, etc., so much so that we can share each other's ideas, thoughts and feelings. etc. in much depth.

Language is also different from other human behaviours, such as gestures, body language, facial expressions, whose meaning tend to be more restricted to their immediate physical contexts, for language can be used to refer to things which happened in a far away place and in the past. Because of the characteristic of displacement (see Aitchison, 1985, p. 25) it is possible for people to communicate

over distance, which the other kinds of behaviours are not capable of. And it also allows people to retrieve as well as to preserve their cultural traditions.

The importance of the symbolic nature of language concerned here is that culture is, to a large extent, transmitted through language. Whether it is history of civilization, social customs or social values, etc. we acquire them largely through language medium. To say it from another angle, language thus, as Byram observes, '... pre-eminently embodies the values and meanings of a culture, refers to cultural artefacts and signals people's cultural identity.' (Byram, 1989, p. 41) The fact that cultural meanings differ across social communities means that in learning a foreign language one has to be accustomed to a new set of meanings in order to understand, in the way the native does, the messages transmitted.

Yet it is a commonplace experience in foreign language teaching that some of the cultural meanings embedded in a foreign language are ignored, particularly when the learning is centred on linguistic structures. It doesn't mean that the symbolic nature of language can be changed, but it means that the learner's experience with his own culture is used to fill in what is missing in the language samples. The term 'culture transfer/interference' is used to refer to this kind of phenomenon (see Byram, 1989, p. 42). This, on the one hand, is possible because human beings, whatever their cultural backgrounds are, have a lot of their experience in common. On the other hand, this is liable to result in the learner's mis-interpreting the cultural meanings embedded in the target language/language acts, because in different cultures experience may be interpreted differently, though it could be very subtle sometimes.

There is also another aspect of language which makes it different from other culture aspects. Because of its symbolic nature, language owes its own existence to what it stands for (Byram, 1989, pp. 40-1). This can be seen from a study of the relationship between language and thought. As Boas points out, people's way of thinking is dominated by their language, and their language in turn is the reflection of their life style. The example which he sets to support his

argument shows that some Indians were not able to express abstract ideas due to the fact that in their languages there were no such vocabulary available. And the reason for it is that they did not feel such a need in their life, since what is concerned in their life is almost their immediate surroundings (Boas, 1911). This point of view can also be supported by such a fact that a language is normally short of vocabulary in expressing things which are absent from or not common to the life experienced by a people, but rich for things which are common or important to their life. This can help us to see, from one respect, why people often find it hard to get linguistic equivalents in another language. For example, in Chinese, and particular in Japanese, there are some honorifics which do not have equivalents in English, or some other European languages, because people from these European countries do not share the same way of thinking, the same beliefs and values, and therefore they do not behave in the same way as Chinese or Japanese do. Obviously as we can see, there exists a mutual dependent relationship between language and culture.

It is clear from the above discussion on the special characteristics of language that the relationship between language and other culture phenomena is very complicated. Language, though it itself is a part of culture, is the major means of transmitting and preserving culture, and at the same time it comes to its existence just because of its function of representing the other aspects of culture. This special relationship obviously does not make language teaching an easy task.

Now let's come back to a point which we touched upon earlier: culture, thought and language are closely linked to each other. Since language embodies meanings, using a language means to presuppose the meaning embedded within. For example, using the word 'parliament' implies, to a degree, a knowledge of the political system where democracy is practised. And using the terms like 'lord', 'baron', etc. to address the people with these titles means the user's acknowledging an understanding of the hierarchy system. So through language people are able to gather ideas of the culture framework behind the language form. To look at the

issue from another angle, as Boas's report demonstrates, the way people organize their thoughts is pretty much decided by the language they use. In passing information or expressing ideas or opinions, the message sender and the receiver both have to apply the same meaning embedded in the language on the one hand, and on the other their language behaviours are also regulated in accordance with the cultural meanings in language.

Each culture is unique in the sense that the outside world is interpreted and classified in accordance with its own tradition and surroundings and therefore has its own standards of values and rules of behaviours. Then in language learning it is necessary for learners to acquire the culture meaning of the target language in order to understand the people they are or are going to interact with, and to be able to behave appropriately. When a language phenomenon in one system bears little resemblance to that in another system, people could be more conscious of the cultural difference. For instance if a culture phenomenon in Language A appears obviously different in Language B, the learner, in order to comprehend it, may have to go to great lengths to find out what it is about. While in an opposite situation, when an apparent similarity can be found in both Language A and in Language B, the learner is more likely to resort to his native language in interpreting meanings unless being made aware of any differences between the two. As has been mentioned above, to ignore the difference in meanings will consequently result in a 'culture transfer/interference'. We can take a couple of examples to demonstrate the significance of cultural understanding.

The ability to handle the issues of social functions, social contexts and social discourse structures is very much dependent on one's culture knowledge, as social conventions could be markedly different across cultures. Yet, as has been discussed in the first chapter, it goes beyond sentence level. For a simple example, when receiving a complimentary remark, as a standard formula, a Chinese would be expected to respond in demonstrating his modesty. In hearing a remark such as: 'You are a wonderful tennis player.' a British person would normally express his

appreciation of the speaker's kindness. While a Chinese would normally say things like: 'No, I am far from that.' or 'No, it is not really so.' even if he is really good at it. Both the British and the Chinese do what they think proper according to their social norms. As Damen says: '... much of what is perceived as right and natural and correct is merely a reflection of shared cultural values, patterns, and beliefs.' (Damen, 1987, p. 56) Thus this difference in behaviour reflects a conceptual difference which cannot be captured if cultural difference is not understood. And a culture transfer, in terms of pragmatic competence (see Bialystok, 1993, p. 43), would be leading to an inappropriate social behaviour, or even a prejudiced view, which will be dealt with in some later paragraphs.

Some seemingly trivial differences between languages sometimes may reflect rather significant ideological differences between cultures. In learning Chinese, European students may find that in Chinese language there is a larger vocabulary for family members and kin, and in general, the order of seniority is expressed more clearly. Whether a brother or sister is older or younger, whether an uncle or an aunt is senior to one's father or mother, and whether a relative is on the mother's side or father's side, and so on and so forth, is much more clearly specified in this language. Also the Chinese tend to use polite formulas much more frequently than some other cultures. On the surface these differences are trivial, but it leads to a part of the value system which holds much importance in the tradition of the culture. It is related to the mentality of the people that collectivism is far more important than individualism, and it is important to have a harmonious relationship among people (see Dong, 1993, p. 152). The beliefs that family is the basic unit of the society and that the order of the society has to be started from the family have also contributed to establishing such social values. If this kind of value standards can be brought to the learner, even if only to limited extents, it would be helpful for the learner to be aware of this kind of value standards and to have some knowledge of the mentality of Chinese people rather than taking meanings for

granted. Now we shall move to the issue of in what ways an intercultural perspective will make language learning different.

§2.3 Language Learning and Cognitive and Affective Development

So far our discussion has been focused on the interactive and dependent nature of language and culture. It is clear that with respect to intercultural communication an understanding of the target culture is indispensable. This enables us to say, at this stage, that the need for a cultural perspective in foreign language teaching is theoretically evident in terms of being useful in helping the learner to be communicatively competent. Yet there should be a much wider implications for such a perspective.

From our above discussion we can see that language learning in general is a unique experience through which one gains understandings of the relationship between the human being and the world, and of the relationship between individual human beings and as well as between social groups. It implies that the learning process is not simply a process of learning language skills or communication skills. Through it the learner also builds up his vision of the world and obtains his self identity (see Damen, 1987; Edwards, 1988; Byram, 1989, p. 40) in accordance with the culture which he is exposed to, as we shall see more clearly below. This experience is thus very important to the development of the learner in both cognitive and affective terms.

To be able to see this point it is perhaps useful for us to go back to some of the main points we had in the above paragraphs. To begin with, social and cultural realities are inevitably reflected in the forming of a language (most clearly in semantics) and of the patterns of language use. Also, cultural understanding, as, in D'Andrade's term, a 'directive force' (quoted from Quinn & Holland, 1987, p.8) in guiding and eliciting meaningful linguistic acts, regulates the linguistic behaviours of a community and thus builds a strong link between individuals through shared values, beliefs, behavioural norms, etc. And furthermore, individuals therefore will

necessarily identify themselves socially and psychologically as members of a community through linguistic as well as other means on the basis that they have to share with each other the common way of thinking and standards of behaving. According to these, language learning, in a general sense, can be seen as a process through which the learner learns to socialize and to manipulate the outside world through language which reflects the world reality on the one hand and requires the user's recognition of a commonly agreed set of cultural-based meanings and principles on the other. At the same time as the learner has to learn to interact with others, this learning experience will inevitably act in forming his social identities which are culturally identifiable. Thus to learn a foreign language could mean, to different degrees, to acknowledge a new set of sociocultural meanings and to recognize or to accept some different social identities. According to Schumann '...the learner will acquire the second language only to the degree that he acculturates' (quoted from Harley, 1986, p. 18). In other words, to become socially and linguistically capable to interact with the native he has to learn to identify himself socially and psychologically with the native speaker, or to achieve, as in Schumann's words, 'social and psychological proximity with speakers of TL' (*Ibid*, p. 18). To see this point, let's first have a brief look at how foreign language learning and first language acquisition are different in terms of the social and psychological development of the learner, and then what are the implications of it.

When a child acquires her/his mother tongue, s/he learns meanings by being led to relate language symbols to the objective world and social phenomena that are available to her/him. Therefore in hearing a speech sound or seeing a written symbol s/he is guided and encouraged to link it with her/his perception of a certain object, a certain event or a certain situation, which thus forms part of her/his conceptual structures of the world. As we have discussed earlier, language is a reflection of the various parts of a cultural experience, therefore the child's perceptual inclination is largely pre-determined by what is embodied in the language that s/he learns. In other words, a person's world vision is very much

dependent on her/his culture background. This can be demonstrated through an example from a slightly different angle.

In order to account for how people's perception is formed or influenced, Luria carried out an investigation of the issue of why people's perception of colours and shapes are different by examining the visual illusions of some different groups of people who have different social and educational backgrounds. The result of the study indicates that one's 'socio-historical development' - either in terms of education or other kinds of experience - bears close relationship to the formation of her/his visual perception (see Luria, 1976, pp. 113-6). That is, the difference in the cultural traditions and social conditions of different social and cultural groups is a key element responsible for their perceptual difference for colours and shapes. To interpret this in a general term, it means that the scope or depth of our perception of the world has much to do with what is available to us in our experience. Perceptions of colours or shapes are relatively simple to the issue of perceptual development, yet through this research, I think, we are able to see the connection of sociocultural environment and the development of perception and cognition in general. Since language carries with it every aspect of our human experience, including the innermost feelings, it is different from other kinds of learning experience, and therefore should have a much deeper and wider influence on the growth of perception and cognition.

It becomes rather clear that together with her/his acquisition of her/his mother tongue, the child gains gradually an understanding of the world, and thus forms her/his perceptual perspectives which are culture-specific, or culturally biased. As Fantini observes: '...the mother tongue acquired in infancy influences the way we construct our vision of the world.' (Fantini 1991, p. 110) Duquette has explained how this happens:

A young child receives input during the first two years of life (Piaget, 1963), but something happens in this process: the child begins to organise the information, and through the recurrence of patterns or routines develops certain expectations. These expectations are cognitive in nature, but also cultural because the child learns not only in isolation, but also

from others as a result of living within a family (group) unit and school community. (Duquette 1991, p. 122)

Thus through linguistic instructions from the caretaker, the child is made aware of how the linguistic form is related to the world reality through the symbolic meanings assigned to the linguistic forms. Or in other words, the child is taught how the human experience of the world is classified by language in that culture (see Harrington, 1979, pp. 10-19). For instance, when learning the words 'mine' and 'yours', a child would be led to observe the classification of the relations between people and the relevant conventional rules of behaviours. The process of her/his understanding of the meanings of the words is thus also a process in which part of her/his conceptual structures are formed through the medium of language. The words 'mine' and 'yours' come to her/his mind in association with her/his experience of the social reality of human relations in her/his cultural environment, and thus become part of her/his conceptual system which could be different from other cultures in one way or another. This process of development in perception through language, and the cultural orientation of it are observed by Harrington: 'Human languages provide their speakers with sets of categories into which experiences are classified. Snow is important to Eskimos: they distinguish types, ergo they are said to perceive snow differently than peoples who are not familiar enough with it to require more than one category.' (*Ibid*, p. 14)

As was mentioned above, through language learning the child acquires her/his sociocultural identities as well. And language itself is an obvious and important feature with which people identify themselves socially and culturally. It is self-evident that people attach themselves emotionally to their social or cultural identities. Social identity is, as put by Tajfel: 'that part of an individual's self-concept that derives from his [or her] knowledge of his [or her] membership in a social group (groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership' (quoted from Gudykunst et al, 1988, p.93). To see the point that people attach much importance to their language identity, we need only to see the enthusiasm that some ethnic groups have demonstrated in asserting their rights

to have their languages taught to their children in mainstream education. So through his language learning experience and other sorts of experience, the child learns to appreciate, though not always consciously, the values and social orders, etc. that are embedded in the language, and therefore identify himself accordingly. What s/he acquires becomes part of her/his existence.

But in learning a foreign language, learners do not seem to have an entirely similar experience as what they have with their first language acquisition. Actually, it is quite different in an important way. Because learners have achieved greater maturity in cognition through their first language learning, it is believed that in learning a second language they have some advantages (Harley, 1986, p. 14-5; Flynn, 1991, pp. 207-9). Apart from the fact that they have acquired greater cognitive capacities, it is believed that in learning their second language they rely a lot on their experience with their first language in interpreting meanings (*Ibid*, p. 15). It is suggested that more mature learners tend to grasp semantic meanings and syntactic structures much more easily than children (Harley, 1986, p. 25). That means, they may tend to extend conveniently their existing conceptual structures to accommodate the new language in the way that the second language forms are associated with the meanings derived from their first language. Though this on the other side also has obvious negative effect. If learners rely heavily on their native culture for interpreting meanings, the cultural transfer then means less chance for them to realize the different perceptual perspective adopted by the target language group, and less chance to find out the different meanings embedded in the target language. In that case mis-interpretation is inevitable. Since what the learner would get from the learning is different from the native model, they would not feel the same as the native does with the language and the culture.

And unlike children who acquire their first language by experiencing it in its sociocultural contexts, foreign language learners are, quite often, deprived of such an experience since the setting of language learning is not like the contexts of first language acquisition. What the learners are provided with tends to be some

language samples separated out from their sociocultural soil. Therefore it seems to be inevitable that the absence of the sociocultural information encourages the tendency of the learners' referring to their own cultural experience in order to make sense of the meanings of new language forms or phenomena. So in learning a second language in a formal learning setting learners do not have many opportunities to go through the same learning process as they have done with their first language acquisition.

Learner's drawing references from their previous experience is understood as one of their strategies to cope with the insufficiency of experience with and the lack of information about the target language and culture (Harley, 1986, p. 16). After all, learners are able to refer to their own cultural experience only because all cultures share, to a large extent, similar experience. That forms the basis of our recognizing and understanding each other basically as fellow-beings.

Yet not being able to understand the specific cultural basis of the native's way of life and their language would affect learners not only in terms of communicative competence and scope of world vision, it would also have psychological impact on them. On the one hand, '...such a study, divorced from context, is necessarily abstract and necessarily limited and can in no way lead to a full understanding or a full mastery of the language.' (Ager, 1988, p. 3-4) On the other hand, learners would very possibly not be able to understand fully, and be prepared to accept different ways of thinking and behaving. And this would inhibit them from bridging the, in Schumann's words, 'social and psychological distance' (quoted from Harley, 1986, p. 29).

Since people acquire their sociocultural identities and perception of the world through language, then in foreign language learning it is almost inevitable that learners would be influenced affectively. First of all, when being brought into contact with a foreign language learners would necessarily encounter some sociocultural differences which demonstrate some principles and values unlike those of their own culture. This would likely result in some sort of comparison

between their own culture and the target culture, even if at a very limited and superficial level. This could occur either at a conscious level or a subconscious level. For example, a Japanese girl working in the UK once said that she felt much happier in using English than she does in Japanese, because she felt the relationship between the younger generation and the older, as far as it is reflected in choosing the language forms, is much simpler in English than in Japanese. In using Japanese she has to be constantly aware of to whom she is talking, and if talking to an elder person, some language forms showing respect have to be used. She felt a sense of being free from that pressure in using English. Although this may not be a common feeling, actually some other Japanese girls said that the different values carried by the language forms do not affect them so much, yet it does reveal to some extent that people do assess language and the values embedded in it affectively. It also shows that in learning another language learners are likely to learn to identify themselves in that new cultural context if they want to participate effectively in that culture. Yet a lot of cultural phenomena, including those concerning language use, are not as obvious as language form. In that case, it is very easy for learners to misinterpret meanings or behave inappropriately.

It has been widely recognized that when getting into the environment of the target culture, it is a commonplace experience that learners would, to different degrees, undergo a 'culture shock'. Because of the different social meanings and behaviours of each culture, and because of a possible linguistic insufficiency, learners could feel it difficult to communicate and identify themselves in the new environment, and therefore suffer emotional stress. They would feel 'estrangement, anger, hostility, indecision, frustration, unhappiness, sadness, loneliness, homesickness, and even physical illness.' (Brown, 1986, p. 35) It is suggested that to overcome such an uneasiness learners need to go through the process of acculturation (see Schumann, 1978; Brown, 1986). That is to say, they have to learn to accept and adopt the viewpoints of the native, and to learn to identify themselves gradually in the target culture. The more they identify themselves with

the native, the less uncomfortable they would feel. However, this may not always be a pleasant experience, for they may sometimes feel what they have valued or have been identified with is viewed differently, if not unfavourably or vice versa. But if through language learning learners can be helped to be more aware of the differences of the two cultures, and to be encouraged to see the differences in the position of both outsiders and insiders (see Byram, 1989, pp. 143), they could be expected to realize their own cultural orientation and limits. In that sense, the development of a 'culture awareness' (*Ibid*, pp. 142-4) would not only help them to have a better understanding of themselves and the target language group, it may also help them to go through the emotional change with less pain. For they may see what they would not have been able to see otherwise and therefore feel less excluded. Therefore there is the possibility of developing a sympathetic view towards the cultural differences.

On the other hand, it is believed that the learning process can also be influenced by learners' attitudes towards the language and culture that they are learning. In general, a more positive attitude would produce better learning results. Although the issue of attitude is a very complex one, for it involves various factors such as the issue of language status, the aims of learning, learning environment and personality, etc., yet to understand the target culture may at least help in reducing negative feelings resulting from mistaken views. That is, if learners are given a chance to gain some native insights by observing the culture from inside, it is possible for them to think differently, even if they may not share the other side's viewpoints. What appears 'strange' 'incomprehensible' or even 'unreasonable' previously may become less so. It would seem to stretch the point to say that cultural understanding will bring positive change to the attitudes of the learner, yet a cultural perspective can encourage the learner to look at things from a different, or rather a wider angle. This at least can reduce ignorance and misunderstandings. It is very likely that learners may feel more willing to get more involved in their studies if they feel closer to the target culture. As stated by Damen: '...positive

attitudes toward the target language group, as well as toward self and the native culture, were enhancing factors in second language and culture learning. Clearly, one goal of cultural instruction should be to provide valid information to dispel any misinformation a student has received that might contribute to negative attitudes.’ (Damen, 1987, p. 224) So it would be beneficial to the learning if learners can be helped to gain an awareness of their own cultural making, and to be encouraged to observe the target culture from the point of view of insiders as well as that of outsiders.

To summarize the discussion we have had so far, to understand the target culture, on top of being useful for communicative competence development, also contributes to the learner’s general development in cognition, perception and affect. Because of these, an intercultural perspective in foreign language teaching should provide a valuable opportunity for learners to enrich their experience and to broaden their vision of the world. Equally important, such an approach would facilitate the process of acculturation.

§2.4 Issues Concerning the Implementation of an Intercultural Perspective

In spite of the inter-dependent relationship, language and culture are each very complex and have their own characteristics. To treat them in an integrated manner in foreign language teaching is thus not a straightforward issue.

Although language has to stand for things other than itself, it has its own rules of functioning and forms its own system. As Widdowson explains, knowledge of language is culturally independent, while knowledge of the world is not. And communication takes place by the negotiation of the relationship of the two kinds of knowledge (Widdowson, 1988, p. 18). Since a linguistic system is independent when not being involved in a social interaction, is it necessary to deal with the two simultaneously? Can it be better if the social knowledge is handled after the learner has acquired some linguistic knowledge? After all, a linguistic system functions in

its own way, and the time for classroom teaching in general is rather limited. Therefore much attention could be concentrated on helping the learner to understand and to be familiar with how the linguistic system works, if the part concerning social knowledge is left to be elaborated later on. Furthermore, language use is very much social context dependent, and what could influence language use varies greatly. A concern is that to put the two together could only distract the learner's attention and complicates the matter. Then there seems to be a reason in suggesting that those issues concerning the significance of language for social purposes should not take too much of the learner's attention when learning is not designated for a clearly defined purpose. Whether a cultural perspective in foreign language teaching is necessary, (besides the nature of a cultural approach, which we have just discussed) there has to be taken into consideration the aims of learning which determines the nature of learning, therefore the relevant approach and method and content.

§2.5 Intercultural Perspective and Aims of Foreign Language Education

What content or method is to be used for teaching depends very much on the aims of learning. Aims of learning dominate the whole learning process, from the starting point to the final checkpoint. So whether an intercultural perspective should be relevant for a learning task has to be assessed against the purposes of learning.

Teaching could be very different when different aims are pursued. For instance, a training course for hotel receptionists would not be the same as a four-year formal language course for students whose major subject is a foreign language. For the former the future need of the learner is mainly to have some language and communication skills in certain areas so that s/he can carry out the job of hotel business practice. As the objectives of the learning are relatively straightforward and the context of language use is rather restricted and clear, to a

large degree the outcomes of the learning can be compared directly with the input. Thus the nature of the learning is basically skill-oriented and the learning contents are comparatively narrow, and can be clearly defined. So it is possible for much attention to be concentrated on particular language skills or communication skills required of the learner. Although some cultural knowledge is necessary for the sake of communication, nevertheless the scope or depth of it tends to be rather limited since what is expected for future needs could be rather restricted.

Unlike language training where the future need of the learner is more straightforward and the aims of learning can be put in simpler and clearer terms, in a lot of cases language learning is carried out as a part of general education, where the value of language learning is assessed in terms much wider than that of practical use of language. Apart from aims set for the learner to acquire knowledge and skills of language and/or communication, attention is also placed on promoting an overall development in the learner, such as cognitive growth, extending of knowledge and experience, and development in empathy, etc. Various reasons could be put forward for having foreign language as part of an education, political or non-political, academic or non-academic. Yet on the whole what is concerned can be very broadly put into two categories: development in ability and intelligence; and change in conception and attitudes. The former encompasses concerns for the promoting of general capacity and acquiring the skills for learning and problem solving, as well as concerns for an acquisition of knowledge and skills for a certain language. The latter can be said to have concerns over individuals' socialization and the forming of their social responsibilities - an understanding of others and self and the world reality.

It is rather obvious that a development in general capacity and the skills for learning is very important for learners, since it is often the case that whatever learners learn, they will have to go on learning beyond the school years, often by themselves, if they are to be able to cope well with real life situations and the changing world. It is even more so in the case of language education, where it is

difficult for the learning to be focused on a particular or a few type(s) of knowledge and skill(s), since whether in the future the learner will have any chance to use the language skill(s) that s/he has acquired, and for what purpose(s) and how s/he is going to use the language are uncertain factors. But a development in general abilities will be beneficial for the learner's further pursuit of language learning or other kinds of learning, and also for her/him to cope better with their work and life in a more general sense. For example, in regard to the issue of how to make language education more useful for the future needs of learners in the United States, Brecht and Walton have stressed that it is important that through language learning learners should be provided with knowledge and skills which would enable them to manage their future learning, and enable them to cope better with the increasingly complex situation of intercultural communication (see Brecht and Walton, 1995). According to them language learning, rather learning to communicate, could be a 'life long enterprise' (*Ibid*, p. 111) since because of various social changes and technological development in communication social interactions between various cultures are becoming a common social phenomenon, and people have to learn to cope with them. That is to say, we are entering into such a stage of intercultural communication that people from different cultures interact with each other much more frequently at various levels, therefore there could be the need for people to communicate with people from many cultures in various situations. Thus it is necessary for learners to have the ability to organize their own learning when they are in need of it in accordance with their own situations - what skill(s) they need and what proficiency is to be required, etc., as well as to have the knowledge to get access to necessary help.

As we can see from the above discussion, an intercultural perspective in language education is valuable both in the sense of assisting with learners' intellectual development and in the sense of promoting socialization. Since learners are exposed to different cultural perspectives and different visions of the world, they could be expected to gain wider experience and deeper insights of the world.

At the same time, their personal experience could also be much enriched. Particularly through discovery of new meanings and comparison of cultures, they would be forced to re-evaluate their own cultural identity, social and moral standards with a wider perspective which embraces their understanding of both the target culture and their own culture. This, apart from anything else could possibly, as suggested by Byram, bring some changes to the attitudes of learners, and encourage tolerance of other cultures (Byram, 1989, p. 18). Either from the viewpoint of cross-cultural interaction or from the viewpoint of general education an intercultural perspective in foreign language learning could be a very useful means.

So for the learning which is not strictly skill-oriented, the problem does not seem to be whether a cultural approach should be applied in foreign language teaching or not, but rather how to. Of course it should not be the case that cultural knowledge is imparted at the cost of less efficient learning of linguistic skills. What is aimed at is an integral approach where language and the way language is used by the native is presented to learners with a view to promote their awareness of the inter-dependent relationship of language and culture as well as their awareness of their own culture in contrast to the target culture (see Byram, 1989, pp. 136-148). As for what should be selected for teaching we shall discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

PRINCIPLES FOR ESTABLISHING CRITERIA FOR ANALYSING CULTURAL CONTENT

The discussion in the last chapter has led us to the stage where what is concerned is how to implement the theory of language and cultural studies in the practice of foreign language education in the best possible way. To address this issue fully would involve a whole range of educational procedures, i.e. curriculum design, learning material construction, methodology and result testing, etc. Since the present discussion is about contents of text materials, I will concentrate only on the issue of on what basis selections should be made and what culture content should be incorporated in foreign language learning courses. Of course this will have to involve methodology to some extent.

It is clear that in order to make the learning well focused, in one way or another priorities have to be made in presenting some parts from the culture system rather than others. Though it is obvious that a selection is necessary if an intercultural perspective is to make sense at all, yet how can it be decided which part(s) of the culture should be chosen for learners to get familiar with or to know about, but not the others? Where shall we start our 'pick and mix'? Clearly some guide-lines have to be drawn if the selection is to be meaningful.

As has already been stressed, a culture system is immensely wide and complex, so a preliminary remark has to be made that whatever the selections are, they are no doubt only a tiny fraction of the culture body, therefore very limited in scope and depth in representing a culture system.

But the limitation should not be an excuse for a haphazard supply of culture information at the supplier's will or for not making strenuous efforts. Nor can it deny the significance of cultural studies. Rather it should be a demand for a clear concentration on what could be the most relevant and basic to learners'

development as well as a demand for an efficient way of dealing with it, if foreign language education is to achieve its desired aims. In the following I shall discuss the principles which I think necessary in choosing criteria for cultural content analysis.

§3.1 Culture Contents within the Linguistic Capacities of Learners

The first principle is that culture and language contents have to be handled in an integral way. That is, in deciding whether some culture contents are appropriate for the learning, we have to consider if they will fit with learners' linguistic skills or not. If too much emphasis is given to presenting culture information regardless of learners' linguistic level, learning would be hampered in the first place. Also because an important aim of cultural learning is to enhance the ability of using language effectively and appropriately in social interactions, it is against the aims of language and cultural studies if culture contents are dealt with at the cost of language learning. So it is necessary to consider how to present culture contents in language which would suit learners' linguistic ability.

Let's go back a little to the fear that cultural learning would divide the attention paid to the linguistic skills. It should be very clear now that although a linguistic system is an independent area of studies, how to use this system for social purposes is not socioculturally independent. So to have learners' attention focused merely on how to handle linguistic structures would not be for their best interest, as our earlier discussion has made quite clear. It could be argued that there seems to be little point to emphasize the culture element in language learning since culture contact, in a sense, is inevitable in the learning, as language and culture cannot be completely separated. Besides since there is no way to include everything to satisfy divergent needs of different learners, would it be better for culture studies to be dealt with separately from language learning, either in learners' own language or in the target language when learners are linguistically more capable later on?

The earlier discussion indicates that in order to understand a language, to be able to appreciate it and use it for communication, learners need to know the way the native uses the language and the way the native is influenced by the language, so that they can gain some insights into the language and the people who use it as mother tongue. Experience with the target language could be the best way, if not the only way, to gain such insights. So cultural studies in learners' mother tongue could not replace the role language and cultural studies would play. The point that we are bound to be in contact with culture content of some kind does not justify the reason for not making culture content selection, because that would deny the communicative and educational aims set for language learning.

But it is more important to stress here that an intercultural perspective in foreign language teaching does not necessarily mean a reduction of opportunities for learners to acquire their linguistic skills. To suggest learners' being exposed to different cultural meanings and behaviours does not mean that much of the valuable teaching time should be devoted to dealing with culture meanings without giving concern to linguistic forms. Rather it means to handle the linguistic forms in a way where instead of having less meaningful drills or word-practice without much sociocultural context or meaningful connections in between, linguistic items and cultural information denoting meanings should be incorporated so that while learners are obtaining a mastery of the linguistic rules, they would also be able to get some ideas of how, when, where and why they are used, through mainly personal observations as well as necessary discussions.

Nevertheless with such an integral approach considerable linguistic skills would be necessary if meanings are to be dealt with in any depth. It is not to say that such an integral approach can only be implemented at a stage where learners would be linguistically more capable. It means that what is to be incorporated has to match the linguistic ability of learners at each stage. Understandably at an earlier stage of learning what can be put in is comparatively limited and cannot be dealt with thoroughly. But this is by no means meaningless. Through exposure to the

specific culture environment and the ways in which social interactions are conducted in the target culture, even at the most basic level, some of the social features and meanings could be observed, such as human relations, basic social institutions, everyday life routines and other sociocultural environmental features. Some of them could be the most essential parts of a culture or related to the most essential parts, such as social identities, social norms common to members of a society, beliefs and value standards, etc. Although at the very beginning learners' understanding of cultural meanings could be very little, and even only subconscious, as the learning goes on, their understanding of the target culture will deepen with every contact with and observation of the culture. However there is the question of continuity if such a cultural perspective is to be meaningful. As we shall see later, a thorough understanding of meaning has to depend upon a more systematic approach, ideally through different stages of learning.

§3.2 Facilitating Both the Development of an Understanding and Competence in Intercultural Communication and Acculturation

Any attempt to make decisions on what to teach has to be based upon what is to be expected from the learning. It is now one of the major concerns of foreign language education that learners should be helped to develop a communicative competence. From the above discussion we can see clearly now that such a competence depends very much on learners' knowledge of the target culture, knowledge of the characteristics of intercultural communication, as well as the skills for carrying out such a communication, which are closely related to one's knowledge of the target culture and the knowledge of intercultural communication. Clearly learners should be provided with knowledge and experience about all these aspects through their learning.

As has been repeated, to be able to understand the linguistic behaviours of the target culture, learners have to be able to understand specific meanings employed by the native and be aware of the different way of presenting meanings.

It is important that they should be made aware of the difference between their own culture and that of the native, so as to be prevented from interpreting and judging the native's behaviours by their own social behavioural and value standards. On the one hand this awareness will encourage them to search for new meanings, and thus to have better understanding of the target language and culture. On the other hand, with such an awareness they would be likely to be more capable of coping with situations of cross-cultural communication, since they could be more flexible in seeking meanings, and moreover they could have different attitudes towards themselves and others, and therefore towards differences occurring between them.

In discussing the future shape of language education in the United States, Brecht and Walton suggested that it is important for language education to prepare learners to handle the increasingly complex situation of cross-cultural communication (Brecht and Walton, 1995). According to them, it is more and more common that people have to communicate with various cultures at various levels, and with different purposes, thus on the one hand people may need to have different communicational skills for different types of communication, possibly in several languages, and on the other hand they may have greater need to go on learning (new) languages and communicational skills after their formal education. Therefore it is essential that learners acquire the knowledge of how to manage cross-cultural communications in accordance with situations and tasks, and the knowledge of how to organize their future learning in accordance with their needs. To help learners to achieve these, attention has to be given to creating cultural awareness and an understanding of the characteristic features of intercultural communication.

A cultural awareness also has great significance to the general development of learners' cognition and empathy. It is proposed by Byram that a cultural awareness 'would cause learners to reflect on and explicate their own key cultural concepts, however disconcerting this may be, thereby making them see themselves as others do and modifying their existing schemata and cultural competence.'

(Byram, 1989, p. 144) Without realizing other ways of life and thinking, one would not be very likely to be very conscious of or to question her/his own way of behaviours and thinking. S/He would likely stick to her/his own way of thinking. Therefore things divergent from what s/he is familiar with might be taken as abnormal, strange, or incomprehensible. If learners were to hold such an attitude towards the target culture, then even the learning itself could be undermined, not to say willingness to accept other's viewpoints.

It is suggested by Hurman that learners could develop a better idea of themselves and others if they could be made more aware of how each of them would perceive themselves in their own way (see Byram, 1989, p. 143). On the level of language use, they could become more conscious of the way the target language is influenced by the specific culture. While on the level of conception and attitude, this could possibly lead to a more sympathetic view of the differences between cultures, thus removing the stumbling block of uneasiness with or prejudice against the target culture.

Apart from cultural awareness, learners should also acquire a good understanding of the target culture. To be efficient in communication, one has to have sufficient knowledge of the way the native speaks, lives, thinks and projects her/his life experience, including the perceptions s/he has about her/himself and the world. As Byram says:

Learners will need a grasp of the relationship between language and the values and meanings it embodies, an understanding of the implicit connotations and collocations of vocabulary, and an understanding of the nature of the inter-relationship between the self and the society in which one lives. On this basis they will be able to adapt effectively to new situations and use their cognitive powers to develop appropriate behaviours, both linguistic and non-verbal. (Byram, 1991, p. 7)

So alongside knowledge of language the learning should thus include things like: what the members of the target language group are like, what sort of life they have, what they believe and value, and how they perceive themselves and the world, etc. Presentation of this kind would, so to speak, guide learners to step into the native's world so that they could be expected to gain some understandings of

the views and the modes of behaviour of the native. This would provide a basic framework of the target culture. As has been repeated, through such a cultural approach learners could be expected to become more capable in cross-cultural communication.

The term intercultural competence suggests that the end product of the learning is not quite something similar to the native's model, rather an extended vision based upon different cultures. This is meaningful because in the first place it is not realistic for learners to achieve native standards, both in linguistic terms and sociocultural terms, through language instruction in limited time. According to some researches even for second language learners who are in the environment of the target culture for a long time few could actually reach the native standards linguistically (see Acton and de Felix, 1986, pp. 20-9). More importantly, the educational aims of promoting sympathetic understanding of other points of view, and hence establishing a healthier inter-group relationship can be realized not simply through learners' adopting the other's views, but rather through a better understanding of themselves and others in light of the insights into two cultures. Thus learners' own cultural experience would be allowed to play an active role in building up an extended new vision, but not taken as things which should be overwritten. Talking about the role of learners' own culture, Buttjes and Byram have stated:

...it would be misguided to teach as if learners can acquire foreign cultural concepts, values and behaviours as if they were *tabula rasa*; just as it is misguided to teach language structures as if there will be no transfer from the first language. Equally it would be short-sighted to assume that the first language cannot be used to help learners grasp aspects of the foreign culture. (Buttjes and Byram, 1991, p. 18)

So the selected content should give ideas on how and in what ways each of the cultures exercises influence upon its people, so what learners could obtain through their learning would be an extended view of different cultures. The issue of how to develop an intercultural competence will be discussed with issues concerning methodology.

§3.3 Helping Learners to Understand the Most Fundamental Features of the Target Culture

To be able to achieve the above mentioned aims, it is necessary that the target culture be projected in such a way that an overall view of the target culture could be created. That is to say, learners need to have ideas about the most fundamental properties of the culture, with which the members of the target culture identify themselves as fellow members in a most common way, and in accordance with which their thoughts and behaviours are regulated. Although a culture system is very huge and complex, nevertheless it is organized in such a way that some parts, so to speak, play more dominant roles than others. The fact that it is hardly possible for anyone to know every aspect of her/his own culture system, and yet is recognized and functions as a member of a cultural community, indicates that there are some parts of a culture which are more commonly shared, or more basic than others. For example, every nation is made up of various social groups, and most countries are made up of different ethnic groups, albeit each having its own social characteristics and standards of social practice, yet there are some important common features which bind them together as a united community in contrast with others.

Another point to be made for this argument is that many different social phenomena could all be originated from a few, in Byram's words, 'key cultural concepts' (Byram, 1989, p. 144), which 'have dominance over a culture system as a whole. If we take a culture as a tree, then the key concepts may be taken as the trunk of the tree which supports the rest of the body. According to Benedict, a culture cannot be understood simply as the totality of its components. She says:

Cultures, likewise, are more than the sum of their traits. We may know all about the distribution of a tribe's form of marriage, ritual dances, and puberty initiations, and yet understand nothing of the culture as a whole which has used these elements to its own purpose. (Benedict, 1961, p. 33)

So to understand a culture as a whole one needs to know those parts which are more fundamental to its formation. Research on Japanese society from the socio-anthropological point of view made by Hendry can help us to see how a key cultural concept could underlie many different kinds of social phenomena at different levels. Her book on Japanese society has shown that the concepts of 'family', 'inside' against 'outside' play a key role in organizing and keeping orders of the society in many aspects of Japanese life. They have great influence, direct or indirect, on the social structures and people's behaviours at different levels, from family relationships, neighbourhood relationships, to the way industry and political systems are organized (Hendry, 1987).

Concepts like this are so important to the formation and function of a culture that without having some knowledge of them it is not possible for learners to understand the culture in any depth, and to interact effectively with that people. So if the learning can provide learners with information about the more fundamental characteristics of a culture, it would be likely to provide them with a key to the culture, with which they could interpret meanings close to the way the native would do, and with which they could evaluate the culture as a whole.

§3.4 Reflection of Social Reality

There is another point concerning selection which needs to be discussed. What is to be reflected of the culture in the learning materials needs to be close to real life. As the purpose of such an intercultural perspective is about creating an understanding of how the members of a cultural group are influenced by their culture, it is necessary for learners to be informed about the real situations of the life of the native, and the ways s/he thinks and feels. Otherwise, there could be no real understanding. Since learners have to experience a new culture from within to get hold of its full meaning (Buttjes and Byram, 1991, pp. 18-9), artificial social contexts would necessarily mislead learners. For example, through an idealized or over-simplified presentation learners won't be able to see what the native could

see, and feel what the native could feel. So another point which needs to be stressed is that a content for language and cultural studies should reflect some most common social situations of real life, and some of the most culturally identifiable social behaviours of the real people.

§3.5 Some Problems Concerning Selection and Presentation

Some words concerning in what ways culture contents should be presented have to be said here. The principles laid down for what culture contents should be presented would not make much sense if the contents for learning cannot be selected and arranged to cope with the issues occurring due to the nature and the characteristics of the learning.

The first issue to be addressed is that in order to avoid being superficial and inconsistent presentation has to be conducted in a systematic manner. As has been said earlier, due to the nature of the learning, culture information has to be tailored to suit the level of linguistic skills, therefore at early stages meanings may not be dealt with in thoroughness because of the constraints of linguistic abilities. Obviously it is not very likely for learners to be able to build up an overall view of the target culture if their attention is focused only on each individual sociocultural phenomenon at a more surface level, without having chance to see their relation to each other, or rather to the culture as a whole.

To overcome this problem a systematic approach will be needed. That is, it is desirable that the whole learning procedure be designed in a way to give learners opportunities to observe similar meanings repeatedly and orderly from different angles, so that they would be able to experience them in different contexts at different levels of their learning. With each new experience their understanding deepens, and in this way they can be expected to see the inherent connections of social phenomena with their cultural basis. Thus from the easy to the more complicated, from separate cases of overt expressions to the more implicit underlying conceptual structures, their understanding of the target culture as a

whole develops as their experience with the culture accumulates in a more organized way. This is usually known as a 'spiral curriculum'.

With the evidence of their research, Byram and his colleagues have been able to demonstrate that a systematic approach is very important for building up an integral view of a culture. To distinguish the different outcomes produced by a more systematic approach and a less systematic one in presenting a culture through language learning, they have set up a contrast between two kinds of learning effects in terms of 'culture knowledge' and 'culture information'. The former, as it is explained, implies a more comprehensive view of the given culture while the latter indicates that the result of learning does not show an understanding of the target culture as a complete system. It is contended that a provision of culture information in an unsystematic manner would lead to learners' acquiring only 'culture information' which is unstructured and liable to lead to superficial understandings. While 'culture knowledge' which refers to what is structured and gives ideas of the inherent nature of a culture could only be the result of a more systematic approach (Byram, 1989, p. 120).

Although at the earlier stages not much can be discussed directly about sociocultural meanings, yet it does not mean that little can be done to help learners to build up culture knowledge. Because what people say or do are not independent incidences, rather they are related in one way or another either as expressions of an underlying meaning system or as the contributing elements of the meaning system, or maybe as both. The above example of the Japanese society illustrates that different social phenomena can be the outward expressions of the same concept(s). Conversely, social concepts are subject to changes as a result of social environmental changes. So it is possible for meanings to be handled in an organized way in which learners are exposed to different social phenomena selected and arranged in such a way that through them they would be able to discover gradually the inherent connections between them. In this way the development would go through the stages of getting simply some impressions of the target culture at the

very beginning to a more comprehensive understanding later on. A 'spiral curriculum' has been suggested for such a gradual progress for courses of language and culture studies. Such a curriculum would enable learners to return to the meanings that he has encountered earlier 'for more complex analysis' (Byram and Morgan, 1994, p. 51), so that meanings can be dealt with in increasing depth. To implement such an approach means that conscious efforts should be made whenever possible to bring out linkages between various culture phenomena, then concepts which are presented repeatedly on various occasions would be observed from different angles at different levels, thus resulting in a better understanding each time. Obviously such a spiral development has to depend upon a consistency in providing coherent and well selected contents.

Now let's come to the second issue concerning methodology. Either for the purpose of communicative competence or for the purpose of acculturation a comparative approach has got a big role to play. To begin with, being effective learning devices, comparison and contrastive analysis in language learning should be very useful for learners to grasp points of importance and obtain meanings. Although in language teaching more attention has been paid to other teaching techniques than direct contrastive analysis (Byram, 1994, p. 42), yet its usefulness is obvious. To compare languages and divergent ways of language use from a cultural perspective enables one to be more conscious of the differences and similarities between her/his own culture and the target culture, and the impact of each of them on the respective language and language use, hence to be able to get meanings more clearly. That will help learners particularly in pinpointing meanings which are unlike what they are familiar with. What needs to be mentioned here is that in different cultures there may be some apparently similar sociocultural phenomena which actually do not carry exactly the same meanings, sometimes the meanings they carry could even be far apart. Because discrepancies of this kind are inconspicuous and could easily escape people's attention, efforts are especially needed to bring them to learners' notice to avoid mis-interpretations. However this

has been recognized as a more difficult task than the case of dealing with more apparent discrepancies (Damen, 1987, p. 61).

Since by comparison learners would have to observe and analyse meanings on the basis of two cultures instead of one, they could be made more conscious of how different they and the native perceive things. Conceivably specific cultural meanings, some of which are very subtle, could be made more explicit and clear this way. In practice it is necessary to draw learners' attention not only to different ways of practice and behaviour, but more importantly, to what is behind them as well, so that they would be more likely to look into the relationship of perception and behaviour of each of the cultures apart from knowing what and how the differences are. The meaning of doing so can be seen clearly from a statement made by Damen:

...intercultural learners must contrast and compare their own frames of reference or world views with and to those of the "stranger". To plaster new cultural patterns into old form of references *unconsciously* (Italics in original text) is to court miscommunication.' (*Ibid*)

From what has been discussed already we have reason to believe that a comparative approach could be a great benefit for learners in extending their scope of vision and in their development in intercultural communicative competence.

Furthermore, for learners to overcome some inevitable difficulties from social and psychological gaps, or lacunae (see Ertelt-Vieth, 1991, pp. 168-174) a comparative approach could be more than useful. For in this way it is possible for them to go beyond their own cultural frame to examine different perceptions and feelings, including some sensitive ones, for example, those concerning social boundaries of two cultures - group identities, values and beliefs people hold as the important part of their existence. When the differences, particularly the perceptions concerning how each people/group of people think about themselves and the others, are brought side by side, learners are encouraged to take into consideration of the views other than their own, and thus to reconsider the visions they have held about themselves, their own culture and that of the others. More importantly such

a contrastive view could possibly bring home to them the point that they, just like others, are bound by their own culture, and what they say and do would reflect their own cultural background (see Byram, 1989, pp. 116-7). For learners to be aware of their own cultural formation and thus become willing to accept views different from their own, a comparative approach could be an effective means. Although attitude change is a complex issue, it is suggested by Byram that when a change in cognitive structures can be generated, especially in those which reflect the cultural boundary (in Byram's term), attitude change, which is dependent upon cognitive change, then can be possibly achieved (*Ibid*). In one word, a comparative approach could be very helpful in reducing both social and psychological distance.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITERIA FOR CULTURE CONTENT ANALYSIS

With the basic principles laid down, it is now possible to decide what criteria my analysis should be based upon. Several existing criteria for culture content selection will be looked into, and then I will decide on the criteria for my analysis. But first, to have a better idea of what sections of culture should have more immediate relevance to the expected development of learners, it is useful for us to have a closer look at how learners could be influenced by their learning. Since the expected change cannot be understood simply as a development in the ability to interact with the native, but rather a more profound change in perception and intellectual potential, in the following I shall first spend some time to discuss how these changes could be brought about.

§4.1 Communicative Competence and Attitude Change

Anyone who has some experience in cross-culture interactions may have come across some situations like not knowing how to address people appropriately, or having difficulties in getting the true intentions of a speaker from a different culture even if the linguistic forms employed are not unknown to her/him, or feeling anxious because of uncertainties about how to conduct a conversation in an appropriate manner, or simply because of being unable to find a mutually suitable topic, etc. The cause of the discomforts or failures in communication of this kind, is often more culturally related than linguistically related. For it is often the case that people do have some linguistic facilities to express their intentions, but feel a lack of knowledge of what should be appropriate to do in the given situations in that certain culture.

The culture barrier can be accounted for at two levels. Our earlier discussion has shown that people from different cultures do not think in the same

terms. That is, things are perceived differently from culture to culture because each culture reflects the specific life experience and history of that people. But the differences at this abstract level are not directly observable. They can be perceived only at the level of action. That is, differences in perceptions cannot be recognized unless they are reflected in people's behaviours - in what they do or in how they do it. So different cultures do not share, at the level of perception the same meanings, and at the level of pragmatics the same behavioural norms.

In communication the knowledge of culture could be more important than linguistic accuracy, First, in communication, people do not understand each other simply by taking words at their face values, for meaning and form do not enjoy one-to-one relationship. Different registers are used to express different intentions or signal different attitudes in accordance with people's estimations of the social and sociocultural situations they are in, such as: the relationship between the two sides, the locale and the time of the interaction, etc. The understated meanings which depend on a mutual understanding of sociocultural contexts can be retrieved only by an access to the tacit knowledge shared by the people.

But it is the empathic understanding of each other that enables people to perceive both the more direct meanings referred by words and the more emotional aspect lying underneath. As Wikan has concluded from her ethnographic research in several countries, understanding depends a lot on consonance. To tune into other people's viewpoint, people have to use both their power of thinking and power of feeling (Wikan, 1993, pp. 183-209). This obviously requires more than a high proficiency in linguistic skills, for to be able to understand fully members of another community learners have to learn to accept the native's world perspective so as to see and feel as the native does. In accounting for how people understand each other Morain has provided an account of Barnlund's view: '... understanding between people is dependent upon the degree of similarity of their belief systems, their perceptual orientations, and their communicative styles'. (Morain, 1986, p. 65) As we will see later on, such an understanding has to be obtained through a

willingness of learners to see things from the other's point of view and to experience what the native has to go through.

Below are a few examples for us to have a better idea of how exactly people's perception and behaviour could be influenced by their sociocultural conditions and by the value standards they hold.

As each society has inherited different historic traditions, has established its unique way of life and has enjoyed a unique social and cultural environment, its culture is markedly different from other cultures. This uniqueness will necessarily influence the way people perceive things and behave. For example, political structures and economic strength of a community are very important factors influencing people's life. So differences in these areas will certainly be reflected in perception and behaviour.

For instance, the different political systems of some western countries and some other undemocratic countries have resulted in great diversity in ways of thinking and behaving. The electoral and parliamentary system of the UK has, to a large extent, guaranteed a democratic system which allows common people the rights, at least to some extent, to have their voice heard and interests protected. The belief of equal rights finds its expressions clearly in people's behaviours. For instance, it is common in the UK to hear people commenting about or criticizing openly the government's policy and politicians' behaviours, making demands for policy change, or using laws, or even challenging the laws for the protection of their own interests, etc., while people under different political systems would not think and behave in quite the same way. Clearly without some knowledge of social structural differences it would be difficult for people to comprehend cross culturally each other's behaviours in this respect.

The economic situation of mainland China is different from that of Britain. This has produced noticeable perceptual and behavioural differences. We can take a simple example of difference in life styles. In Britain and other western countries the car is almost essential to most of the people. They depend on it for going to

work, for shopping, for holidays and so on. But people who are not familiar with this kind of life style, would perceive it differently. If explanation is not provided, this way of life may be thought by some Chinese learners as what is available only to some privileged people, or more likely may give the wrong impression that all the people in the west are very rich, because cars have been a symbol of power and wealth in China, and only very few people can enjoy this 'privilege'.

Not only do the differences of life surroundings have influence on the way things are perceived, they also have impact on semantics. For instance the same language is used in Taiwan and Mainland China. But in the last few decades Taiwan has gone through a significant economic development, and the life style there has been much influenced by western culture, particularly American culture, while at the same time Mainland China has gone through a sequence of political movements. So when the two sides began to have chance to communicate after a long separation they each found from the other side some unknown words and usages alongside with some unfamiliar concepts.

The influence of historical heritage and geographical conditions on perception and behaviour is also quite obvious. A handy example for the latter is that the changeable weather in Britain has contributed to the typical English way of greeting - talking about weather. And more importantly these aspects often contribute to the formation of the social identities of a culture group. It is not uncommon that people relate some characteristics of a culture to its natural surroundings or historical backgrounds. Some important geographical and historical knowledge of a country or a community, which is closely related to the life and the social identities of the members, such as territory, natural conditions, administrative divisions, and important historic events and figures which are significant to the life or values of the people, etc., usually forms part of the native's common knowledge. And of course one cannot afford to ignore the specific feelings that people have of the places they call home or motherland. It is clear that a provision of the knowledge which is common to the native and forms part of

their social identities would enable learners to appreciate the way the native thinks and acts.

Perceptual and behavioural difference is a reflection of differences in some deep-rooted beliefs and value standards. For instance, in the UK and some other countries it is believed that people's right for privacy should be respected. One expression of this value standard can be seen in a sort of social agreement that people should not ask about other people's personal details, such as: income, religious beliefs, political attitudes, a woman of her age, etc. But opposite to this, Chinese people in general lay more stress on group harmony and homely atmosphere in social interactions other than on individual privacy. To shorten social distance, the behaviours of Chinese take the characteristics of showing concerns over each other's personal situations. So their behaviours such as asking strangers about their age, income, status of marriage and family details, etc. which are certainly not appropriate by the western standards would make good sense when it is judged from its own standards. Once the underlying value standards are available, the apparent 'coldness' of the Westerners and the 'noisiness' of the Chinese would become less annoying to the people involved in the interactions. At least they would not be taken personally.

For the purpose of communication it is very important for learners to be aware of, and be familiar with those beliefs and value standards different from their own, even if they do not fully appreciate them. Examples of everyday life of the native, works of literature, arts, religion and philosophy should be good means to introduce learners to the moral values and aesthetic values of the target group, which will be helpful for learners to understand the mentality of the people. Once the meaning of a value standard is understood, many social phenomena derived from it could be much more easily interpreted.

Social conventions can be very different from culture to culture, and some of them relate directly to successful interpersonal interactions. For instance, how to address people appropriately, how to show gratitude or dissatisfaction, or how to

talk with different kinds of people in different situations, etc. are often reflections of some deep-rooted differences in value standards and beliefs. For social conventions are often the outward expressions, in standard forms, of some very common and basic beliefs and value standards shared in a culture, and have to be observed rigidly. So unless learners have acquired an understanding of the underlying implications of certain social conventions, they would not be able to comprehend fully those messages encoded, and not be able to function well in interacting with the native. For instance, in some cultures, such as that of Japan, there are different ways of addressing and talking to insiders and outsiders (see Hendry, 1987), so the language forms used would be a clear indication of social distance of the two sides and the attitude of the speaker. To use a wrong form would cause offence or confusion. In Chinese there is the tradition that people address neighbours, even strangers as cousins, uncles or aunts, or grandparents according to their age. This reflects the belief of Chinese that there should always be a family atmosphere among people. There also remain in the Chinese language a few polite forms of language use, or clichés which show courtesy to strangers, or people who are senior in age or position. If someone fails to observe such conventions, he would be regarded as having had an improper upbringing. With such a belief, it is very uncomfortable or offensive for Chinese people to address their senior by name, or to be addressed by a junior in such a way. I have personally witnessed an unfortunate example of this kind. Not being aware of social conventional differences between cultures, an old Chinese teacher, who came to England to teach for a year, was deeply shocked when she was addressed by her students by name.

Due to the fact that some social conventions, like what we have just mentioned above, are more observable and have more immediate implications to social interactions, they are more likely to be given more attention, though not always adequate, than other aspects of culture in language learning. What I would like to stress here is that it is not enough to simply demonstrate the way these

formulated usages are applied in relevant social situations. It is also important that learners should be reminded of the underlying values and beliefs, so that they would not only get information on how to apply the social conventions, but be guided to a better understanding of the culture system.

Differences are also reflected at discourse level - the way in which social interactions are conducted. For instance, comparisons of some discourse structures have shown that when making requests, Westerners tend to come to their points more immediately, while people of some Asian cultures, such as Japanese (Chinese as well) are likely to be less direct in their way of communication (see Schmidt, 1993, pp. 30-1). To speak strictly from the point of view of social interaction, discourse rules which dictate the way in which communication is structured, such as when and how to start or to close a conversation, how to approach a topic, when to make turn-taking, etc. should also be brought to learners' attention. An experience of Schmidt with Thai people has demonstrated this need (*Ibid*). After delivering a lecture in Thailand Schmidt found that his audience, who came over to talk to him, took leave after just a few words, which was much sooner than he had expected. Unaware of the social norm for leave-taking in Thai culture, he believed that his lecture was poorly received and felt a bit upset. In fact it was the difference in leave-taking practice that resulted in his misunderstanding. If he had been informed of the differences, he would have surely felt differently.

But unfortunately this aspect of language use could be easily overlooked in language learning, for it is not featured verbally and sometimes it is not very easy to pin down exactly the way a practice is conducted. For example, Chinese people do not say 'Thank you' or 'Sorry' as frequently as British. But the questions of when they do it, when they don't and why cannot be explained in very simple terms. These slight differences may affect communication without being realized. Therefore it would be beneficial for learners if they are made aware of them.

In communication people have to constantly assess what is expected of them and what responses their action will elicit from the other side so as to work in

co-operation. This can be done only on the basis that the two sides of the communication can interpret meanings in the same terms and can apply the same standards in judging the situations that they are in. In cross-cultural communication to be able to sense intentions of the other side, or to be able to plan an action for a purpose, such as deciding what to say, how to say it, and when to say it, one has to know the target culture well enough so as to understand the mentality of the people and to be able to avoid violating the conventional rules for communication in that culture.

To be able to do so requires, apart from a knowledge of the target language and culture, a willingness to understand and to accept a perspective different from one's own. It has been suggested that because of the psychological orientation of attitude towards social distance people tend to feel more comfortable with 'in-groups' than with 'out-groups' (Bochner, 1982, pp. 13-5). When getting in touch with a new culture, because of the difference in behaviours, in concepts, and even in appearance, the social distance perceived by learners could be very large. As an unfamiliar phenomenon is likely to be perceived as potentially dangerous, or suspicious, the social distance felt could thus possibly contribute to an uneasy feeling of the different culture. There is little doubt that if learners take a negative attitude towards the target culture, they would not be very interested in having social interactions with the members of that culture. And according to the view of Gardner and Lambert, reported by Acton and de Felix, a positive 'orientation' in learning would come from the 'desire to identify with or be closely associated with members of the target culture...' (Acton and de Felix, 1986, p. 24), therefore learners' motivation in learning could be seriously damaged if they took a negative attitude towards the target culture.

And if we look at the issue beyond the aspect of social interaction and language learning process, we could see also its implications for the general development of learners. Because with a negative attitude learners would be unlikely to be interested to know how other people see things and interpret

meanings, and consequently would be confined to their own world perspective. As far as social relations between different cultures are concerned, an ignorance of other meanings and perspectives would provide a basis for the development of ethnocentrism.

Though it is undeniable that culture plays a big role in influencing people's attitude towards other culture groups, since it is cultural differences that separate one group of people from another, yet evidence has been gathered to show that it is not very productive in creating sympathetic view of the other culture simply through cross-culture interaction. Doing so could sometimes even increase tensions. (see Gumperz and Gumperz, 1982, p. 3; Byram, 1989, pp. 102-3) As in regard to the issue of how to bring positive change to learners' attitude through cultural studies a cautious note has been made that : '...this is an area which is still in its initial stages of development' (Byram, 1989, p. 102). Studies have to be done to reveal in more depth how culture works on affective aspects. So we have to keep an open mind on this issue.

Attitudes, in a sense, can be seen as a reflection of an individual's vision of the world, because it clearly relates to her/his value judgements made on the basis of her/his understanding of moral values and aesthetic values, which are both personal and cultural oriented. When people try to make sense of new social phenomena which they encounter, it seems that they do not process the unfamiliar phenomena unemotionally. Instead they appear to be involved both cognitively and affectively. That is to say in the process of interpreting the meanings of new experiences, a sort of value judgement on them are therefore passed on. Just because people have different personalities, and different cultural backgrounds and experiences, the same social phenomenon could be taken very differently. It is then reasonable to assume that cognitive structures are formed in such a way that both cognitive experience and affective experience of an individual are embedded within them. So if attitude is to be changed, it seems necessary that people's cognitive structures should be modified (see Bochner, 1982, pp. 11-15; Byram, 1989, pp.

102-119). Although it is inconceivable that the learning could bring learners' experience of the target culture in line with that of the native, and personality does not seem to be directly accessible in the learning, yet as claimed by Valdes: '...comprehension of a people's behaviour patterns and their underlying values clearly gives a more positive attitude to the person who is trying to learn that language, ...' (Valdes, 1986, pp. 2-3). Because if learners are made to perceive things from other's point of view, they will no longer stay in the same position as they did psychologically. According to what Bochner has explained on the basis of attribution theory, because we do not know others as well as we do about ourselves, we can explain our behaviours by relating them to our situations, while we tend to attribute the causes of other people's behaviours to their personality traits (see Bochner, 1982, pp. 19-21). Based upon this he claims: '...the better we get to know other people the more do we come to regard them as we regard ourselves, i.e. in situational terms.' (*Ibid*, p. 20)

Since attitudes are related to people's perceived social distance and social meanings, it is suggested that learners should be encouraged to re-define them by trying to understand the new meaning system on the one hand, and on the other hand consciously examining, from the point of view of outsiders, their own cultural base (see Valdes, 1986; Byram, 1989, pp. 102-119). In this way they would have chance to know better the people whom they are to be in touch with, and to realize how they themselves and the things they are familiar with would appear in the eyes of the members of the target culture. 'After the learners are guided to a recognition of the cultural base of their own attitudes and behaviour, they are ready to consider others in a more favourable light. Through this process, what has seemed quaint, peculiar, or downright reprehensible becomes more reasonable and acceptable.' (Valdes, 1986, p. 2) This process could help them to be aware of their own limitations, and thus to develop a willingness to accept different views.

For this purpose, as suggested by Byram, in the process of learning adequate attention should be given to dealing with the issue of self-identity, and

that would help learners to start re-defining the distance between themselves and others. he argues:

It is those cognitive structures or schemata which reflect boundary-marking common cultural meanings which cultural studies teaching should be attempting to change. In the first instance the schemata which embody individuals' sense of their own ethnic identity determine how they experience other cultures and other people's ethnicity, and it is these schemata which need to change if these individuals' perceptions of others are to change - and their attitudes towards them. (Byram, 1989, p. 116)

According to Tajfel's definition which I quoted in Chapter II, self-identity includes the values and the emotional significance one has attached to her/his identity. It is the part that any individual or group would feel very strongly about. So through the learning learners need to be exposed to not only the way the native interpret meanings, but the way they feel about them. It should be useful to make deliberate efforts to present the members of the target group as individuals in real life situations with views and emotions. In this way it is possible for learners to put themselves in that situation, thus having better ideas of the life experienced by the native. For example, instead of a general introduction of or a detailed account of geography, history, social or political studies, it would be better if learning materials could demonstrate how the individual members are influenced by their sociocultural context in their way of thinking and behaving. On the other hand, it also means that the culture content learners are provided with should reflect what is close to the real life experience of the native. So an over-simplified portrait of a society or an artificial situation will not help learners to gain real insights of the native. Of course it is also necessary that the selected information should reflect what is common to the members and typical of the culture, so that learners can have better ideas of the culture as a whole in contrast with other cultures.

Now I am going to summarize this brief discussion on what an intercultural perspective could bring to learners, and then come to examine some of the existing criteria for analysing textbooks and/or designing syllabi.

Firstly, the above discussion has highlighted the influence of socio-cultural reality on perception and behaviour. The importance of socio-cultural reality for

the understanding of culture is obvious, as due to this reason, courses introducing the national geography, history, political and economic issues and other social issues of the target culture in learners' own language are often supplied as part of language learning programs. But they can not replace what a language and cultural studies course can offer. For one thing, as courses of independent disciplines, they do not concentrate themselves directly on what could be relevant to everyday life of the members or their social identities. Therefore though these area studies courses are of great help to learners in their understanding of the target culture, there should be opportunities to show, from a more pragmatic point of view, what are the responses of people towards their living environment. And furthermore, through concrete examples of social interaction in the target language, learners would be able to spot how the socio-cultural phenomena are related to the perception and self identity of the people.

Secondly, the discussion also shows that learners need to get themselves familiar with the social conventions of the target culture, because social convention is that part of knowledge which regulates behaviour and signals membership. More significantly it often embodies some important beliefs and values commonly recognized by all the members of a social group. So to be able to interpret meanings and understand the potentially emotional aspect in social interaction, learners have to know this aspect of culture. In the learning process attention should be led not only to how but also why the native behaves in the way s/he does, because only by so doing is it possible for learners to get insights into the perceptual and emotional world of the native.

Thirdly, it is important that learners should understand those value standards and beliefs which have great influence on all the members of the target group, particularly those which underlie different behaviours at various levels in their social and spiritual life, such as those in American culture, which, according to Kraemer, are often implicit in English teaching materials: individualism, egalitarianism, action orientation, etc. (see Dunnett, 1977, p. 154). Learners need

to understand these so that they can have good ideas of the perception and behavioural characteristics of the people they are to be in contact with. Once they have got some ideas of the mind-set of the people, communication will become easier. It is likely then that different view points would then be appreciated, and at the same time the course of communication would become more predictable.

And finally, social relationships between individuals and between social groups should also be part of learners' knowledge. How people interact with each other in accordance with their different social roles reflects some of the beliefs and values they hold. Therefore through observing social interactions, including social conventions, at different levels, such as between family members, between friends, with superiors, with peers, or with people of different gender or different ethnicity, etc., learners could grasp some important value standards behind the social practice, e.g. attitudes towards old and young, toward insider and outsider, and so on.

§4.2 A Survey of Some of the Existing Criteria for Cultural Content Analysis

There have been quite a lot of efforts made in integrating culture learning with language learning. Many suggestions have been put forward from various perspectives and some models have been proposed. For example as an attempt to deal with cultural clash in class and to help avoiding misunderstanding, Archer has proposed a method called 'culture bump' for the purpose of creating a culture awareness and cultural understanding in learners (Archer, 1986, pp. 170-7). By this method learners are to be exposed consciously to the conflicts between their own culture and the target culture. In this process their attention is drawn not only to some different features of each of the cultures, but more importantly to the different concepts behind them by consciously comparing the two. While being led to realize different cultural meanings embedded in the social behaviours and social realities of each of the cultures, learners are also offered a chance to explore the

realm of feelings. For 'They (culture bumps) lead teacher and student alike to an awareness of self as a cultural being and provide an opportunity for skill development in extrapolating one cultural influence on everyday life, expressing feelings effectively in a cross-cultural situation, and observing behaviour.' (*Ibid*, p. 171) Learners, while observing the attitudes of other people towards certain social realities, could also be guided to compare their own emotional response with that of the native. It is expected that this would help learners to gain a better understanding of the contrast between 'self' and 'others', and to be more sympathetic to the other's views, and thus the psychological barriers and language barriers could be more easily overcome.

Based upon similar ideas, Hughes has recommended some teaching techniques for raising cultural awareness and cultural understanding in class (see Hughes, 1984, pp. 167-8). He argues that the focus of culture study should be placed on 'an understanding of an individual's motives, intentions, desires, and reasons for behaviour' rather than on 'forms of organization, concepts, customary beliefs, and patterns of behaviour seen in relation to each other' (*Ibid*, p. 162). He contends that dealing with issues concerning motive, desires, intention, etc., which he has classified as 'psychological' type, 'can aid us in sensitizing our students to cultural differences', while those abstract ideas and factual knowledge, which he has classified as 'institutional' type, are much easier for students to grasp on their own (*Ibid*).

The idea behind the techniques is similar to that of 'culture bump' - a conscious analysis of culture in a comparative manner could help to sensitize learners' culture awareness and to remove misunderstandings. What is stressed by the techniques is to provide opportunities for learners to be actively involved in finding out the similarities and differences between their own culture and the target culture so as to discover what is behind the overt expressions of each culture, and why they are different. In this way learners will be encouraged to seek meanings in a wider scope. When they are made to realize that their own behaviour is culturally

bound, they will be more likely to accept what has originally appeared to them as 'strange' or 'disagreeable' behaviours, and to acknowledge the values and beliefs held by others. If this can be achieved, ethnocentrism would be replaced by a more open view of 'self' and 'others'. As far as the learning process is concerned, learners' motivation for learning may thus be elevated as a consequence.

Suggestions have also been made for selecting culture themes or topics. Though there have been a lot in common in those suggestions, there exist some differences in emphasis due to diversities in objectives and orientations of teaching.

For example Brooks has provided a comprehensive list of 62 topics useful for cultural studies in language class. They range from more observable features, such as social norms, life patterns, social institutions, social welfare and so on to less observable features, such as social values and beliefs and attitudes towards life, etc., relevant to teenage learners (see Brooks, 1986, pp. 124-8). Let's take some examples randomly from the list:

- *Greetings, friendly exchange, farewells.* How do friends meet, converse briefly, take their leave? What are the perennial topics of small talk? How are strangers introduced?
- *The morphology of personal exchange.* How are interpersonal relationship such as differences in age, degree of intimacy, social position, and emotional tension reflected in the choice of appropriate forms of pronouns and verbs.
- *Patterns of politeness.* What are the commonest formulas of politeness and when should they be used?
- *Verbal taboos.* What common words or expressions in English have direct equivalents that are not tolerated in the new culture, and vice versa?
- *Discipline.* What are the norms of discipline in the home, in school, in public places, in the military, in pastimes, and in ceremonies?
- *Festivals.* What days of the calendar year are officially designated as national festivals? What are the central themes of these occasions and what is the manner of their celebration?
- *Pets.* What animals are habitually received into the home as pets? What is their role in the household?
- *Comradeship.* How are friendships and personal attachments likely to be formed and what provisions are made for fostering comradeship through clubs, societies, and other group organizations.
- *Cosmetics.* What are the special conditions of age, sex, activity, and situation under which make-up is permitted, encouraged, or required?
- *Tobacco and smoking.* Who smokes, what, and under what circumstances? What are the prevailing attitudes toward smoking? Where are tobacco products obtained?
- *Competitions.* In what fields of activity are prizes awarded for success in open competition? How important is competition in schools, in the business world, in the professions?

- *Learning in school.* What is the importance of homework in formal education? What is taught at home by older members of the family?
- *Meals away from home.* Where does one eat when not at home? What are the equivalents of our lunchrooms, cafeterias, dining halls, lunch counters, wayside inns, restaurants?
- *Careers.* What careers have strong appeal for the young? How important is parental example and advice in the choice of a career? What financial help is likely to be forthcoming for those who choose a career demanding long preparation?

What is emphasized in Brooks' list is that the learner should be guided to see how the target group act in their specific sociocultural situations and the relationship of the cultural environment and the behaviours. As we can see from what have been quoted from the list, the author suggests that through being exposed to the practical performance of everyday life of the target group and their everyday life common sense, the learner could possibly come to see how the target group interpret the world and therefore the reason why they behave the way they do. He observes: '...the point of view should be that of a young person of the age and status of the students being addressed, and the perspective should be that of such a person as he goes about his daily tasks.' (*Ibid*, p. 124) Thus these topics and themes are chosen to present, from various angles, social and cultural realities experienced by the young people of the target culture to help learners to gain 'the view of life as seen from within the new speech community, especially by individuals who are in circumstances comparable to those of the student.' (*Ibid*, p. 128) So the list is found to have included many aspects of everyday life and concerns of individuals, with particular reference to that of students, e.g. work and leisure, life style, living conditions, social interaction and appropriate verbal behaviours, companionship, hobbies, and some social institutions and public services, etc. for the purpose of creating a more genuine picture of the life led by young people, rather than to impose an abstract impression of a culture on learners. There are several topics on language use, showing the impact of social context on language behaviours - variation of language forms, of tones and intonations in relation to different purposes of language use and different social situations; differences between written language and spoken language; and verbal taboos as

well. This 'observing the culture from within' approach certainly gives credit to what is desired of the learning - providing an insider's view of what things should be like, what should be appropriate, thus enabling learners to develop their communicative competence.

By following the list of topics, learners will be able to get an insight into the relationship of sociocultural environment, perception and behaviour by being exposed to a culture through the individual's experience of life from various angles. As what they are exposed to is likely to be close to real-life interactions, they could have a chance to examine attitudes, feelings and emotions characteristic of the target group. In my opinion, it emphasizes how as individuals, the people of the target group identify themselves.

The following list has suggested a different approach. The list of topics compiled by the American Language Institute for cross-cultural courses (quoted by Dunnett et al., 1986, pp. 152-3) seems to have laid more emphasis on learners' having a more profound understanding of American culture as a whole. As we shall see below, it has placed a lot of stress on an understanding of the general features and some distinctive characteristics of American culture - the basic structures of the society and some prominent features of it. The list is quoted below:

1. The United States - The Melting Pot Society
 - diagram of American ethnicity
 - emphasize the melting pot idea - has it succeeded?
 - discuss 'mainstream America'
2. Mexican Culture
 - attitudes of and toward Mexican-Americans
 - Spanish and Mexican influences in many parts of the United States
3. Blacks in America
 - attitudes of and toward
 - Martin Luther King and the Civil Rights movement
 - Uncle Tom's Cabin excerpt / short stories written by Black Americans
4. Native Americans
 - contributions of
 - Indian folk stories
 - American Indians as depicted by films
5. Religion in America
 - attitude toward

- different kinds
 - effects on culture
 - cults and organized religion
6. Women in America
 - contributions of
 - attitudes of and toward
 - ERA and anti-abortionists
 - anti-abortionists
 7. The American Family
 - structure
 - values
 - level of closeness
 - dependence/independence
 8. American customs
 - multiplicity of
 9. The American Character
 - stereotypes
 - myths
 - various types
 10. Big Cities vs. Small Towns
 - ways and attitudes
 11. American Business
 - how does it affect relations and attitudes?
 - commercialization: Christmas and Easter
 12. Pop Culture
 - poetry
 - abstract painting / Andy Warhol's 'Campbell Soup Can'
 - rock music
 - disco music
 13. American Attitudes
 - toward themselves
 - toward the world
 14. A View from the Outside
 - looking at the arts and literature from abroad, how are Americans viewed in other countries?

(Dunnnett et al., 1981, pp. 152-3)

Unlike the list offered by Brooks, it attempts to present a collective image of Americans rather than individuals who are busy with their everyday life. It is clear that the orientation of the above list is to produce an over-all picture of America and Americans so as to enable learners to get an outline of what American culture is briefly about and the basic idea of how Americans in general identify themselves. Therefore we can see the attempt to present the culture from a much wider scope

than the other one. It appears that a lot of attention is placed on an understanding of the values and beliefs which form the specific structures of American culture, particularly those which influence the social identities of the people, such as the heritage of multi-cultural background, the basic characteristics and attitude of the people. Correspondingly the list itself does not give clear suggestions on how individuals function in the culture and the interactions between people and environment. Instead it presents the culture of its main frames and characteristics.

If the two lists are compared, I would say the former provides the environment for learners to look into the life experience of the native and thus observe more closely their social behaviours and their emotional reactions, therefore they learn about what they would think and feel as well as behave. The latter on the other hand points out from a much broader view those aspects of culture which are so fundamental that they distinguish the culture from other cultures. In order to understand a culture in general and the basic features and mentality of a people, learners need to have knowledge of this kind. But in my view, what is inadequate in the second list is probably that it does not give a clear idea about the material side of life in USA and about how the American spirits are reflected in individuals' everyday behaviours, particularly language behaviour in the area of pragmatics. Brook's list concentrates on presenting the life relevant to teenagers, so it does not cover as wide a range as the other list.

It has been clearly indicated in the second list that a comparative view is necessary for learners to have a better understanding of themselves and the target group, particularly in bringing out those 'deep aspects of culture' (*Ibid*, p. 155) - concepts, attitudes, emotions, etc. It is suggested that the learning should reveal to learners how the Americans views themselves and others, which may contrast with the way they are perceived by others and *vice versa*. In this way learners would be encouraged to seek for a 'two-dimensional outlook' (*Ibid*, p. 153), and to understand meaning from a wider angle. As our earlier discussion indicates, issues

concerning attitudes, identities, could be used to encourage learners to reflect upon their own cultural base and emotional attachment.

In analysing cultural references in European textbooks, Risager pointed out that since the 1950s the foreign language teaching textbooks ‘...have been ascribed an increasingly important cultural role as well: linguistic examples have been dramatised to a larger extent, interlocutors have become flesh and blood by the way of drawings and photos, and the everyday life, the social context, and the natural environment of the foreign countries concerned have been gradually introduced.’ (Risager, 1991, p. 181) In her opinion although an intercultural perspective has increasingly been gaining attention, there still is a problem of lack of materials and teachers’ experience in this respect (*Ibid*, p. 182). On some occasions emphasis has been put mainly on the social interactional aspect of cultural studies, neglecting its wider implications. (*Ibid*, p. 191) Her analysis has been based on a model which, as she says, has been elaborated in different models (*Ibid*, p. 182). It comprises four categories:

1. The micro level - phenomena of social and cultural anthropology:
 - a. the social and geographical definition of characters;
 - b. material environment;
 - c. situations of interaction;
 - d. interaction and subjectivity of the characters: feelings, attitudes, values, and perceived problems.
2. the Macro level - social, political, and historical matters:
 - a. broad social facts about contemporary society (geographical, economic, political, etc.)
 - b. broad sociopolitical problems (unemployment, pollution, etc.)
 - c. historical background.
3. International and intercultural issues:
 - a. comparisons between the foreign country and the pupils’ own;
 - b. mutual representations, images, stereotypes;
 - c. mutual relations: cultural power and dominance, cooperation and conflict.
4. points of view and style of the author.

(*Ibid*, pp. 182-3)

As we can see from this model, the way a culture content is selected and presented will necessarily reflect the author’s points of view, which could be

culturally and personally biased. As far as culture content is concerned, it can be viewed from three different levels, with the first two levels, in my view, concerning mainly with an understanding of the characteristics of a culture at both the individual level and institutional level, and the third with largely methodology and cultivating cultural awareness. An intercultural competence would come from the combination of the three categories, which are interactive with and interdependent upon each other.

As is suggested by the list, the micro level is founded on the fact that the learning should provide information about the specific social characteristics possessed by the members of a culture group as well as about the specific conditions which have contributed to the forming of these characteristics. That is, through the learning learners are to be guided to see culture as the outcome of interactions between a human being and his/her social environment. So characters presented in textbooks should be defined in their culture-specific contexts. According to what are listed in this group, some very important aspects of individuals should be made available for learners to observe, e.g. human relationships, living conditions and life style, behavioural patterns and attitudes, feelings and value-beliefs, etc. It is not difficult for us to see the similarities between this category and the comprehensive list provided by Brooks. Both of them place a lot of emphasis on the interactive relation of environment, behaviour and perspective. Clearly this will give better ideas about the target group than presenting them separately from their cultural contexts, or presenting a culture in an unemotional and unproblematic way.

At the macro level the focus of attention is shifted from the interactions at the individual level to issues concerning largely social structures. Here the institutional features and other social realities such as: historical and geographical features, political and economic institutions and other social phenomena are to be brought to the attention of learners. Most of the items in the list drawn up by American Language Institute fit into this group. Knowledge of this kind would

provide a broader view of a culture - how a culture as a whole differs from others in a more fundamental way. This enables learners to see how individuals are influenced by their social frame. Yet from our earlier discussion we can see that it is important that information should be presented in the way that the personal experience and feelings of the native towards the social facts are to be included. Only in this way can the impact of social reality on individual's behaviour and perception be revealed.

The third category - international and intercultural issues - has emphasized the need to sensitize learners' cultural awareness. Its significance for cognitive and psychological change has been discussed earlier. It is suggested by the list that learners should be invited to compare their own culture with the target culture and be exposed to different points of views. By setting alongside the target culture the phenomena of learners' own culture and their vision of the world, learners are likely to be made more reflective of their own cultural views and therefore to be more aware of the existence of other meanings, and possibly to accept other views more easily. Particularly when they are made aware that they could misunderstand others just as easily as they themselves could be misunderstood.

By employing the mechanisms of stereotyping, mutual representing and examining mutual relations, learners are guided to examine, or to re-examine from a different angle, their own attitudes towards 'self' and 'others', particularly towards the target group. Through consciously comparing some over-simplified or even misperceived images from both sides, learners could be persuaded to look at things in a different light. This cross-inspection could be a useful tool for learners to overcome some of their psychological barriers in their learning. When they are guided to see culture differences from an intercultural perspective, they could actually see much more than they would in their original stance and realize the limitation of their own views. Therefore they would be likely to take a sympathetic view of the other ideas and values. In that case their attitudes and motivation of learning would be likely to change positively (see Damen, 1987, p. 224).

Risager's model has summarized from different angles those aspects of culture important for developing intercultural competence. Although the themes are categorised into different groups, yet in teaching practice they need to be dealt with in an integral way. In the teaching the inter-related relationship between different cultural phenomena should be brought to learners' attention, since what they need is to understand a culture as a complex system, not as a combination of different information.

What has been said about the model proposed by Risager can be applied to a list of culture themes proposed by Byram, Morgan and their colleagues. This list (in the following I will call it 'the list' in contrast with 'the model' which we discussed above), in my opinion, has based upon principles which have a lot in common with those which underlie the model. As we shall see from the list, what has been concerned in the model has also been given attention in the list. In both of the proposals we can see the effort of promoting a wider world perspective in learners as well as a competence for cross-cultural communication. A comparative approach is also recommended for eliciting deep-rooted meanings and feelings, as well as for the sake of clarifying meanings. In the model those aspects concerning attitude, cultural understanding and the ability to interact interculturally are categorized, I think for the sake of comparison, into three different groups, though they are by no means separated, while in the list all these aspects are covered without apparently being treated separately. So in nature the two have a lot in common, but as we shall see, the list tries to give a more detailed view of what exactly could be included in content. Let's have a look at this list:

MINIMUM CONTENT: AREAS OF STUDY

- *social identity and social groups*: groups within the nation-state which are the basis for other than national identity, including social class, regional identity, ethnic minority, professional identity, and which illustrate the complexity of individuals' social identities and of a national society (NB the issue of national identity is dealt with under 'stereotypes');

- *social interaction*: conventions of verbal and non-verbal behaviour in social interaction at differing levels of familiarity, as outsider and insider within social groups;
- *belief and behaviour*: routine and taken-for-granted actions within a social group - national or sub-national - and the moral and religious beliefs which are embodied within them; secondly, routines of behaviour taken from daily life which are not seen as significant markers of the identity of the group;
- *socio-political institutions*: institutions of the state - and the values and meanings they embody - which characterise the state and its citizens and which constitute a framework for ordinary, routine life within the national and sub-national groups; provision for health-care, for law and order, for social security, for local government, etc.;
- *socialisation and the life-cycle*: institutions of socialisation - families, schools, employment, religion, military service - and the ceremonies which mark passage through stages of social life; representation of divergent practices in different social groups as well as national auto-stereotypes of expectations and shared interpretations;
- *national history*: periods and events, historical and contemporary, which are significant in the constitution of the nation and its identity - both actually significant and, not necessarily identical, perceived as such by its members;
- *national geography*: geographical factors within the national boundaries which are significant 'in members' perceptions of their country; other factors which are information (known but not significant to members) essential to outsiders in intercultural communication (NB national boundaries, and changes in them, are part of 'national history');
- *national cultural heritage*: cultural artefacts perceived to be emblems and embodiments of national culture from past and present; in particular those which are 'known' to members of the nation - e.g. Shakespeare in Britain, the Impressionists in France, Wagner in Germany - through their inclusion in curricula of formal education; and also contemporary classics, not all of which have reached the school curriculum and some of which may be transient but significant, created by television and other media - e.g. Truffaut's films in France, Agatha Christie in Britain, Biermann's songs in Germany;
- *stereotypes and national identity*: for example, German and English notions of what is 'typically' German and English national identity; the origins of these notions - historical and contemporary - and comparisons among them; symbols of national identities and stereotypes and their meanings, e.g. famous monuments and people.

(Byram, 1994, pp. 51-52)

From the list we can see some more concrete suggestions on what could be done in incorporating cultural studies in language learning courses for the aims

discussed earlier. The relation of different aspects of culture can be seen more explicitly. For example, in the category of *socialization and life-cycle* it can be seen more clearly the connection of social institutions and beliefs and behaviours. In dealing with historical issues, it is suggested that attention should be focused on those which have affected the way people perceive their social identities and the way they perceive the world, but not what the author would think interesting or important, nor what would be done in a history course. Also in regard to issues of socio-political institutions the authors think that those to be presented have to be related to the ordinary life and concerns of the people. In other words, the representatives of social structures, organizations, as well as the values represented by them, have to be those which have more obvious and wider-spread influence on people's way of thinking and behaving. It seems to me that what is focused at in the list is to create an integral vision of the target culture. Suppose, if we introduce Confucius, a very influential figure in Chinese history, according to the suggestions it would be better for us, for instance, to inform learners how Confucius' ideas of social and family orders have influenced the conception and behaviour of Chinese people in these respects in the last two thousand years, instead of simply introducing what he has achieved as a philosopher, educationist and politician.

As for social identity, the list has given some examples to show the complexity of an individual's social identities. Besides national identity, a person assumes different social identities in different contexts, such as in the family, in the work place, as a member of an age group, ethnic group or other social groups. Since each social group has its own specific way of practice and holds specific values and beliefs, from the point of view of social interaction a knowledge of these could be necessary for learners to understand the target group and to function properly in given social situations in that culture. With social identities being presented together with different social contexts and different social behaviours, a lively atmosphere of social interactions could be created to some extent, and

learners would be able to get some insight into the native's understanding of social roles, social situations and behavioural norms the native is required to follow.

Moreover, in dealing with social identity, the 'deep culture' (see above) could be brought up for inspections. As the issue of self identity is attached with emotions, in dealing with national identity it is suggested in the list, as well as in the model, that there should be introduced in the learning the mechanism of mutual representation. Starting with stereotypes, a conscious comparison of the images of self and the other side as the reflection in each other's eyes could open the door for a deeper understanding of the target culture as well as one's own, therefore leading to a sympathetic view of different meanings, values, and feelings and emotions. We can see in the list an emphasis on dealing with national identities - for the purpose of understanding how the native views her/himself and her/his culture, or how s/he identifies himself, selected content should include the information which the native takes as part of her/his national identity, either geographical, historical or behavioural characteristics which are significant to the social identities of the target group.

It can be seen from the above discussion that the model proposed by Risager and the list by Byram et. al. covers roughly the same range of cultural themes. They comprise wider scope of cultural information than the previous two lists. In fact we can see that what has been concerned in each of the previous lists can be said to have been included in the last two lists under separate categories. Although the model and the list, in my view, share, to a large extent, the same considerations over the objectives and methodology of learning, yet the list gives clearer idea of what exactly the learning is after. For example in dealing with issues of belief and behaviours, national cultural heritage, etc. it is made quite clear in the list that the focus of the learning should be to expose learners to what has been most common to all the members of the target group, either as part of their everyday life, or what has been most commonly shared by all the members as part

of their social identity. With items more clearly defined, a better focus is allowed in selecting cultural content.

In the previous chapter I have drawn the basic principles for content analysis on the basis of the aims and nature of such a language and culture learning, and in this chapter I have discussed what could be achieved with an intercultural approach. In my view a criterion for cultural content analysis should provide means to achieve the following:

1) A knowledge of the relationship between man and his living and social environment. But it is not enough that living and social conditions are presented simply as a background for linguistic activities. Rather information on how people are affected by and respond to their environment, as well as their attitude towards them, are more important for learners to know;

2) A knowledge of the relationship between individuals and between social groups. This includes the complexity of social identities, social behavioural norms and the values and beliefs attached to them. Various human relations and affective elements need to be dealt with;

3) An understanding and appreciation of the value-belief system of the target culture. This means learners have to be encouraged to adopt a wider world perspective other than their one-sided perspective. In respect of emotional aspects and the search for meaning a mutual representation may create a more intriguing situation for learners to discover themselves as well as the target group;

4) A general idea of the national identity of the target group. This includes social values which are commonly held by the members, and their outward expressions, such as specific behavioural norms and other sociocultural features which distinguish the members from outsiders.

We can see both Risager's model and Byram and Morgan's list are wide enough to cover all the above mentioned aspects of learning. Since the list is more detailed and gives more methodological implications, I will choose this list as the criterion for the following cultural content analysis.

CHAPTER FIVE

AN ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENTS OF TWO LCFL COURSEBOOKS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF LANGUAGE AND CULTURE LEARNING

In this chapter I shall examine the cultural contents of two coursebooks for Learning Chinese as a Foreign Language (LCFL) against the criteria I have chosen. But before getting into the details of the books, I shall first explain why I have chosen these learning materials for the analysis. Also it will be useful for us to have a brief idea of some of the changes brought to the concepts and the pedagogic practice of LCFL and its implications for the development of LCFL learning materials, so that we can have a better idea of the framework in which the discussion is to be carried out.

§5.1. Changes in the Concept of LCFL and Its Impact on Learning Materials

As has been pointed out in the introduction, because the concept of Chinese language learning was traditionally, and to a large extent still is, often associated with academic development of learners - gaining access to the high culture of the nation, or studying the political, economic or social systems of the society, or getting opportunities to do studies or researches in some other subjects in Chinese language, it was, or rather has been a characteristic of LCFL that the learning concerns mostly the ability to understand written texts, caring much less about skills of listening, speaking and communication. This can be partly explained by the fact that as a foreign language Chinese was, and to a considerable degree still is, mostly taught at tertiary level. This has determined a strong orientation of the learning towards cognitive development and academic interests. As courses of higher education, it is not surprising that great importance has been attached to the educational experience and the academic development of learners. To be able to get access to the written literature is thus essential.

But a more fundamental reason for emphasizing the written literature, particularly that of the high culture, lies in a deeply rooted concept of what Chinese language learning is about. It has been the case, though there has been a gradual change, that from the point of view of both native Chinese and foreign specialists in Chinese studies, only the written language, more precisely the written literature recording the achievements of the culture and other sorts of subject knowledge are regarded as important to learners. Because not only these achievements and subject knowledge are considered as the valuable assets of our human being, but also a knowledge of this kind and the ability to read and write are what should be expected of educated people. In regard to how the Chinese language and the learning of the language have been perceived by the native, and its implications for instructional practice, Walton states: 'To many natives the Chinese language is the written language.' Therefore, he continues: 'The curricula that have been designed for American students in the PRC in the last decade seems as much oriented to an appreciation of Chinese high culture as to skill development ...' (Walton, 1989, p. 13) Just as is the case of many other written languages, for thousands of years written Chinese has been taken with a lot of respect by the people, and what is used by people in their everyday life was, and to a considerable degree still is, not so much valued, therefore not regarded as worthy of studying. As far as non-native views are concerned, written Chinese has also been taken as the focusing point of the learning. Besides what has just been said above, there has also been a more obvious reason for it. In a good many cases foreign teachers who have been involved in the field of TCFL (teaching Chinese as a foreign language) are specialists in different areas of Chinese studies. Naturally it would be their concern that the learning should lead to an ability and interest in pursuing in the future whatever field of interest a learner may have. That is to say, much importance of the learning is attached to academic development.

There is yet another important contributing factor. In the past there was not much chance for Chinese and other peoples to have direct cross-cultural interactions. So there was no real need for learners to pay much attention to skills for cross-cultural

communication, as used to be the case of language learning in general. This partly bears the explanation for why the great changes in the language learning theory and the pedagogic practice in general in the 1960s and the 1970s did not bring much change to the tradition of LCFL until around the 1980s, when the *Open-door Policy* was carried out. Since then China has been increasingly involved in international affairs, and there have been more and more cross-cultural interactions between Chinese and other peoples. This change has called for skills to carry out direct cross-cultural communications, and consequently spurred the change in TCFL.

It used to be the case in the practice of Chinese language teaching that the learning was divided into two parts. Because most learners of Chinese start their courses with no or little experience with the language, so it means that they would not be able to get into the learning of selected Chinese written texts before they have acquired some basic knowledge of the language system. Therefore in the first stage focus was given to the language structures, and then attention was shifted to some selected works on literature, history, philosophy, or other subject studies, and that usually consisted of a good proportion of classics. Language learning materials were then designed accordingly: with heavy emphasis on the grammar and language structures at the early stage - often individual sentences with little meaning in them; and then on selected works at later stages. Alongside the language courses, learners often had opportunities to attend various background courses provided in their native language, so that they could get a lot of culture information and knowledge about the target culture, which is believed necessary for and important to their studies. About this practice some comments will be made later.

As we can see, it is a characteristic of the tradition of LCFL that culture studies is basically treated separately from language skills acquisition. It can be said that the interactive nature of language and culture, and the impact of cultural understanding on the language learning process were much ignored. Therefore it can be said that though culture studies was the part where much attention was placed, what was stressed in the

learning is quite different from what is aimed at by the present endeavour of language and culture learning.

As I said in the introduction, since the end of the 1970s LCFL has experienced a fast development. And most profound to this development is the change in the concept of language teaching - to enable learners to be successful in cross-cultural communication has been acknowledged, and the traditional view that a mastery of the grammar-structure knowledge is necessarily the first step leading to a more in-depth learning of literature or other subject studies has been replaced by it. So in the teaching much more attention has been turned to the pragmatic use of language in social interactions. Although, as pointed out by Lü, some efforts had been made in China in the 1960s to promote the abilities of applying the language for practical use, nevertheless what was aimed at was not explicitly defined, and there was little doubt that the ability for conducting cross-culture interactions was not what exactly the teaching was designed to promote (see Lü, 1990, p. 34).

The change in concept has been reflected in both the theoretic development and the instructional practice of LCFL. Ever since the communicative approach was introduced into the teaching of Chinese, to develop communicative competence has been regarded a major principle for the design of the overall development of LCFL and the primary aim of the language teaching (Yu, 1991, p. 55).

As far as textbooks are concerned, this has brought a great deal of change in this respect. A lot of efforts have been invested in constructing new learning materials, and there has been a noticeable shift of emphasis from grammar-structure learning to a more functional oriented approach (*Ibid*, p. 56). The most obvious development is that since the beginning of the 1980s a good variety of books for various purposes and levels have been produced to meet different kinds of demand. It is a common feature of many of them that a lot of attention has been given to the functional aspect of language use in the learning. Efforts can be seen in contextualizing the language contents and in introducing the social conventions so as to demonstrate the constraints of social situations on language behaviours. It is said that many new textbooks are constructed

with the principle of combining the structural aspect, social situational aspect and the functional aspect in the learning (see Lü, 1990, p. 136).

But as has been pointed out by Yu, a member of the Chinese National TCFL Leading Group, because of a lack of understanding of the exact meaning of communicative competence, how to help learners to develop such a competence is a problem yet to be solved. According to him what has been done in implementing the communicative approach has been largely restricted to the functional aspect of language use, and other aspects concerning communicative competence have not been sufficiently dealt with or fully understood (see Yu, 1991, p. 58). Although the role of cultural understanding to the forming of communicative competence has been recognized (as it can be seen from the introductions of the two coursebooks we are going to analyse), and in some books efforts have been made in this respect, yet what exactly should be done, and how it could be done effectively are still questions waiting to be answered more satisfactorily (see Lü, 1990, p. 131). Because there has not been enough theoretical guidance for the pedagogic practice, so what has been done may be said to be partly empirically based. It has been suggested then that a list of contents indicating different levels of competence in functional use and a list of graded culture contents should be established to guide the learning at each different stage just as has been done in grammar and lexicon learning (*Ibid*, p. 61).

§5.2. Reasons for Choosing the Two Coursebooks for Analysis

The two coursebooks I am going to analyse are entitled *Practical Chinese Reader* (实用汉语课本) and *Modern Chinese - Beginner's Course* (初级汉语课本) respectively. The reasons why I have chosen the two particular coursebooks for analysis are these. Firstly, I have used both of them for teaching for a few years and therefore I can draw upon my own experience with them in the analysis. Also I have noticed some differences between them. I hope, by taking a close look at them, particularly through a comparison of the differences, some understanding could possibly be gained of the way in which outcomes of learning are influenced by the

contents provided, however limited this may be. But more importantly, I hope that a close look at the cultural contents in them with an intercultural perspective would enable us to have some ideas of in what ways these learning materials are useful in assisting learners with their development in cultural understanding and cultural awareness, and in what ways they are unsatisfactory.

Secondly, it is claimed in both books that to develop communicative competence is what the learning aims at. Actually *The Practical Chinese Reader* (hereafter as *Reader*), published in 1981 (the first two volumes), is said to be the first coursebook produced in mainland China attempting to implement the communicative approach in Chinese language learning (see Lü, 1990, p. 59). And the other one was published in 1986 also in mainland China. By comparing them we can see what has been done in each of them for the sake of promoting communicative competence, and what has been successful or unsatisfactory in each of them. And if there are some differences between them, then what could be the implications to the development of TCFL?

Finally, and more importantly, as far as I know both of the coursebooks have been used widely for TCFL in and out of China for many years. Particularly the *Reader*, which was produced mainly for users outside China (see Lü, 1990, p. 60; Shi, 1990, p. 631) was one of the major sources of learning materials for Chinese language learning in many countries (also in China) until five or six years ago, and is still very popular today. It should be made clear here that this particular coursebook consists of different levels: elementary, intermediate and advanced, and it is the books at the elementary level that have been most widely used, and also it is this part and the early intermediate part that the present writing is going to look into. The impact of this coursebook can be seen from the fact that several supplementary learning materials and other learning aids, such as computer learning programmes, have been developed in the last few years largely on the basis of it in the United States, as well as from the simple fact that the two elementary volumes have been reprinted for at least ten times between

1981 and 1995. The influence of it is such that we could see its impact on the teaching practice of LCFL.

The other coursebook - *Modern Chinese - Beginner's Course* (hereafter as *Course*) was published about five years later - the first two volumes in 1986 and the third in 1988, and has also gained a lot of popularity, though compared with the former, as far as I know, it may have had a less strong influence outside mainland China than the *Reader* for various reasons. Unlike the *Reader*, it is not claimed to be specifically designated for users outside the country. And also it seems to be that some teachers find the grammatical system less clearly and effectively presented in this coursebook than in the other one, and there are also less exercises in this respect. For teachers who believe it important that learners should acquire first of all a good knowledge of the linguistic system through their learning, this change is not something which can be very much appreciated and easily coped with. Another reason lies in the fact that there have been quite a number of coursebooks for LCFL produced around the same time as this one or after, and some have adopted a similar approach - placing more emphasis on demonstrating how the language is used by the native in given situations (e. g. *Chinese For Today*, 1986; *Learning Chinese*, 1992), therefore there have been a much wider choice for people in their selection of learning materials than ever before. And of course, there could be other reasons as well.

Since both of the coursebooks have had quite a big influence on LCFL teaching practice, and both have been the direct result of the attempt to implement the communicative approach in TCFL, an analysis of them could be expected to give a relatively reliable impression of the general state of affairs in TCFL during this period.

In this analysis attention will be focused on issues of what sort of culture information has been presented to learners in these coursebooks, and whether the information supplied is relevant and sufficient to achieve the aim of promoting communicative competence, as it has been claimed by both of them. Attention will also be given to the issue of to what extent the other educational potentials of language

education could have been achieved by having learners exposed to the culture contents provided.

And secondly, this analysis may help us to see the relationship between cultural studies through language learning and cultural studies through various background courses, since so far it has been the case that Chinese as a foreign language is, in a good many cases, taught at the tertiary level where area studies usually constitute a very important part of curriculum alongside the language courses (except a few cases). In such a case is it necessary to emphasize the cultural aspect in language learning courses? Are the cultural studies in language courses and background studies compatible or exclusive? If it is necessary to emphasize cultural studies in language courses, then what culture knowledge/information should be given priorities for the best interest of learners?

§5.3 An Introduction of the Coursebooks

Both of the coursebooks are designed mainly for adult foreign learners, and both of them are produced by Beijing Language Institute which has been the centre of teaching Chinese as a foreign language in mainland China. The *Reader* comprises three levels: elementary, intermediate and advanced, with two volumes at each level. The two volumes at the elementary level have been admired for their linguistic clarity, particularly for the clear and systematic treatment of grammar and for the carefully controlled step-by-step progress, and therefore were, and still are preferred by many teachers of LCFL. Other volumes for later stages came out in succession since 1986, but they have not been as popular as the ones for the elementary level. An obvious reason for it is that there are a much wider variety of books and other materials to choose from after the beginner's stage, therefore sometimes people choose not to stick to one coursebook but to pick from various sources those which would suit their needs and tastes, particularly when people choose to concentrate more on their chosen areas of studies.

The *Course* is a three-volume coursebook which is supplemented by listening, writing and extensive reading materials, and in this analysis those supplementary materials are not included. It consists of what could have been classified as the elementary level and the early intermediate level by the way *Reader* is divided. That is to say its third volume is roughly equivalent to the third volume of *Reader* - at the early intermediate level - in depth and coverage. Again after finishing learning the first two volumes, people sometimes would use other substitute materials instead of Volume Three for the same reason given above. Since *Course* consists of what have been classified both as elementary and early intermediate by *Reader*, in order to have a parallel comparison, in the following analysis the two volumes of *Reader* at the elementary level and the first volume at the intermediate level will be included to match the three volumes of *Course*. The advantage of this is that we can have clearer idea of the way culture is handled at different stages, since more content can be incorporated after the beginning stage.

It is claimed in the introduction to *Course* that more attention has been given to demonstrating the way language is used in real social interactions rather than to a more systematic introduction of the language structures (*Course*, pp. 1-2). Therefore it appears that more efforts have been made in these books to show how the native would use the language in given situations. The language samples provided appear to be more clearly contextualized to bring out the relationship of social contexts and language behaviours. Mechanical drills and grammar analysis have been cut down deliberately to focus learners' attention on the way social interactions are carried out in specific social contexts, instead of concentrating on the structural aspect of language. Meanwhile the *Reader* appears to have divided its attention more or less evenly to both the structural aspect and the functional aspect of language by having different parts devoted to each of the two aspects separately. Also it seems that in *Reader* less attention has been given to social variants of language use. A comparison of the two is therefore meaningful because it will enable us to see from a wider angle the

implications and potentials of cultural studies in the context of Chinese language learning.

The two coursebooks have several things in common. First of all, both of them are designed to suit the assumed interest and the level of understanding of mature learners, more precisely, university or college students, since as has been said earlier, the teaching of the Chinese language has mostly been carried out in university or college settings. To be relevant to learners' immediate situations, in both of the coursebooks at the elementary stage campus life is made the centre of social interactions, and the protagonists are mostly foreign students learning Chinese either in China or in their own country. The reason for this has been made clear in the introduction to *Course*: 'As it is for beginners, the coursebook contains the material which is most necessary and which can be used immediately by the student in daily life.' (*Course*, p. 5) However, after this stage the focus is changed in both of the coursebooks. A much wider social scene is brought in to reflect the culture and society from various aspects.

Another feature shared by both coursebooks is that most of the main texts at the elementary level are in the form of situational dialogue, showing how the language is used for interactive purposes, here much of them being about routines of student life. However in *Course* texts are more clearly contextualized and a wider range of social encounters are introduced, giving learners more opportunities to observe the way language is used in different social contexts. This approach is different from that of the past, because it used to be the case that at this stage the learning was focused on analysing sentence patterns which have little value in terms of social communication, and language samples were not always natural sentences. However when the learning enters the intermediate stage, there are fewer examples of face-to-face encounters in these books, and instead more introductory texts about various aspects of the culture are provided.

Furthermore, as claimed by both coursebooks, serious efforts have been made to introduce Chinese culture for the benefit of language learning. As is stated by the

Reader in its introduction to the elementary books: ‘In order to ensure good results in language study, some understanding of China’s culture and history and present-day condition is necessary. For this purpose, background information regarding Chinese society, history, scenic spots and historical sites, local customs and conditions has, where possible, been incorporated, especially in the texts of Book II.’ (*Reader I & II*, p. 5) The recognition of the influence of culture on language understanding is also voiced in the introduction to the first two volumes of the *Course*: ‘The texts cover a wide range of typical situations in students’ social life and campus life. The language used is natural.... Special attention has been given to introducing aspects of Chinese culture, while maintaining a level suitable for beginners.’ (*Course I & II*, p. 6) Obviously the importance of culture knowledge to language learning is recognised in both, however in what way it is important is not explicitly explained.

Having had a brief introduction of the two coursebooks, we can now come to the details of the culture contents provided in these books to see how well they can facilitate learners in their language and culture learning.

§5.4 An Analysis of the Contents Presented in the Two Coursebooks

First of all I have to explain the way I am going to list the information presented in the coursebooks. There are many units in each book and the units at the elementary levels are not divided in accordance with functions or topics. The division is based rather on grammar progress. Therefore the culture information, in my view, is somewhat scattered. So in order to avoid a long and tedious list I prefer not to present them unit by unit, but rather group them under each of the categories which we discussed in the previous chapter. There are some obvious disadvantages in so doing. First of all the focus of each unit cannot be reflected because the events or stories in each unit will not be described, and therefore there is the risk that some sociocultural phenomena may be overlooked. And a social phenomenon may be referred to in different categories if its implication(s) can be associated with more than one aspect. But on the other hand, this will provide a clearer picture of the distribution of the



culture information in the course as it can be seen more straight forwardly under each category. In the following list the information which is simply mentioned in passing will be indicated with an asterisk. The foreign students who are the protagonists of the books will not be included in the list and those phenomena which are shown clearly not in a Chinese culture environment or as part of another culture will be marked with two asterisks.

Practical Chinese Reader

In those three volumes, learning materials can be said to revolve around two centres, with different emphases for each: student life at the first stage and a more general introduction of Chinese culture from a wider angle at the second stage. In Volume One and Volume Two, which form the beginner's level, most of the learning contents are designed around the assumed experiences of two students of Chinese. In the first volume the two protagonists - Gubo and Palanka - start learning Chinese in their home country (which is not specified) where their interactions with two native speakers - their Chinese teacher and a Chinese friend who studies English there - provide examples for some social conventions useful for everyday social interactions and some typical social behaviours of Chinese people. It is interesting that since this coursebook is designed to be used in many countries, where the social encounters are supposed to happen is therefore not specified. Though from the surname of one of the protagonists - Brown - and the given situation that a Chinese student studies English there, we can assume that the Anglo-American culture is made the background of the cross-cultural activities. The other protagonist is introduced only by first name, and both of the first names - Gubo and Palanka - are not typical English names. There are some problems about this. Because there is no clear indication of where the cultural setting is supposed to be, some learners are found to take it for granted that what is there is in Chinese culture. Usually when they finally grow doubtful about it more than half of the book has already been gone through. As far as my own experiences tell, students, either European or Japanese, are often confused about the cultural setting, and some clearly mistake it as Chinese unless they are led to examine the clues

carefully. Although some of the social features presented are more familiar to European students rather than to Chinese, such as the example of young people celebrating their birthday by holding a dancing party at home, going to cafe, etc., yet since there are not enough explicit indications available of what cultural environment it is supposed to be, it is just possible that some learners would assume the same social norms being also practised in China and the Browns just happening to be in China. It is not true that there are no clues for learners to pick up that the social scene is set in *a foreign country* other than in China, yet we shouldn't really blame learners for their carelessness since there is clearly an ambiguity in terms of social context.

And secondly, trying to make the learning contents relevant to learners of different cultural backgrounds, it is necessary that what is to be presented has to be common to the experience of all those concerned. It means that it is not very easy to include learners' own cultures in the learning. The ambiguity of social setting in *Reader* would mean less chance for learners to reflect upon their own cultural identities and to better appreciate the target culture. More will be said about this later.

In Book Two most of the texts are still in the conversational form. The social contexts for interpersonal interactions become much clearer. As the two protagonists continue their learning in China, we can see more social interactions between them and the native in different social situations. Through their experiences in clinic, shop, bus, and other public places, through their interactions with friends, classmates and people in streets, more information about the sociocultural environment and the social conventions are provided. Here we can see clearly more effort in presenting various aspects of the culture, such as some famous historical places, famous literary and political figures, some Chinese food and the most important Chinese festival, as well as a mentioning of Chinese costumes, Chinese porcelain, and a couple of names of the streets and public places in Beijing, etc.

There can be seen an obvious shift away from the traditional grammar-structure approach in these books. The way the learning contents are structured shows an attempt to accommodate both the need for social functions and a mastery of the

linguistic knowledge. So in each unit the main text is either a contextualized conversation to demonstrate language use in different social contexts, or an introductory text, often about the culture of one aspect or another. This is followed by a lot of pattern drills, grammar exercises and frequently supplementary reading practice. Clearly the authors attempt to balance both the learning of the linguistic structures and the learning of the situational-functional use of the language. As has been said above, many learning materials produced since the 1980s are said to be featured by combining the learning of structures, meaning and function together in the courses. To enable learners to gain understandings of the Chinese culture, in Book One and Book Two some background information is given explicitly in English about the Chinese tradition, the basic geographical and political features of the country, separated from the texts. But at the same time cultural information presented in the texts is much less explicit.

In the third volume, where learners are assumed to have acquired the most basic knowledge about the language structures, a much broader sociocultural scene is brought in and more cultural information is provided. At this stage more attention is given to present the culture from a much wider perspective. In this volume the protagonists - the two students and Mr. and Mrs. Brown, Palanka's parents, are visiting several parts of China, and what they are supposed to see and hear about the culture and society is introduced to learners mainly in some introductory texts. Through the reported experience of their travelling in China learners can see briefly some aspects of the society, such as some geographical features, minority groups, social relationships, moral values, etc. Below is a brief list of the culture contents in these books.

Book One

(1) *Social identity and social groups*

Professional identity:

- A Chinese teacher who teaches Chinese abroad (LL. 8, 21, 29)
- A Chinese student who studies English abroad (LL. 9, 11, etc.)
- A Chinese counsellor who holds a film reception (L. 27)

Other social identity:

- ** A waiter (L. 19)
- ** Mr. and Mrs Brown, Palanka's parents. (LL. 21, 22, 27, 29, 30)
- ** Gubo's younger sister. (L. 24)

(2) Social interaction

Titles of address

- A way to address some professionals with respect: surname plus the profession - *Wang laoshi* (Wang teacher) (L. 8)
- Several common ways of formal address, e. g. *xiansheng* (Mr.), *taitai* (Mrs.), *xiaojie* (Miss), *tongzhi* (comrade) (LL. 4, 19, 21, 25, 27)

Hospitality:

- An example to show that Chinese often serve tea to a guest without asking whether he/she feels like it or not, for it is often regarded a gesture of hospitality (L. 8)

Social greetings and courtesy

- Two forms of formal greetings: *Ni hao* (Hello); *Nin hao* (Hello) - a common form and a polite form which shows courtesy or respect. To be used in accordance with familiarity, seniority or level of formality (LL. 1; 2; 8)
- Standard formulas used when having a guest: *Qing jin.* (Come in, please.), *Qing zuo.* (Take a seat, Please.) *Qing he cha.* (Have some tea please.), etc. (LL. 8, 10)
- A standard expression to show gratitude and normal ways of replying to it: *Xiexie!* *Bu keqi.* (LL. 8, 11)
- Two different forms of asking people their name: the polite form which is used to show respect and courtesy - *Nin gui xing?* (May I ask your honourable name?) and the common form often used for the purpose of official business or used towards juniors - *Ni jiao shenme mingzi?* (What is your name?) (LL. 9, 13)
- Response to compliments. When being praised, Chinese are traditionally expected to demonstrate their modesty by saying something like: *Bu gandang.* (I don't deserve it.) or *Nali.* (It's not so.) This may be based on the belief that people should always remain modest (LL. 8, 25)
- Standard formula for bidding good-bye (L. 11)
- Different ways to ask elderly people, young people and children their age (LL. 21, 24)
- Sending flowers for a friend's birthday. (L. 21)

(3) Belief and behaviour

Social behaviour and life style

- Serving tea to a guest as a gesture of hospitality, so often a host/hostess would insist on serving tea to his/her guest (L. 8)
- Tea is a popular drink in China (L. 19)
- A popular Chinese food - *jiaozi* (L. 25)
- * Skating - a winter sport in Beijing (L. 28)
- * Chinese use chopsticks to eat. (L. 27)
- ** Theatre and movie going (LL. 16, 17, 18)
- ** Going to cafe with friends (L. 19)
- ** Birthday party (L. 21)
- ** An example of housing condition: the Brown's house (L. 22)
- ** Some common western food: cheese, ham and bread (L. 25)
- ** Watching football match (L. 28)

(4) Social-political institutions

Social institution

- China's airline service - CAAC (L. 29)

- * News media: *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), one of the main newspaper in China. It is the official newspaper of the People's Republic of China (L. 23)
- * Two famous restaurants in Beijing are mentioned by name (L. 25)

Political institution

- * A Chinese embassy (L. 27)

(5) *Socialisation and the life-cycle*

Family

- Two Chinese families: the family of the Chinese overseas student's sister - a three member family which is typical nowadays of urban people below 40 or 45 years old - both of the couple works, have only one child (L. 14); the Chinese teacher's family - wife also works and two children go to university and school respectively. (L. 21)

Ceremony marking different stage of life

- ** Palanka celebrating her birthday in her own cultural environment: a birthday party at home (L. 21)

(6) *National history*

- None

(7) *National geography*

- * The two biggest rivers in China (L. 7)
- * The two largest cities of China (L. 7)

(8) *National cultural heritage*

- Several Chinese proverbs and rhymes (LL. 16, 19, 21-23, 25, 27, 29)
- A well known Chinese folk song and an episode of a well known Chinese opera (LL. 19, 26)
- A classic Chinese poem (L. 26)
- * The Great Wall (L. 7)
- * Beijing opera (L. 16)
- * Two important literary figures in modern Chinese literature (L. 26)

(9) *Stereotypes and national identity:*

- None

Book Two

(1) *Social identity and social groups:*

Age and other social group identity

- An old overseas Chinese who is visiting China. He talks with Gubo and Palanka about his life in the USA and his visits to China on their flight to Beijing (L. 31)
- An 11-year-old boy who travels alone to Beijing to seek for music education (L. 31)
- An old music teacher who happens to meet the child on their journey and offers the child encouragement and help (L. 31)

Professional identity

- A Chinese student who studies English at the university where the protagonists study Chinese. He swaps lessons with one of them (LL. 31, 32, 41)
- A teacher of Chinese with whom the two protagonists learn Chinese in Beijing (L. 33)
- Shop assistants in post office, department store and clothes shop (LL. 34, 36, 37)

- The parents of the Chinese student who studies English in the protagonists' hometown. The father is a production manager in a workshop, and the mother has retired and finds pleasure in doing voluntary work for neighbourhood (LL. 39, 46)
- A taxi driver, who is the brother of the Chinese student, guides the protagonists to a famous royal garden in Beijing (L. 41)
- A retired builder whom the protagonists chat with in the Tian'anmen Square (L. 42)
- A bus driver and a ticket conductor (L. 44)
- A shop assistant who helps a lonely old lady when her son is serving in the army (L. 48)

(2) *Social interaction*

Titles of address

- A polite way to address an unknown old man: *lao xiansheng* (L. 31)
- Informal ways of address indicating familiarity and intimacy: adding *xiao* (young) before one's surname if he/she is young and *lao* (old) if he/she is no longer young or older than the speaker (L. 32)
- A polite but informal way to address an old woman: *daniang* (LL. 39, 46)
- A form of address for a woman who is about one's parents' age (LL. 39, 48)
- A polite way to address a worker or people in service business: *shifu* (LL. 39,)

Hospitality

- The parents of the overseas Chinese student insists on the protagonists' having dinner with them when they come to pay a visit (L. 39)
- The Chinese teacher invites the protagonists to spend the Chinese New Year's day with their family (L. 48)

(3) *Belief and behaviour*

Moral belief and values standards

- The enthusiasm in the drive for Four Modernisations in China which is reflected through an overseas Chinese and an old factory worker (LL. 31, 39)
- The symbolic meaning of plum blossom and the value standard it represents in Chinese culture (L. 33)
- A comic dialogue criticising conceitedness and vanity (L. 37)
- An ancient fable with the moral that without right methods one can never achieve his/her goals (L. 38)
- An ancient fable which criticizes those people who are extremely dogmatic (L. 39)
- Story of a postman who did his best to fulfil his duty (L. 41)
- A famous Chinese fable with the moral that nothing is impossible if one has courage and perseverance (L. 42)
- A story showing an attitude to marriage (L. 44)
- * Giving up seats to the old and the sick, though this is done by the protagonists, it is a virtue highly respected and is a moral standard required of everybody in the culture (L. 38)

Routine Behaviour and life style

- The convention of addressing a letter and postal service (L. 34)
- Chinese New Year and the Lantern Festival; the conventions of celebrating these festivals (L. 48)
- Some famous snack food in Beijing (L. 43)
- Going to places by bus (L. 38, 42)
- ** Vacation - Students get temporary jobs in their holidays in the protagonists' country (L. 35)

(4) *Social-political institutions*

Social welfare and public service

- Health check-up for students in school clinic (L. 32)

- Bus service, post office and shops (LL. 34, 36, 37,38)

Educational institution

- A museum in Beijing (L. 47)
- * The names of two universities in Beijing (LL. 31, 38)

Financial institution

- Chinese Money system (L. 36)

(5) *Socialisation and the life-cycle*

Work and leisure

- The father of the Chinese overseas student works in a workshop for most of his life and is elected the head of workshop; his wife retired from work and enjoys voluntary works for the neighbourhood (L. 39)
- The retired builder takes his grandchildren to the Tian'anmen Square (L. 42)
- university sports meet and a Chinese sports *taijiquan* (L. 40)
- ** Long school/university vacations in the home country of the protagonists; students there often get temporary jobs during this time (L. 35)

(6) *National history*

Historical events

- * The Four Modernisations in China (LL. 31, 39)
- * The founding of the People's Republic of China (L. 36)
- * An event that marked the end of the Ming Dynasty (A. D. 1368-1644) in Chinese history (L. 41)
- * The names and the period of reign of the dynasties in Chinese history (L. 49)

Historical figures

- An important literary figure in modern Chinese literature (L. 47)
- Two poems and their authors (LL. 33, 47)
- An important figure in the modern Chinese history and the history of the Communist Party of China - Premier Zhou (L. 50)
- * The name of a well known artist in China (L. 36)

(7) *National geography*

- Beijing's climate (L. 33)
- China's administrative divisions (Partly in English) (L. 40)
- Scenic spots and historical sites in Beijing (LL. 33, 41, 44, 47)
- * Two places in China which are famous for their chinaware (L. 36)

(8) *National cultural heritage*

Literary works

- Four well known classic fables (LL. 36, 38, 39, 42)
- A well known play - *Chaguanr* (*Teahouse*) and its author (L. 49)
- Some modern poems (LL. 33, 45, 47)
- * The names of several Chinese classical and modern novels (LL. 32, 41, 44)

artefacts and historic relics

- Several historic sites and scenic spots are introduced (LL. 33, 41, 42, 44)
- Famous chinaware makers (L. 36)
- Chinese costumes (L. 37)

(9) *Stereotypes and national identity*

- National costumes (L. 37)
- National festivals and the traditional way of celebration (L. 38)

Book Three

(1) *Social identity and social group*

Regional identity and ethnic identity

- The Uygur nationality: their religious belief and some of their unique characteristics (L. 2)
- Shanghai dialect (L. 4)
- A rural family in the north of China who are members of the People's Commune - unit of production organization in the rural area of China (L. 8)

Age group

- An old couple in Shanghai who are retired factory workers (L. 4)
- A young couple who has gone through a marriage crisis (L. 7)

Other social groups

- A young man who has started a new life after being re-educated at a reform school for stealing; a girl - a fellow worker of the young man - who helps the young man to start his new life and falls in love with him (L. 9)
- People who gather in parks in the morning to practise Chinese slow boxing (L. 10)

(2) *Social Interaction*

Titles of address

- The way to address a friend's parents: *bofu, bomu* (L. 9)

(3) *Belief and behaviour*

Moral belief and value standards

- An example to show the social value and the tradition in Chinese culture that young people should respect and take care of the old (L. 6)
- An example showing a change in the concept that only a son can be the heir of a family and be the one the parents can depend upon when they grow old (L. 6)
- An attitude towards family and divorce (L. 7)
- Divorce and re-marry (L. 7)
- Attitude towards people who once committed an offence (L. 9)

Behaviour and life style

- The way the people of Uygur nationality in China celebrate their festival: pray in mosques; singing and dancing; big feast (L. 2)
- The unique wedding ceremony of Uygur people and an Islamic food they serve their guests (L. 2)
- The Chinese tradition of celebrating the Mid-Autumn Festival (15th of August in the lunar calendar) (L. 6)
- The life style of the rural people in north China and their way of entertaining guests (L. 8)
- A very popular food in northern China: *jiaozi* (a kind of dumpling) (L. 8)
- A common social phenomenon - some people, particularly retired people, like to gather in parks in the morning to practise Chinese slow boxing as physical exercises (L. 10)
- Sports which are popular in China (L. 10)
- * Some young people choose not to have traditional wedding ceremony. They go travelling instead (L. 7)

(4) *Social-political institutions*

Social welfare

* Pension for retired workers (L. 8)

Political institutions

- Neighbourhood committee which is a political organisation at grass-root level in cities (L. 7)
- People's commune, a political organisation in the rural area at a lower level (L. 8)
- Reform school, a place where juvenile delinquents with minor offences are kept and re-educated through part-time work and part-time study (L. 9)

News media

- The names of some newspapers in China, particularly some official newspapers, such as: *Renmin Ribao* (*People's Daily*), *Guangming Ribao* (*Guangming Daily*) (L. 15)
- An introduction to Radio Beijing (L. 15)
- * The Xinhua News Agency of China (L. 15)

(5) *Socialisation and life-cycle*

Family and social community

- A three-generation family living together in harmony, which is common in China - the young respect and takes care of the old, and the old help the young with household work (L. 6)
- A member of the neighbourhood committee successfully mediated a family row between a young couple over their different views of how to balance work duties and household chores (L. 7)
- Free training in Chinese martial arts, such as *Taiji* (slow boxing), *Qigong* (meditation by deep breathing). It is not only a sport, but also a way of socialising for many people, particularly retired people (L. 10)
- A story of a caring husband who loves and looks after his paralysed wife (L. 10)

Education

- A young man who determines to turn over a new leaf of his life, and the support and understanding he gets from the society, and eventually won the love of a female colleague (L. 9)

Work and leisure

- A retired couple, their life experience before and after the founding of the People's Republic of China (L. 4)

(6) *National history*

Historical events

- The social change in Shanghai before and after the founding of the P. R. C. through the eyes of a retired couple. Their life experience before and after the period (L. 4)
- The developments in medicine: the first use of anaesthetic for surgery operation in China (possibly in the world); the first complete book on herbs medicine

Historical figures

- One of the greatest actors in the history of Beijing Opera (L. 11)
- Two most celebrated medical scientists in Chinese medical history: one of them used anaesthetic for surgery operation in about 1800 years ago and another wrote an influential book on Chinese herbs medicine (L. 12)
- Two most celebrated artists in modern Chinese history (L. 13)
- A famous Chinese folk musician (L. 15)

(7) *National geography*

- The geographical location and the size of China (L. 1)
- The climate and natural environment of the Turfan Basin in Xinjiang (Sinkiang) Uygur Autonomous Region (L. 2)
- The Yangtze River and the magnificent scenery of the Three Gorges on the river (L. 3)

- The largest city of China - Shanghai: its population and its economic position in China (L. 4)
- Hangzhou, a city near Shanghai. It is known as the paradise on earth (L. 5)
- Xi'an, a historic city which has inherited a rich and splendid cultural heritage (L. 14)

(8) *National cultural heritage*

Arts and legendary works

- Fairy tales which are known to every household (LL. 3, 5)
- Beijing opera: its artistic features; the names of some very famous plays (L. 11)
- A wonderful legacy of Chinese culture: a museum in Xi'an has collected numerous stone tablets on which are engraved the classic works and the best example of calligraphy through Chinese history (L. 14)
- A famous piece of Chinese music (L. 15)

Traditional medicine and health

- Chinese slow boxing: a traditional way of keeping fit (L. 10)
- An introduction of acupuncture - a traditional Chinese medical practice, and the use of anaesthetic for surgery operation in China about 1800 years ago (L. 12)

(9) *Stereotypes and national identity*

- None

As we can see this is a rather long list, though this is by no means exhaustive. At least on the face of it all the areas which we intend to look into have been more or less covered in these three volumes, except for stereotype. Some parts are more fully dealt with, and some are touched upon lightly. We need to go further to find out how sufficient these could be both in terms of fulfilling the general aims of foreign language education, and in terms of promoting communicative competence. As the first two volumes are for beginners and the way they are designed is different from the third volume, I will treat them as one unit separately from the third.

In these two volumes, as has been said earlier, most of the texts are in the form of dialogue to illustrate situational-functional aspect of language use. As a result, we can see from the contents a good amount of information on how to conduct everyday social interactions, such as how to address people in accordance with their age, sex, profession, familiarity and formality, etc.; the use of some social formulas most common in social interaction - exchanging amenities, expressing gratitude, regret, apology, leave-taking etc., and a few behavioural patterns manifesting some social values of the culture, and so on. By showing how language is used in situations such as in shops, on buses, between friends or people in streets, the learning offers learners

opportunities to observe the impact of social situations on the use of language and some of the behavioural characteristics in the culture, such as demonstrating modesty when being paid compliments, hospitable, and the tradition of respecting the old, etc., even if not explicitly sometimes.

We can also see from the contents a couple of examples of Chinese families: the members and their professional identities, and examples of other kinds of social identities; some other social institutions and social conventions; as well as some beliefs and value standards held by Chinese people. And there are also some pieces of information here and there on the historical and geographical features of the culture. Clearly a lot of painstaking efforts have been put into demonstrating the culture, and this is very beneficial to learners in their learning of the language and culture. Yet to get a better idea of how learners could have been possibly influenced by the information provided, we need to know more about how the culture information is presented, which is not completely reflected in the list.

Firstly, I feel that sometimes there is a lack of sufficient exploration of some of the culture contents presented in these books. By saying this I mean that the way some of the social identities, social institutions and social values are presented fails to give a very clear picture of their sociocultural significance. For example, both of the Chinese students whom the protagonists interact with, rather frequently - one abroad and one in China - do not bear very strong social and cultural identities. Even if not much can be put in at this stage, there should be room to show some characteristics of this social group. Of course it is necessary that learners should be enabled to cope with their learning environment as soon as possible by being introduced to some situations and vocabulary common to the experience of students - classroom and things which are immediate concern to them, such as libraries, shops, post-office, etc., but because students in different countries have different social environments, and could think and behave differently, it should not be assumed that they are the same, for even behaviours in classroom are different between cultures. For the sake of being able to understand the people they are going to encounter, and meaning in that culture in

general, it is necessary for the learning to provide more insights into the social situations and sociocultural identities of this social group: such as what they do in their spare time, what their concerns are and how they cope with their life and studies, and so on, and some more general traits of the people. The possibility to do so is demonstrated by an interesting exception in this respect in the second volume, where one of the protagonists talks about how students in his country use their holidays to do some temporary jobs. This could lead to a comparison of the two cultures involved in terms of school terms, life style and social values, yet this has to depend very much on individual teachers own choice and experience since it is not explored in the book. However from our discussion of the issues of psychological impact of cultural learning on self-identity and on changing of perceptions in Chapter II, we can see that if learners' own culture is referred to, it would be more likely that a higher degree of cultural awareness and cultural understanding would be created. For to draw learners' own culture into comparison could help to sensitize their cultural awareness, and can thus reduce mis-interpretations, and possibly their ethnocentrism as well. Even if in the situation where it is difficult to draw learners' own culture into comparison due to the books being designed for use in many countries, it would be useful if a comparative approach is applied and teachers are asked to include comparative methods to help to sensitize learners' cultural awareness and to gain cultural understanding. From the books we can also see that although the social settings are largely about student life, yet there is no mention of the Chinese educational system, and the concept of education as part of socialization, there is not even much information on the everyday life of a Chinese student, or the difference in academic terms and time-table. It should be possible for these to be incorporated in the learning.

Furthermore, as said above, in Volume One the cultural setting for social interactions is not made in Chinese culture, for instance, a more comfortable living condition - big house, going to places by car, and the life style of going to a cafe and so on. The effect of this, in my view, can be accessed from three angles. Firstly, this could make it more difficult to present the interactive and the social institutional

features of a culture. As we can see, although a good amount of information is supplied about social behaviours common in everyday life, particularly verbal ones, there are not enough about social identities, socialization and social conditions in this book. In other word, the information is rather restricted to those standard forms of social courtesy, leaving little room for language variants and social relations. Secondly, because of a lack of clear cultural features it could be confusing for learners. Again as has been said already, some learners have indeed mistaken the cultural settings. This has thrown some doubt to how realistic a picture this book has provided about the culture. Thirdly the ambiguity of the cultural setting makes it hard to draw comparisons of the different cultures involved. A contrast to this ambiguity in social background can be found in the second volume where more information on social identities and social institutions are made observable partly due to the fact that the culture setting is much clearer, therefore more information about the cultures involved.

Because of the reasons discussed above I would say that the culture information provided is not quite sufficient enough to help learners with their cultural awareness and cultural understanding. In terms of communicative competence development this is certainly not very helpful, as learners would know little of the life styles of the people and their way of thinking, consequently would not be able to know what social behaviours, including linguistic behaviours, would be appropriate in given social situations. This can be illustrated by an experience of some students of Chinese.

Pub going or going to a cafe is a common way of socializing in the U.K., but in China, at least at the time when certain students were there a couple of years ago, these can be said as a kind of luxury which not many Chinese can offer. As a way of socializing many Chinese people like to invite friends to their homes, or to go to parks or cinemas. Without realizing the life styles and the living conditions of the people the students, who went to China to study in their second year, found it difficult to make friends at first. It took them some time to realize that one reason was that what they suggested doing - going to a pub or a cafe, was beyond what most Chinese students could afford, and they did not want to accept what they would not be able to return.

This from one respect shows that if learners can be better informed of sociocultural differences they could cope better to communicate cross culturally.

The aspect of social values and beliefs has been much dealt with in these two volumes. But it is handled in different ways. Firstly, as we can see the large amount of examples of various social greetings and titles of address have provided a good insight into the way Chinese people interpret social distance and social behaviours. For instance, learners could, to different degrees, pick up the belief behind the various forms of address: a friendly atmosphere of social interaction may be created if people treat each other in the way as if they were from an extended big family. This belief would certainly influence people's social behaviours of various kinds in terms of social distance, therefore it is important for learners to be aware of it. Secondly, there are a number of stories, plays, and poems, etc. carrying in them social morals and beliefs of various kinds, attached to each lesson in these books as extensive reading materials. Some of them are well known classical works which have become part of the language and household knowledge. Some of the morals and beliefs conveyed are part of those which have been taken as guidelines of people's everyday behaviour. Through these some of the moral and ethic values which have been advocated strongly in the culture have been brought to the reader. For the purpose of understanding the language and the way language is used this aspect of learning is very useful indeed.

As the learning proceeds much more culture information is brought to learners. The third volume contains information on a much broader sociocultural scope. As can be seen from the list, it ranges from social issues like family relationship, marriage and divorce, retirement, re-education and so on, to some social structural features like the grass-root political organizations, minorities, cities and rural areas, etc. And there is also a comparatively larger part introducing the cultural assets the nation has inherited.

Here the way the learning is organized shows a shift of focus in the learning. The first two volumes may be described as structural-functional oriented, where the learning revolves around the concerns that learners should be enabled to understand the language structures as well as to cope with their everyday life situations:

interactions with people on an everyday life basis; classroom activities and learning environment; and being able to use some public services and to get necessary help. As the social scope is rather narrow, consequently upon completing the first stage, learners would have little idea of what sort of life ordinary Chinese would have and what their concerns would be. But when entering the second stage, we can find that the emphasis has been shifted. In Volume Three we can see a wider range of social representatives, and various aspects of the culture have been dealt with, some have been looked into with a greater depth. For example, in this book we can find examples of different kinds of social relationship, relationship between family members, between neighbours, between different generations, and between different sexes. Clearly this would lend insights into how the natives identify themselves in various social situations as well as into their way of thinking and interpreting social behaviours. Some other aspects of culture, e.g. historical figures, geographical features, high achievements in medicine, arts, etc., ethnic group, mass media and so on are also included so that learners could get a more complete picture of the culture. All these would be very useful for learners both in terms of cognitive development and affective development, since they could lead to an understanding of the relationship between sociocultural environment, concept and behaviour, particularly when the sociocultural identities are clear. Since this course is for mature students, some more complicated social problems are included, such as gender relations, attitudes towards marriage, divorce and so on. This would not only enables learners to gain understanding of the native's point of view, it would also help in enriching their own experience, thus broadening their world vision.

This in terms of communicative competence development is indispensable. Because effective communication is only possible when both sides of communication can understand each other's intentions and behaviours, in other words, can think in same terms. But clearly the third volume is different from the first two, for at this stage attention is placed on a deeper understanding of the culture instead of mastering some social formulas common in everyday social encounter. Yet as far as the way of

presentation is concerned, there are much less opportunities for learners to observe how the native would behave linguistically in responding to various social situations since in this book there are much less examples of direct social interactions.

In general a lot of culture information with a wide range has been presented in these three volumes, although there are some aspects which have not been fully explored. Apart from what has been discussed above there are still a couple of points I would like to discuss here.

In these books a more subtle feature of language use, namely, social conventions in regard to appropriateness of language behaviour and discourse rules, does not seem to have been tackled. Though because of the nature of this aspect of language use, it clearly cannot be dealt with easily, yet its importance to successful communication is beyond doubt. Because each culture may have its own rhythm and social approach in carrying out social interactions, such as how and when a topic is to be approached, and its own pragmatic rules for what is appropriate to do and what is not, learners have to be made aware of these. For example, Chinese people in general care a lot about 'face'. They are not only very careful in protecting their own 'face', but also careful not to hurt others' 'face'. Originated from this notion many Chinese do not feel comfortable in turning down other people's requests directly or making negative comments on others face to face. So if they have to say 'no', they tend to express it in other indirect ways, which would appear confusing to people who are not familiar with this code of conduct. Worse still, it could cause serious misunderstandings between the interlocutors, even biased views towards each other's culture. This indirectness is also reflected in the way Chinese people approach a topic. Many Chinese feel that the way some westerners come to their topics is very drastic, in some situations not polite enough, to these westerners, on the other hand, it would be totally unnecessary for Chinese people to beat about the bush. So it is not enough to tell learners simply how to use a language form, such as the negative form, they have also to be informed how to use it in social interactions, and the cultural meanings attached to them as well. However since this aspect of language use is not in one-to-

one relationship with language form, it is more difficult to demonstrate how to use it, and there could even be the danger of making over-generalization.

Another point is about the issue of increasing cultural awareness through a comparison of differences in cultural perceptions, particularly in regard to self identities. In these three volumes a sort of cross-cultural setting has been created. What I mean is that many of the social interactions are supposed to happen between the native and the non-native. Yet not much has been done to illustrate differences or similarities between two cultures, and there is no example to reflect how each of the two sides views him/herself and the other side. One of the difficulties is what has been mentioned - the cultural background of the protagonists is not meant to be made clear, therefore it is not easy to make comparisons. But if through the social interactions a kind of contrastive view can be made on how the native is viewed by others as well as by themselves, it would be more beneficial to learners in their cultural awareness and cultural understanding.

Now let's come to the next course book.

MODERN CHINESE - BEGINNER'S COURSE

This course, as I have said earlier, has a lot in common with *Reader*. This is mainly reflected in the way the learning is structured. Like *Reader*, it starts with what is believed most common to the everyday social encounters of a student, and then moves on to include a wider social scene. Like *Reader*, it appears that more stress is laid on demonstrating the social functional aspect of language at the first stage of the learning, and after that various topics are introduced about the culture, ranging from history, geography, literary works to life drama, code of conduct and value standards. So we can see a similar pattern here: most of the materials in the first two volumes are in the form of social dialogue, and they are designed around the experience of a group of foreign students learning Chinese in Beijing, but the materials for the second stage are a collection of extracts on various topics and with different styles.

But there are also some differences. A noticeable one is that compared with *Reader* the first stage of this course clearly appears to have laid more emphasis on demonstrating the inter-dependent relationship of social situations and language behaviours rather than on a more systematic learning of grammar and structures, despite the fact that the learning sections are divided in accordance with units of grammar and structures just as that of the *Reader*. For example, from these books learners will be able to notice the different manners of shopping in a state-run shop and with road sellers, with whom one can haggle on prices. It also gives a number of examples to show how to greet people in different informal situations in addition to the more formal ones. In order to show the impact of sociocultural situations on language use, the texts are contextualized more clearly and some of the specific cultural features are indicated. This can be seen more clearly when the first volume is compared with the equivalent book in *Reader*, since here the cultural background is made much clearer than in the other one. For example, we can find information on the different services provided by the Bank of China and the People's Bank of China, more information on public transportation in Beijing and more information on some of the places there. We can also see information on some behavioural patterns, such as homework for children at weekend, taking children to parks at weekend, dining habits, using public baths, etc.

Another difference is that in this course there are a few examples of using comparative approach to elicit meanings, either between differences in Chinese culture or between Chinese culture and other cultures. For instance, there are comparisons on dining habits in some different countries, on the different symbolic meanings attached to chrysanthemum by French and Chinese, and on the regional differences between Beijing and Shanghai - the two largest cities in China. There also introduced a comparative view on how the native and the non-native would interpret some of the ways Chinese make informal social greetings.

Thirdly, compared with *Reader* at the first stage this course provides a broader social scene. Although campus life is still set as the centre for all the activities, yet a

wider scope of social life and behaviours are brought in through interactions between the protagonists and the native they meet on the one hand, and interactions between the native on the other hand.

And finally, there is no visual information at all in these books. In *Reader* some pictures and sketches are presented to illustrate some of the events and actions or to bring out verbal responses, for example, people's shaking hands when they meet; the Great Wall, the Mt. Fuji, the Eiffel Tower and so on to show nationalities; and a doctor in his white gown to show the profession, etc. The virtue of visual aids and how to use them are not to be discussed here, but as far as cultural learning is concerned, they could be effective in introducing the target culture if information can be well presented visually to give a realistic and clearer view of the culture. For it can have a more direct appeal to learners, and sometimes pictures and photos can contain a lot of information which cannot be explained in simple language. So more information could be added if some visual information can be presented effectively. To use the word 'effectively' I want to point out that it is very necessary that information given should be accurate and as informative as possible.

In *Reader* learners may pick up a little bit of information of some cultural features from the pictures given. For example, despite the fact that the pictures are very simple, they illustrate some specific features in the culture: the most prominent features of Tian'anmen Square and a few parks in Beijing, the style of a Chinese costume, etc. But many of them are not very informative in terms of showing cultural characteristics. In my point of view, some improvement needs to be made so that more and clearer sociocultural features can be revealed.

Now we can have a look at the cultural contents in *Course*.

Book One

(1) *Social identity and social groups*

Professional identity

- Two Chinese teachers who teach Chinese to the foreign students (LL. 1, 2, 4, etc.)

- Three Chinese students who are the friends of the group of foreign students. They study at the same university (LL. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.)
- * A Chinese doctor (L. 4)
- * Shop assistant, post-office worker, bank clerk, and street seller (LL. 8, 18-20)
- * A professor whom one of the foreign students chat with at a bus stop (L. 14)

Other social groups

- The wife of one of the Chinese teacher (LL. 21, 27-30)

National identity and regional identity

- A Japanese student, an American student, and other three students whose nationalities are not mentioned (LL. 5, 11, 12, etc.)
- A visitor from Shanghai, who visits his friend - one of the above mentioned teachers in Beijing (L. 30)

(2) *Social interaction*

Social Greetings

Titles of address

- Forms of formal address: 1) a common way to address some professionals with respect - adding their professions after their surnames (L. 4, 11, 14);
2) *tongzhi* (comrade), a most commonly used form of address in formal situations, or used between people who are not familiar with each other. It shows a communist ideology (L. 8)
- Forms of informal address: 1) using the given name alone to indicate familiarity and intimacy (L. 10);
2) *xiao pengyou* (young friend) a common form that adults use to address unknown children (L. 21);
3) *lao xiansheng* (old mister), a polite form to address an elderly unknown man. The word 'old' has the implication of being wise and respectable, though the culture-specific concept is not discussed (L. 21);
4) *ayi* (aunt), *shushu* (uncle), forms of address for children to address young adults, or for people to address others about their parents' age. (L. 21)

Hospitality

- An example of entertaining visitors - offering tea and sweets (L. 11)

Social greetings and courtesy

- Two formal greetings: *Nin hao* (Hello) - a polite form which shows courtesy and respect, and *Ni hao* (Hello) - a common form of greeting. To be used in accordance with level of familiarity and seniority (LL. 1, 2)
- Forms of informal greetings: A few examples to show how people exchange greetings with friends and people they are familiar with (LL. 4, 9, 14)
- Different ways of asking people their name: *Nin gui xing?* (What's your honourable name?) a polite form which is used to show courtesy; and *Ni jiao shenme mingzi?* (What is your name?) a common form which is often used for the purpose of official business or used towards juniors (L. 11)
- A standard expression to show gratitude and ways of replying: *Xiexie! Bu xie. Bu keqi.* (LL. 6, 11)
- Ways of asking for a favour: *Qing wen; Lao jia* (LL. 9, 13, 20)
- How to ask people their age: three different forms are used for different age groups - children, elderly people and those in between (L. 22)
- Bidding farewell (L. 30)

Taboo

- It is noted that in general it is not appropriate to ask young women their age (L. 22)

(3) *Belief and behaviour*

Social behaviour and life style

- Offering tea and sweets to a visitor as a gesture of being friendly (L. 11)
- An example to show that it is normal for people to ask strangers their age. (L. 21)

- An example to show that when friends go out together, Chinese often vie with each other to pay their fare (L. 28)
- Some Chinese food, one of which is very common in the north of China (L. 5)
- Theatre going - a way of socializing (L. 30)
- * Parks and other places in Beijing people often visit at their leisure time (LL. 9, 16)

(4) *Social-political institutions*

Educational institutions

- * Two universities in Beijing (LL. 12, 14)

Financial institutions

- The Chinese money system (L. 18)
- The two kinds of bank in China: People's Bank of China deals only with Chinese currency and internal banking; and Bank of China deals with foreign exchange and international banking (L. 20)

Public service

- Bookstore, shops, post office and banks (LL. 8, 18, 19, 20, 27)
- Different types of public transportation in Beijing (LL. 28, 29)
- * Several places in Beijing which are open mainly for foreigners, e.g. the International Club, The Friendship Store, etc. (L. 13)
- * Some parks and museums in Beijing (L. 16)

(5) *Socialisation and life-cycle*

Work and leisure

- * Learning atmosphere and living conditions for students: dormitory, library, dining hall and school clinic (LL. 4, 5)
- * An old man who takes his grand children to town (L. 21)

Education

- A brief introduction of the length of schooling at different stages of education in China (L. 16)

(6) *National history*

- None

(7) *National geography*

- Beijing - as the setting of the events in this book
- * The name of Shanghai is mentioned (L. 29)

(8) *National cultural heritage*

- Places of historic interest in Beijing: the Summer Palace, the Great Wall and the Palace Museum (L. 16)

(9) *Stereotypes and national identity*

- None

Book Two

(1) *Social identities and social groups*

Professional identity

- Two Chinese teachers who teach foreign students the Chinese language, one is young and one is not so young (LL. 31, 32, etc.)

- The neighbour of one of the Chinese teacher. The way he is addressed indicates that he might be a worker or people in service work (L. 31)
- A foreign interpreter who is an ex-student of the younger Chinese teacher (L. 35)
- Two Chinese students who are friends of the group of foreign students. They all study at the same university (LL. 36, 37, 38, etc.)
- A Chinese doctor (L. 36)

Age group

- The children of the older Chinese teacher. They are pupils (LL. 32, 33, 38)
- The girl friend of the younger Chinese teacher (L. 34, 35)
- An elderly man whom two of the foreign students travel together with on a train (LL. 45, 46)
- In China some elderly people like to go to teahouse, but young people like to go to music tea garden (L. 45)

Ethnic and regional identity

- Moslem food (L. 40)
- Northerners in China are fond of jasmine tea while Southerners are fond of green tea (L. 45)
- A brief mention of Shanghai dialect and the standard Chinese (L. 47)
- Some different features of two of the largest cities in China - Beijing and Shanghai (L. 49, 50)

(2) *Social interaction*

Titles of address

- A form of address commonly used to show respect to workers or people in service business, etc. *shifu* (master) (L. 31)
- A form of address used by children towards unknown elderly man (L. 33)
- A form of address used by children towards people of their parents' generation (L. 38)
- A common form used to address an elderly unknown man: *lao xiansheng* (L. 46)
- A common form used to address an elderly unknown woman: *daniang* (L. 48)

Hospitality

- An example to show that when having guest(s) for dinner, a Chinese host(ess) would often persuade the guest(s) to eat as much as they can (L. 40)
- An example to show that people who travel together are often very friendly to each other - chatting, sharing food and drinks, helping each other (LL. 45, 46)

Social greetings and courtesy

- A conventional expression Chinese would use when entertaining guests with the meaning to the effect that the food that has been prepared is not good enough and hope the guest(s) can put up with it (L. 40)
- Informal greetings: a detailed explanation on how to greet people by using various forms of greeting in accordance with different contexts, and a number of examples are shown. A comparison of the insider's view on some of the greetings with that of the outsider is introduced (L. 41)

(3) *Belief and behaviour*

Behaviour and life style

- Cold drink stalls in parks are popular places to go in hot seasons (LL. 33, 35)
- An example of a common way of behaving - invite friend(s) home for a meal on the very day or at the last moment (L. 40)
- A comparison of the different dining habits of Chinese and some other peoples: Japanese, an American (L. 40)
- The history and the popularity of Beijing snack food (L. 42)
- A comparison of the different kinds of tea favoured by Chinese people and Americans (L. 45)
- Chinese humour (L. 54, 55)
- Public holidays and celebrating traditional festivals (L. 53)

Work and leisure

- An example of pupils' doing homework on a Saturday evening (L. 32)
- The two children are taken to a park to climb a hill by their mother on Sunday (L. 33)
- Tea house is a popular place for a lot of people, particularly elderly people, to go in their leisure time as a way of socializing and enjoyment; while music tea garden is a favourite place for young people (L. 45)
- Watching football match (L. 37); Watching puppet show (L. 47)
- The foreign students talking about their hobbies and sports and the popular Chinese sports (L. 39)

Moral beliefs and value standards

- A comparison of the outsider's and insider's views on some of the Chinese informal ways of greeting, for example, in an outsider's view it is rather peculiar that Chinese often ask each other if they have had their meals or not, while to Chinese it is basically just a way of greeting. (Though there are some different explanations derived from the cultural tradition) (L. 41)
- A young man helps an unknown old lady who has locked herself out to get her key out for her by climbing from outside of the building (one cannot call a fireman for this in China). It is regarded a great virtue to help other people when they are in need (L. 48)
- Vanity is criticised through a comic dialogue (L. 52)
- A comparison of the different symbolic meanings attached to chrysanthemum in Chinese culture and in French culture; and the fact that Chinese people in general are fond of chrysanthemums (L. 53)

(4) *Social-political institutions*

Social institution

- Hospital (L. 36)
- Different categories of train service in China (L. 44)
- * Supermarket (L. 38, 40)
- * China's airline service (L. 51)

(5) *Socialisation and the life-cycle*

Family

- The family of one of the teachers: a three-generation family, his mother, his wife, two children who are pupils and himself. The family lives in harmony: the mother helps her daughter-in-law with cooking (LL. 32, 33, 38, 40)
- An old lady looks after her grandson while her son is at work (L. 48)

Courtship

- A date in a park, which is very common in China. (LL. 34, 35)

Hospital and health

- * Seeing doctor in hospital (L. 36)

Social relationship

- The teacher invites his students to a football match and afterwards to his house for a meal (L. 37)

(6) *National history*

- None

(7) *National geography*

- A comparison of the two biggest cities in China - Beijing and Shanghai: their population, their industry development, different city constructions and different climate conditions (LL. 49, 50)
- * The names of a few cities are mentioned (L. 35)

(8) *National cultural heritage*

Sports

- * Chinese slow boxing - taiji (L. 39)

Arts

- * Chinese puppet show (L. 47)

Culture convention

- The national public holidays and festivals Chinese people have, particularly the importance of the Chinese new year - the Spring Festival - to the people (L. 53)

(9) *Stereotypes and national identity*

- The way in which the traditional festivals are celebrated (L. 53)

Book Three

(1) *Social identity and social groups*

Professional identity

- A student who goes to countryside to do social investigation (L. 60)
- A young worker who has devoted his time and energy to his work (L. 61)
- A technician who is newly elected as the manager of his factory (LL. 72, 73)
- The wife of the above mentioned technician, who is a factory worker (ditto)
- A caretaker of an residential area, who often helps the family of the technician and other residence (ditto)

Age group

- People who have lived to very old age (L. 60)
- A few teenagers talking about their view of parent-children relationships (L. 67)
- An old gardener who falls in love with a widow, but the traditional prejudice against re-marriage prevents the woman agreeing to marry him until 20 years later (L. 74, 75)
- A widow who has spend most of her life looking after her children and grandchildren by being a nanny and doing odd jobs. When she falls in love with a gardener she found herself deeply bounded by the feudal ethical code of chastity and cannot but deny her own feelings. It takes her 20 years to shake off the yoke of the feudal ethics (ditto)

Other groups

- The children of the widow who not only are against their mother's re-marriage, but also treat her poorly (ditto)
- People who encourages the widow to break the feudal tradition (ditto)

(2) *Social interaction*

Titles of address

- A form of address used for addressing an old man whom the speaker is familiar with: adding *daye* (elder uncle) after his surname (L. 72)
- A common way to address a woman who is older than the speaker by adding *dajie* (elder sister) after her surname (L. 73)

neighbourhood

- Neighbours help with and care about each other (L. 73, 74, 75)

(3) *Belief and behaviour*

Social behaviour and life style

- The way people celebrate Chinese new year - Spring Festival; the different food for people in the south and north (L. 59)

- The life style of a group of rural people who enjoy a long and healthy life (L. 60)
- Bicycle - one of the main means of transportation in Beijing (L. 62)
- A traditional memorial ceremony for died relatives and died family members - burning paper money with the belief that it could be used by the died in another world (L. 74)

Moral beliefs and value standards

- A criticism of people who lack will-power (L. 56)
- A famous fable with the moral: 'Where there is a will, there is a way.' (L. 57)
- A short play criticizing people who are extremely dogmatic (L. 58)
- An attitude toward love and marriage (L. 61)
- A criticism of some bad manners in social communication (L. 66)
- Different attitudes towards power and position. The newly promoted factory manager insists on not abusing his powers by seeking personally benefits, while his wife thinks it is a common practice in the society (LL. 72, 73)
- The change of attitude towards re-marriage and old people's marriage (LL. 74, 75)

(4) *Social-political institutions*

Political institutions

- * The Chinese Communist Youth League (L. 61)
- * Neighbourhood committee - an administrative organisation at grass-root level (L. 75)
- * The Women's Federation - A women's organisation in China (L. 75)

Social institutions and social welfare

- * Free medical care - government employees and students, including retired people, are provided with free medical treatment (L. 75)

(5) *Socialization and life-cycle*

Family and family relationship

- Conflicts between parents and their teenaged children (L. 67)
- Some teenagers' views about their parents (L. 67)
- The family of the newly elected factory manager: his wife who works in the same factory, his son and himself. The husband spend most of his time on his work and the wife has to manage the house work herself (LL. 73, 74)
- The selfishness of the children of the widow. They refuse to look after her when she is ill (LL. 74, 75)

Education

- A part of an educational experience for students - doing social investigations (L. 60)

Courtship

- An idea of what is true love (L. 61)

(6) *National history*

Historical events

- A brief mention of three dynasties in Chinese history of which Beijing is the capital (L. 65)
- A brief mention of a very important event in modern Chinese history - the May 4th movement in 1919 which is an anti-imperialist and anti-feudal movement (L. 68)
- A brief account of Chinese history from 2100 BC till the May 4th movement in 1919 (L. 70)

Historical figures

- Confucius, the most outstanding educationist, philosopher and thinker in Chinese history (L. 71)

(7) *National geography*

- The regional divisions (L. 57)

- Geographical location of China, her neighbouring countries, her size and population, and the administrative districts (L. 63)

(8) *National cultural heritage*

Language and literary works

- Some interesting features of the Chinese language (L. 64)
- Some well-known writers in the 20th century and their representative works (L. 68)
- An introduction of a well-known modern novel (L. 69)

Inventions and cultural heritage

- The features and history of a street in Beijing which is famous for trading of antiques, works of calligraphy, paintings, and rare books (L. 65)
- The four inventions made in ancient China: paper making, printing, compass and gunpowder (L. 70)
- The legend about the Spring Festival and the tradition of celebrating it (L. 59)

(9) *Stereotypes and national identity*

- The fact that there are fifty-six nationalities in China and the Han is the biggest of them all is mentioned as a passing reference (L. 63)

Although simply from a comparison of the two lists we would not be able to have a complete view of the two coursebooks, nevertheless it can provide a useful guide to an understanding of them. Obviously in comparing them, we can see a lot of similarities between them. So much of what has been discussed of *Reader* is also applicable to this coursebook. Yet there are some differences which are worthy of discussion.

Firstly, we can see from the list some examples of employing a comparative method in introducing different behaviours and perceptions between different cultures. This should be useful not only in eliciting meanings, but also in helping learners to be more aware of cultural differences, particularly when both the insider's view and the outsider's view are brought in side by side. From our earlier discussion we can see that it is possible for learners to be made more aware of their own cultural making through observing their own culture from other people's point of view. Such an awareness could possibly lead to his willingness to observe and accept the target culture from the native's point of view. Although in many cases it is impossible to bring learners' own culture into comparison, since the targeted reader do not come from one culture, such as the case of these two coursebooks. Yet if learners is shown how the target language and culture is different from other culture(s), it should at least prevent them to take

culture for granted. For example, in *Course* the authors deliberately brings in an outsider's view of some of the informal greetings in Chinese culture, and compare it with the insider's view. This gives learners a chance to see the native's point of view which would otherwise unavailable to them. So from the point of view of cultural awareness and culture understanding I think this is a good step forward.

Secondly, we can see from the lists that at the first stage of the learning *Course* contains somehow more information on the behavioural features of Chinese people and the social conditions of their everyday life. This is partly due to the efforts of contextualizing the texts to give learners better ideas of how to use the language in specific situations, and partly due to the fact that a wider range of social encounters are included in. For example in *Reader* only the more formal ways of greeting are introduced, but actually Chinese people are found to use more frequently some different forms of less formal greetings in different situations of their everyday life.

Some units show more clearly the relation of social context and social behaviour. For example, towards the end of the first stage, two of the protagonists go travelling from Beijing to south China, and through their interactions with an old man and a train conductor on a train, information of different aspects of the culture can be spotted, which I have listed under different headings above: the train services in China, people's attitude and behaviour towards fellow travellers, Chinese people's love for tea, two different ways of socializing for young people and elderly people - drinking tea and playing chess in tea-house for the elderly and tea and music for the young in music tea-garden, as well as the difference in climate in the north and the south of the country. But as it can be expected, much less information has been incorporated at the beginning of the course.

As far as social identities are concerned, we can see a good range of social representatives: family members, neighbours, different age groups, sex groups, several professional groups, some regional and ethnic groups and some other social representatives - people who lack self discipline and will power, and an interpreter who used to learn Chinese in Beijing. Although some of them are just mentioned in

passing, therefore not much of the characteristics of them are available for learners to observe, nevertheless, many social groups are included, whatever the depth is. *Reader* has also included various social representatives, particularly in the later two chapters.

Furthermore in this book there is also an example of taboo. Although the information given is too simple to be precise, at least we can see this - attention has been given to the pragmatic use of language rather than simply on using the correct language forms.

Overall, *Course* does not provide more information than *Reader* on Chinese culture, but in my view at the first stage it has made more efforts in demonstrating the impact of sociocultural situations on people's behaviours. At the same stage *Reader* on the other hand concentrates more on an understanding of the culture in general by illustrating some value standards and beliefs Chinese people as a whole would normally observe, and some artefacts and traditions which have contributed to the cultural identities of the nation, such as national costumes, a brand of porcelain which is well known all over the world, traditional sports, *taiji*, and some historical places, etc. Moreover, *Reader* includes some well known fables which have become part of the language as well as part of the people's beliefs. But when we come to the second stage both courses have demonstrated a similar approach - to reflect the modern society from various aspects as well as to introduce some of the cultural traditions, such as the important historical and geographical features, social conventions and artefacts, which have not been much covered at the early stage.

Both in *Reader* and *Course* the representation of the category of *social interaction* is quite thorough in terms of standard social formulas, though in *Course* there can be seen an attempt to demonstrate language variants, which is not reflected in *Reader*. The category of *belief and behaviour* is also very much emphasized. Because this part contributes directly to meaning making, in order to enable learners to understand the culture, as is the aim of the courses, this part has been very much stressed. In *Reader* we can see the inclusion of both the behavioural standards of everyday life and the influence of the cultural tradition on the present day life,

particularly literary tradition, while in *Course* there is much less presentation of the traditions. This can be seen also in the category of *national cultural heritage* which is more emphasized in *Reader*. As far as social representatives are concerned, there is no substantive difference between the two courses. Social institutions and other cultural environment have also been presented in both of the courses, particularly in *Course*.

From the above analysis we can see that the importance of cultural understanding to language learning has been recognized in both of the coursebooks. But from the different approaches adopted we can see that the role of culture in language learning has been interpreted not in exactly the same way. In my understanding, the role of cultural learning has been largely associated with meaning making in *Reader*. That is, much of the information is supplied to demonstrate how the native views the world, either in terms of values and beliefs, or in terms of behaviours, or cultural heritage, so as to enable learners to understand the native's perspective. This is valuable. From the point of view of cognitive and affective development, it would enable learners to understand how the native would think and behave, thus could help to enrich their experience and broaden their vision of the world. As far as the aim of developing communicative competence is concerned, this is also very important, though not sufficient. Because despite the fact that much has been done to help learners to understand the language and culture, not enough has been done to reveal the relationship between sociocultural environment and social behaviour. As we can see, in this book the information about social conditions and social identities is less clear, and social pragmatics is largely ignored. So even if examples of direct social encounters are provided, it has to be said that learners are not very well informed about what should be appropriate to do in different social communicational situations since they are not supplied with information about various social situations and the corresponding behaviours (include language behaviour).

The *Course* on the other hand gives better information on how people would behave in accordance with their social contexts. So when they come to social interactions, learners could be expected to cope better with their situations, even if not

in a significant way. But the area of discourse rules has not been dealt with in this coursebook either. As for the cognitive and affective development, this course provides different experience for learners. Firstly *Course* does not supply as much information as *Reader* does on the traditions and heritage, and on values and beliefs, so obviously it means learners would have less chance to be exposed to these aspects. But on the other hand the comparative approach used adopted in *Course* has been introduced into the learning, should help learners to be more aware of their own cultural limits and therefore to be more sympathetic of different view, even if this has been only to a limited extent. Therefore we could expect to some degree that this coursebook would provide a better chance for empathy and open-mindedness.

The above analysis has very briefly outlined what has been done in the two LCFL coursebooks in regard to cultural studies. It, in a sense, also reflects the general state for LCFL learning materials at the elementary level, for the reason I have given above. From this analysis we can see that the potential of cultural studies in language education has not been fully explored in these coursebooks. The differences between the two indicates that a lot can be done to make the learning more useful for learners in terms of both communicative competence development and personality development.

From the analysis we can also see that despite the efforts in revealing the way Chinese would generally think and behave, some of the more fundamental concepts which play a more dominant role in governing people's behaviours have not been dealt with. For example, collective spirit in Chinese culture has far more influence on the people than, say perseverance, just like individualism to Americans. And indirectness has been built in the national character. Without knowledge of concepts of this kind, one can hardly be expected to be capable in understanding or communicating effectively. The influence of these can be seen both in the using of the language itself and in structuring the way of communication, they should be included in the learning.

Earlier I have said that it is often the case that Chinese language learning are accompanied by some culture courses. Then is it necessary to emphasize cultural studies in the language course when learners already has a lot of background course?

The answer is 'Yes'. First, as far as social conventions, particularly verbal conventions, are concerned, a language course provides the best opportunity for it, since this section is usually less systematic and situational bound, thus cannot be easily managed separately from language learning. Then is it true that there is no need to deal with those areas which are normally tackled by background courses, such as history, geography, literature economics, politics, and so on? The answer is 'No'. Because these background courses are generally dealt with in a professional and systematic manner. Although it is valuable for learners to learn the culture, it may not provide learners the opportunities to get the insider's view which may be more emotional than factual, for example. So from this point of view the two are mutually supportive. To be able to understand the native, to share their views and feelings, language and culture studies will be a necessary means.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has been an attempt to find out answers to the questions of what cultural content should be incorporated in foreign language learning materials so as to help learners to develop an intercultural competence through their learning in general, and in particular whether the two LCFL textbooks which I have been using for teaching provide adequate help to learners of Chinese in this respect. The thesis can be seen as being formed of two parts. In the first stage I have looked into the issues of the relationship between language and culture, of the influence of culture on language learning and on the development of social competence, and of the relevance of cultural learning to the aims of foreign language education. In the second stage I carried out an analysis on two sets of LCFL learning materials on the basis of the understanding of the above issues, attempting to assess the values of each of them in terms of creating cultural awareness and cultural understanding, which forms an important part of intercultural competence.

In the first chapter the discussion is about the social nature of language use and some insights into the communicative approach in foreign/second language learning. This forms the basis of the rest of the discussion. For since language activities are very much the reflection of social realities and are dominated by various social factors, then in learning another language one has to acquire as much as possible the knowledge and the perspective of the native in order to appreciate the way the language is used by the native under various social circumstances, and consequently being able to use it appropriately in cross-cultural interactions. The discussion goes further in the second chapter to the interdependent relationship of language and culture, and to how this relationship should influence the learning both in its process and in its result. It shows that the fact that people of different cultural backgrounds are different in thinking and behaving affects the learning both in the way the new meaning system is accommodated and in the way learners would perceive the contrast between their own cultural identities and those of the native. This implies that what is needed for cross-

cultural communication is far more than acquiring skills for communication. Thus it is necessary that in the process of the learning both the cognitive and the affective aspects should be addressed.

Based upon these understandings, the following two chapters are focused on the issues of what cultural contents to be dealt with and how to deal with them in learning practice. The discussion here emphasize that it is important to bear in mind that culture and language have to be dealt with in an integral manner, and that learners need to be guided to see and feel what is seen and felt by the native so as to enable them to understand the native's perspective, and consequently to be more able in cross-cultural communication. Through looking into some models of and criteria for language and cultural learning, I was able to see what has been suggested from various perspectives about the issues of what cultural contents should be brought into the learning, and how to strike a balance between various aspects of culture as well as between language and culture. These provided me with the means to examine the cultural contents in two LCFL learning materials.

The Fifth Chapter forms the second part of the thesis. In this part two sets of LCFL learning materials are examined from both the pragmatic point of view and the point of view of promoting cultural awareness and cultural understanding. The analysis shows that although in both of the coursebooks a lot of attention has been given to cultural learning, yet the role of culture in the learning is not interpreted entirely in the same way. From one of them, *Reader*, we can see an inclination of laying more emphasis on the cultural tradition and culturally oriented values and beliefs, which is necessary for meaning making and understanding the cultural perspectives of the target group in general. While the other, *Course*, appears to have tilted towards, to some degree, a more pragmatic approach, with which learners could have better opportunities to observe how natives meet each other on an everyday basis. The difference is also reflected in that in *Course* we can see some efforts in guiding learners to see the target culture from the native's point of view. By illustrating the contrasts in views and behaviours between Chinese culture and other cultures *Course* enables

learners to get some insights into the way the native Chinese interpret their behaviours and their way of life, as well as help them to develop a cultural awareness. This analysis provides a brief idea about the two coursebooks, so that we can see what can be expected from the learning and what needs to be improved.

The analysis suggests that as far as the cultural contents are concerned, there is much room for improvement. First of all, I think, it is necessary that more information be provided about social identities of interlocutors and social environment of social encounters so that learners can gain better understanding of the social behaviours presented and the meanings employed in the circumstances in the culture. It is important to deal with values and beliefs which guide people's everyday behaviours and which are part of the everyday common sense to the people. Secondly, for the purpose of assisting the development of cultural awareness and cultural understanding, it is necessary that learners be provided with information about how the native interpret and feel about their social realities and themselves, and particularly how these are different in comparison with learners' own perspectives. We can see from the analysis that in the two coursebooks, particularly in *Reader*, there seems to be a lack of consideration of the points that learners would not automatically accept the perspectives of the target culture, and that cultural conflicts could undermine learners' motives for the learning. Lastly, more efforts are needed to deal with discourse rules and some social conventions which have wide and deep influence on people's behaviours, yet are not ready for direct observation at surface level.

The discrepancies between the two coursebooks and what is suggested as being insufficient by the analysis point out not only that there is the need for a better theoretic framework for language and cultural learning, but also that more empirical studies are necessary on what learners could and could not have learned from such learning materials and how they might be influenced cognitively and affectively by them.

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