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Communicative Language Teaching in Current Chinese Colleges and Universities

A thesis

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Literature and Language

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in English

by

Xiaorong Li

May 2011

Dr. Theresa McGarry, Chair

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Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, Chinese, Universities

ABSTRACT

Communicative Language Teaching in Current Chinese Colleges and Universities

by

Xiaorong Li

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been prioritized as the key instructional approach in colleges since the Chinese Ministry of Education issued a revised syllabus in 1999 that underlines college EFL students' communicative competence. The issuance of the syllabus was followed by a series of reforms on curricular designs and teaching methods. However, CLT has encountered great resistance. College teachers and learners are constrained by socio-cultural influences such as the perceptions of teachers' roles and ways of learning and teaching (Hu, 2002; Rao, 1996). Although some teachers have shown positive attitudes towards CLT, in general they have failed to practice it communicatively. This thesis discusses solutions and provides suggestions after delineating the difficulties these teachers and learners have encountered particularly. Taking into consideration China's increased global impact and internationally-collaborating programs that are currently conducted in many universities, this thesis highlights that CLT is an applicable approach to improve students' communicative competence.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my parents, my sister (Xiao-mei Li), my husband (Jun Zhang), and my daughter (Xiang-yi Zhang).

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My thanks first go to Dr. Judith B. Slagle, Dr. Robert Sawyer, and Dr. Shawna Lichtenwalner, who accepted me into the graduate program. I would not have come this far in my education and professional training without their granting me the chance to study at ETSU.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides background information concerning the context of English language teaching, introducing situations regarding communicative language teaching (CLT) and its development in Asian countries such as China, Japan, and Korea, particularly, before bringing forth research questions.

Background of the Research

Traditional teaching methods were, and are, influential in higher educational institutes in China. Grammar-translation and audiolingualism have been the dominant teaching methods for college-level English teaching in China for decades because their characteristics are compatible with the Chinese culture of learning (Hu, 2002). Consequently, Chinese college teachers of English were, have been, and are still adopting traditional methods in teaching English. Most of the time, college English teachers would start with teaching a list of vocabulary and then translate the content word by word or sentence by sentence while explaining grammatical rules in the meantime. According to Rao (1996), Chinese English teachers use translation as a tool to test and measure students' understanding of language; consequently, translation activities permeate almost every process of the English teaching.

Traditional Chinese teaching methods have been challenged since Chinese educational authorities introduced communicative language teaching (CLT) to China in the late 1980s. It is during this period of time that China adopted the "open-door policy" and there has been an increased demand for competent English speakers to handle international exchanges. In response

to such an increasing need, Chinese educational authorities were active in promoting CLT in Chinese English classrooms, where English is taught as a foreign language (EFL). Liao (2000) pointed out that educational sectors have responded to this approach positively by making changes in the curricular design to meet the needs in the communicative teaching, and CLT became very popular in China in the mid to late 1990s.

Further initiatives were made to ensure the adoption of CLT over time. In 1999 the Chinese Higher Education Ministry promulgated an important revised syllabus that highlights students' skills in listening and speaking in particular. The requirement of the new syllabus underscores the importance of EFL learners' greater communicative competence and thus further prioritizes Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in college English teaching. It was then followed by a series of reforms on curricular designs, teaching approaches, and faculty training programs.

However, CLT has encountered great resistance among traditional EFL college teachers and learners all these years due to certain socio-cultural influences such as perceptions of teachers' role and of ways of learning and teaching (Hu, 2002; Penner, 1995; Rao, 1996; Savignon & Wang, 2003). For example, in China where the dominant culture of learning is traditionally conservative and less challenging, students are often reluctant to participate in communicative activities. Teachers are absolutely authoritative and thereby they are deemed master givers of knowledge.

Although it has met resistance among teachers and students, CLT is still gaining popularity in many Chinese universities. There are several reasons for such phenomena: (1) Chinese educational authorities have been active in promoting it for the sake of its national economic strength and global impact (Liao, 2004); (2) in spite of the overwhelmingly reported

constraints, college teachers show positive perceptions towards CLT and some research manages to reveal its effectiveness (Anderson, 1993; Jin et al., 2005; Liao, 2004); and (3) more and more EFL students are no longer satisfied with traditional English teaching that fails to facilitate their communicative competence (Fang, 2010; Gan et al., 2004).

As more and more Chinese higher education institutions undertake internationally-based cooperative education projects, the concern with how to help college students achieve communicative competence in English is also growing. In order to gain a better understanding of how CLT is practiced in these Chinese universities, it is necessary for us to discuss some of the issues that restrict these institutions from benefitting from CLT's strengths.

Focusing on meaning and communication and incorporating authentic input, the goal of CLT is to develop language learners' communicative competence through meaningful interaction. English instruction through CLT is intended to promote communicative competence and learning through interaction, collaborative learning, and cooperative learning (Oxford, 1997). Richards (2006) pointed out that "CLT has served as a major source of influence on language teaching practice around the world" since it appeared in the 1970s (p. 1). Nowadays, it is believed that "CLT has become the most influential and dominant language teaching approach of recent times and has spread around the world, along with English" (Gil & Najjar, 2009, p. 3). However, many language specialists doubt its effectiveness in countries where English is taught not as a second language but as a foreign language.

Much research has been carried out to find out the relationship between CLT principles and practice in countries where English is taught as a second language (L2). Sato and Kleinsasser (1999), for example, indicated that teachers' perceptions of CLT were not in line with their actual classroom practices. They surveyed some Japanese second language in-service teachers in

Australia to investigate the consistency between their perceptions and teaching behavior. They found out that what was observed in the classroom had little to do with what the teachers had claimed they knew of the principles of CLT or what they had learned about CLT. This case indicates that L2 teachers do not really practice what they have learned of the use of CLT in the process of their teaching. It is also implied that these some L2 teachers tend to develop their notions of CLT without examining whether or not their beliefs are theoretically based.

CLT started a trend in many Asian contexts such as Taiwan, Korea, and Japan where English is taught as a foreign language (FL) after it was first proposed in the 1970s in the United States and England. As the trend has been spreading in these countries, their governmental authorities have been supportive of CLT's implementation. For example, the Taiwan Ministry of Education made a policy to eliminate the form-focused senior high school and college entrance examinations in 2001 and 2002 (Savignon & Wang, 2003).

However, as in China, the implementation of CLT has also met resistance among EFL teachers and students in these Asian countries. Li (1998) pointed out that "curricular innovations promoted by the adoption of CLT in EFL countries have generally been difficult" (p. 677). In research intended to reveal how CLT is adopted in Taiwan, it was reported that there existed "a mismatch between learner needs and preferences and their reported experience of classroom instruction" (Savignon & Wang, 2003, p. 223). Li (1998) researched how CLT was implemented in Korea and revealed some Korean teachers' perceived difficulties. In this research, teachers complained about their low proficiency in English, lack of training, and lack of time for communicative activities; they also showed disappointment in students who lack motivation and participation. Li suggested that more suitable English teaching theories must be established to meet the needs of EFL countries for the future development of CLT. Above all, he claimed that

“change agents must study teachers’ perceptions of an innovation to ensure its success” (p. 677). Most inspiringly, he pointed out that “the literature on curriculum innovation suggests that teachers’ understanding of an innovation is central to its success” (p. 677). Li stressed that EFL teachers’ proper perception of CLT plays a key part in the implementation of CLT.

Similar to CLT’s situation in China, how CLT can be implemented successfully has a great deal to do with the teaching and learning styles of teachers and students in the process of learning and teaching. Because these countries have been under the extensive influence of Asian philosophical systems such as Buddhism, Daoism, and above all, Confucianism, they share a many similarities in terms of learning and teaching. For example, teachers are seen as the masters in knowledge and they are expected to impart knowledge to the students. Such culture of learning like this has indeed been troublesome for CLT teachers who try to steer their students toward communicative approaches. However, why is CLT still being widely promoted in these countries? There must be some strength that is worthy of being exploited; numerous researchers and educators are still studying its effectiveness and values so that we can make the most of it.

CLT is playing an important and positive role in building communicative competence in the era of globalization. The trend of globalization is generating more connections among countries in the 21st century, and English is playing an important role as a “global/international language or a Lingua Franca” (Fang, 2010). Although EFL learners in Asian EFL contexts have been and are still encountering different difficulties in the communicative classroom, the positive attitudes revealed in such research as Liao (2004) , Fang (2010), and Savignon and Wang (2003) towards CLT should not be overlooked . Many Asian EFL learners are benefitting from CLT through appropriate informed practices and various strategic instructions. As the global

interconnection enables one culture to link to another at an even faster pace, English teaching has become an indispensable means for such connection.

As CLT is seen as “describing a set of core principles about language learning and teaching,” it is hoped that we can apply such core principles to address issues presented in the process of teaching and learning (Richards, 2006, p. 45). Richards suggested that “CLT will continue to be the major general language teaching methodology for some years to come, since its principles are generally supported by the English language teaching and profession and by ELT/TESOL specialists and applied linguists” (p. 45). Thus, it is reasonable to hope that CLT will still play an important role in language teaching in the long run to empower language learners to attain a higher level of language use.

Background of the Problem

Chinese higher educational authorities started to introduce CLT in the late 1980s, followed by a series of reforms in curricular design, teachers’ training programs, and syllabus revision. In the 21st century most of the EFL students in Chinese universities are expected to acquire an overall competence in English during the school years, and ability in listening and speaking in particular. However, both teachers and students have met with difficulties in the communicative classrooms where the ways of learning and teaching English are clashing with their traditional culture of learning, which emphasize teacher-centeredness and rote memorization.

Presently, although college learners realize the importance of communicative competence, they lack strategies to achieve it. The need to use English as a lingua franca is changing learners’ attitudes towards CLT (Fang, 2010; Zhu, 2003). Facing this era of globalization when China’s

economy is growing so dramatically fast and the job market is demanding a greater number of employees with greater skills, EFL learners expect to improve their communicative competence so that they can be more actively involved in globalization (Zhu, 2003). However, due to some constraints such as lack of teachers who know how to practice CLT, lack of authentic materials, and the problem with big classes, learners are encountering severe difficulties in the communicative classrooms.

Although CLT has been widely promoted during Chinese educational reforms in the colleges, it is not well-practiced by the EFL college teachers (Han, 2008). However, it has been a popular topic that is hotly debated by teachers and researchers in China. Following a series of major educational reforms that were initiated by the educational policy-makers in 1986, 1999, 2004, and 2007, college English teachers have been encouraged to adopt various methodological strategies centered on CLT to facilitate college students' communicative competence. However, although CLT has been promoted to teachers, it is often not practiced in the communicative way (P. Li, 2004; Y. Li, 2004; Penner, 1995). Communicative activities such as role play, drama, and games have been incorporated in the textbooks by governmental education sectors. However, these task-based activities are not familiar to either college teachers or learners, who are used to traditional ways of formal teaching. Such socio-cultural difference in learning styles together with situational complexity makes CLT's implementation in Chinese colleges difficult. Unavoidably, all these innovative changes have influenced teachers' and learners' attitudes and beliefs regarding language teaching and language learning. Issues related to these influences that the teachers and learners have had will be discussed in the research questions listed below.

Research Questions

- (1) What is the extent to which communicative activities are carried out in Chinese colleges and universities?
- (2) What attitudes do the college EFL teachers and learners hold regarding CLT?
- (3) What are some of the situational and socio-cultural difficulties for CLT?
- (4) What are the currently existing and proposed solutions to these difficulties?

Purpose of the Study

This study explores the implementation of CLT within the context of EFL colleges and universities in China. The main purpose is to summarize the research on how CLT is implemented in the systems of higher education in China and how college EFL teachers can teach English communicatively. With the main purpose in mind, I intend (1) to identify the difficulties for Chinese EFL college teachers and students concerning CLT; and (2) to offer some insights and solutions for Chinese EFL college learners and teachers to overcome such difficulties.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in two ways:

Firstly, a study of difficulties and solutions in English teaching will help us to further understand our teaching behaviors. Through literature review, I attempt to provide reasons for CLT's implementation in Chinese colleges and universities and to identify the difficulties in particular aspects. I hope, by discussing the solutions, to provide insights on how college EFL teachers can effectively apply CLT to help students to improve communicative competence.

Most of the research on teaching English in China concentrates on identifying difficulties, with a skeptical view. Few studies discuss the cases in which communicative approaches work well; nor do they discuss the necessity for CLT in China. This thesis further explores some of the positive views and practices drawn from encouraging reports (Gan et al., 2004; Jin et al., 2005). Thus, I hope to provide insights for teachers on how to teach communicatively so that China can meet its growing needs for communicative employees in this globally-expanded era.

Secondly, this study can contribute to the development of the current English education in Chinese colleges and universities. Presently, China's increased economic growth and global impact highlight the need for CLT to be further practiced in EFL classroom in colleges. The facts that China gained access to the World Trade Organization (WTO) and successfully won the bid for hosting the Olympic Games in Beijing in 2008 have further boosted the desire of the college EFL learners to gain communicative competence (Zhang, 2008). What's more, with the increase in Western-based tertiary educational programs, the trend of integrating communicative approaches is inevitable in higher EFL institutions. All these scenarios lend China great chances to make learning English a national priority. As China endeavors to expand its global market and influences, it is even more vital for the Chinese college EFL learners to achieve communicative abilities in the international language – English – through the practices of CLT (Anderson, 1993; Fang, 2010). Much effort should be given to the studies on the current status of EFL at colleges and universities in China. A discussion of the difficulties, effectiveness, and solutions of CLT may shed some light into current college English teaching. Therefore, it merits discussing.

Methods of the Study

The study of the research questions are based on a literature review on CLT. Rather than from primary research, the findings are synthesized from recent studies drawn from periodicals, textbooks, and journals such as the *Asian-EFL Journal*, *Asian TESL Journal*, *Canada TESL journal*, and *TESOL Quarterly*. This thesis begins by introducing the background information of the Chinese higher institutions, where English is taught as a foreign language and the current teaching situation is introduced. It is then followed by the justification of the practice of CLT and its connection with improving communicative competence based on second language acquisition. After identifying the difficulties for Chinese EFL learners and teachers in CLT activities and providing some suggestive ideas, the thesis highlights the necessary implementation of the CLT approach in the context of Chinese colleges by offering recommendations.

Organization of the Thesis

This thesis is composed of three chapters. Chapter 1 gives an introduction of the research background, and explains the purpose, significance, method of the study. Chapter 2 presents a literature review of the rationale of CLT and its application in Chinese colleges. Chapter 3 presents the conclusion of the thesis, including a summary of the research findings drawn from previous literature review and implications of the findings. References are attached following the last chapter.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a literature review concerning primary features of communicative language teaching (CLT), which will be described in three sections. The first section gives a historical account of the terms and terminology such as communicative competence, CLT, and task-based language teaching (TBLT) via group work. The second section begins with an historical introduction of the major teaching methods that were influential in China. And it is then followed by a retrospect of China's English education covering from a hundred year ago until now. The third section of this chapter introduces the six achievements of English teaching, the syllabus innovations at different time periods, and the situational and cultural limitations of CLT's implementation in Chinese colleges and universities.

Communicative Language Teaching

CLT is now an “accepted paradigm with many interpretations and manifestations” (Brown, 2007, p. 45). For some, it means “little more than an integration of grammatical and functional teaching,” for others, it means “using procedures where learners work in pairs or groups employing available language resources in problem-solving tasks” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 66). It derives from and is centered on communicative competence (CC); it also has a close connection with task-based language teaching (TBLT). The following parts introduce the definitions and characteristics of CC, CLT, and TBLT.

Communicative Competence (CC)

Communicative competence is the goal of language teaching according to Hymes (Richards & Rogers, 1986). In order to be able to express themselves meaningfully in a speech community, learners need to develop CC. To get an understanding of its connection to CLT, this part will review CC's definition, its distinction from grammatical competence, four components of CC, and research and development.

Definition of CC. According to Brown's (1987) account, Hymes did not think Chomsky's 'rule-governed creativity' could fully explain the "social and functional rules of language", and thus, he created "communicative competence" in his works published in 1967 and 1972, which has become a 'household word' since then (p. 198-199). Clearly, the term is the result of a reaction to Chomsky's definition of competence that stresses the grammatical competence of the ideal native speaker; it demonstrates Hymes's expectation for the use of language in social context (Savignon, 1991, p. 264). Hymes (1979) suggested that competence should be viewed as "the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language use which the speaker-listener possesses" and that is "involves far more than knowledge of grammaticality" (pp. 13-14). Such competence should enable us to use functional language in certain social contexts; consequently, we are able to "convey and interpret messages" and "negotiate meanings" between one another (Brown, 1987, p. 199).

Grammatical Competence vs. Communicative Competence. Brown (1987) and Canale and Swain (1980) distinguished the differences between linguistic or grammatical and communicative competence. Communicative competence refers to "capacity relating to the rules of language use" and grammatical or linguistic competence refers to "the rules of grammar" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 5). Similarly, Brown (1987) described linguistic competence as

dealing with knowledge of the rules and forms of the language and explained that CC is about knowledge that “enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively” (p.199). Such distinction between these two systems informs us that they interrelate; and as Larsen-Freeman (1987) stated, “communicative competence involves being able to use the language appropriate to a given social context” (p. 62). Clearly, it is CC that endows language learners with the capacity to interact with other speakers with meaningful, social, and functional uses of language.

Four Components of CC. Brown (1987) informed us of the four components of CC based on Swain’s and Canale’s descriptions: (a) grammatical competence, (b) sociolinguistic competence, (c) discourse competence, and (d) strategic competence. Grammatical competence deals with “sentence-level grammar” (p. 199). It concerns whether or not we master some basic knowledge of rules of the syntax, semantics, phonology, and morphology. It is also closely associated with our understanding of the literal meaning of utterances. Discourse competence copes with the relationships among sentences. With such ability, we are able to “connect sentences in stretches of discourse” (p. 199). Sociolinguistic competence is related to socio-cultural rules of language and is not restricted to the literal meaning of utterances. With such ability, we can use the language appropriately in different social circumstances. Strategic competence refers to the “competence underlying our ability to make repairs, to cope with imperfect knowledge, and to sustain communication through “paraphrase, circumlocution, repetition, hesitation, avoidance, and guessing, as well as shifts in register and style” (Savignon, 1997, p. 45). With such strategies, we are able to sustain our interaction. These four aspects of CC relate to one another; they not only afford us the knowledge of language, but also skills that go beyond our mastery of the language. Above all, these components endow us with the capacity to use language communicatively.

Research Concerning CC. In Savignon's (1991) research project at the University of Illinois in 1972, the term "CC" was used to characterize "the ability of language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge" (p. 264). In this research that involved studying teaching French to English speakers, students were encouraged to seek information, ask for further explanation, and perform other communicative tasks (e.g., role-plays, games, problem-solving tasks) to negotiate meaning; in the meantime, students were motivated to use the language without memorizing patterns. These activities focused more on the pragmatic aspects of the language rather than the structural level of the language learning. As a result, students were able to perform functional roles of the language. This result is in line with Hymes's expectation for CC. Clearly, communicative competence is shaped by focusing on meaning rather than formal features.

The Development of CC. Savignon (1997) pointed out that the development of CC evolves from two areas of teaching and learning a second language (L2): one comes from the theoretical issues in psychology, linguistics, and communication; and the other is from the practical concerns in methodologies. The perspective formed in these two areas is broader than the previous linguistic view that focuses on grammatical features of language. She further indicates that CC goes beyond linguistic aspects to areas of anthropology and sociology. With the notion of CC, language is focused on its social, functional, and strategic use in social settings, rather than on discrete elements. Consequently, the interpersonal interaction is realized through meaningful communication.

As revealed above, CC affords L2 learners long-term goals towards language learning; undoubtedly, it is also tied closely to communicative approaches in the process of language teaching.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative language teaching focuses on interactive communication that aims to “develop what Hymes (1972) referred to as ‘communicative competence’” as a reaction to Chomsky’s view of linguistic competence that “deals primarily with abstract grammatical knowledge” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 70). In order to understand CLT, the following parts start with distinguishing the differences between method and approach and review CLT’s appearance, preliminary functional syllabuses, goals, principles, characteristics, authentic materials in CLT, teachers’ and students’ roles in CLT, and challenges.

Method vs. Approach. A method is characterized by a finite set of described rules regarding linguistic structures. An approach is dynamic and subject to modifications because of teachers’ experience or recognition in teaching or learning in the classroom (Brown, 2007). Instead of a method, communicative language teaching (CLT) is viewed as an approach by Richards and Rodgers (1986). A communicative approach to language teaching is designed for communicative, social, and pragmatic contexts of teaching, and thus it is full of variables. Method and approach are not disconnected; an approach also uses elements from a method. For example, CLT might adopt the same techniques to teach vocabulary or grammar as the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, and/or the Audio-Lingual Method. CLT’s difference from these methods is that it has “much greater room for individual interpretation and variation than most methods permit” in terms of design and procedure (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 83). CLT

could present a variety of forms of syllabus models, curricular designs, and classroom activities based on variable alterations from learners and teachers, whereas methods are less changeable.

CLT's Appearance. CLT originated in England in the 1960s as a response to the criticisms raised by Chomsky who did not think that the current structural theories of language explained well “the creativity and uniqueness of individual sentences” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 64). British linguists shifted their attention to the functional and communicative potential of language; as a result, they felt the need to work on “communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures” (p. 64). CLT has seen enormous innovative work in curricular design, teaching techniques, classroom management procedures, teacher training, materials development, and testing and evaluation systems since its first appearance in the late 1960s in the British classrooms of foreign languages. In the mid-1970s, CLT expanded to the United States, where the theories of Audiolingualism were rejected in the mid-1960s. This new trend was enthusiastically supported by many advocates such as Christopher Candlin, Henry Widdowson, John Firth, Halliday, Dell Hymes, etc. Among them, Halliday is an important one who rejected traditional procedures and stressed functional focus on language use (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Functional-Notional Framework as CLT's Basis. Halliday's functional framework of language and Wilkin's Notional Syllabuses serve as bases for and also had a great impact on the development of CLT (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Halliday and Wilkins initiated innovations in syllabuses. In Wilkins's book *Notional Syllabuses*, he described two types of communicative meanings for language learners to understand and express: notional categories such as “time, sequence, quantity, location, frequency”, and functional categories such as “requests, denials, offers, and complaints” (p. 65). These functional-notional categories are playing significant role in

designing new syllabuses, textbooks, and language programs as opposed to previous ones centered on linguistic structures.

Functional Features of CLT. Like Halliday and Wilkins, Littlewood (1981) also noted the importance of functions of language. She claimed that one of the most characteristic features of CLT is that it “pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural features of language, combining these into a more completely communicative view” (p. 1). The structural aspect of language deals with the grammatical system, providing linguistic facts and operations for the learner. Unfortunately, however, such a structural aspect of competence is not “sufficient on its own to account for how language is used as means of communication” (p.1). In order to help L2 learners complete the task of meaningful communication, CLT practitioners employ functional and social meanings in certain social contexts by providing opportunities for learners to use the language in a meaningful way. Thus, they manage to go beyond the instruction of structural rules and facilitate communicative competence.

CLT's Goals and Principles. CLT is an approach that aims to (a) “make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 66). CLT practices embrace three major principles by which activities and language use help learners promote learning: (a) the communication principle; (b) the task principle; and (c) the meaningful principle (p. 72). These principles underscore the interactive role of communication. Such interactive nature of communication is reflected through the “collaborative nature of meaning making” such as sending or receiving messages among learners (Savignon, 1991, p. 261). Clearly, to communicate in the target language communicatively is the ultimate goal in CLT.

CLT's Characteristics Described by Li. While Littlewood (1981) stressed that learners must develop linguistic skills before they develop their functional competence, Li (1998) emphasized significantly the role of CC in real-life situations. According to him, CLT has the following six characteristics:

1. A focus on communicative functions;
2. A focus on meaningful tasks rather than on language per se (e.g., grammar or vocabulary study);
3. Efforts to make tasks and language relevant to a target group of learners through an analysis of genuine, realistic situations;
4. The use of authentic, from-life materials;
5. The use of group activities;
6. The attempt to create a secure, nonthreatening atmosphere (p. 679).

As the above list shows, Li stressed the functional, meaningful, and authentic use of the language in students' small-group activities. Learners complete tasks such as puzzles, games, map-reading, surveys, interviews, role-plays, and other simulated activities. In order to complete these tasks, students have to use the target language in gathering information, sharing opinion, transferring information, reasoning, acting out, and giving or receiving feedback. These tasks reflect the most "obvious" characteristic of CLT: that "almost everything that is done is done with a communicative intent" (Larson-Freeman, 1986, p. 132).

Characteristics of CLT Described by Brown. Many of Li's above description of CLT's characteristics are in line with Brown's (2007) description. Brown related that (a) a focus is given to all of the components of communicative competence; (b) form is not central while "language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes"; (c) a focus is given to "students' 'flow' of comprehension and production", and fluency may sometimes be more important than accuracy; (d) students will eventually use the language "productively and receptively in unrehearsed contexts outside the classroom;" (e) students are given opportunities to notice their own learning styles; (f) the

teacher is to facilitate and guide the students to generate genuine use of the language; and (g) students take an active role in learning. (pp. 46-47).

The Use of Authentic Material in CLT. The use of authentic material marks an important characteristic of CLT. Richards (2006) pointed out authentic materials “provide cultural information about the target language”, “provide exposure to real language,” and “relate more closely to learners’ needs” (p. 22). Larsen-Freeman (1987) further emphasized the use of authentic materials by claiming that they create for learners “an opportunity to develop strategies for dealing with language as it is actually used by native speakers” (p. 62).

Teachers’ and Students’ Roles in CLT. Another significant feature of CLT is "its learner-centered and experience-based view of second language teaching" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 69). Since CLT accentuates students’ active role in the classroom, teachers are less dominant in teaching. The teachers are sometimes facilitators or advisers, and at other times they can be a ‘co-communicator’ (Larson-Freeman, 1987, p. 63). They act as communication facilitators or group participants (Richards & Lockhart, 1994). They are around to organize class activities, supply the language that is needed by the students or engage them in communicative activities (Larson-Freeman, 1987). They do not have to be particular about students’ errors of form, because it is more important for students to communicate fluently rather than accurately. While the teacher’s role is to be assisting learners with class activities, learners are expected to be responsible for their own learning.

Issues Regarding CLT. CLT is “laden with issues of ‘authenticity, real-world simulation, and meaningful tasks’” (Kumaravadivelu, as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 45). Although CLT saw the development of approaches that highlighted the fundamentally communicative properties of language in the 1980s and 1990s, some key issues related to CLT have still remained in discussion

among researchers. For example, one issue is whether grammar-based syllabuses should be abandoned or revised; another issue is “how to implement CLT principles at the level of the classroom procedures” (Richards & Rogers, 1986, p. 82). Above all, what concerns EFL learners is the issue of how CLT can be adopted in situations where grammar-based tests are still demanded. In EFL contexts like in China, teachers lack knowledge of CLT, so the actual practice of CLT has encountered difficulties (Anderson, 1993; Penner, 1995; Sun & Cheng, 2000). While revealing EFL teachers’ difficulties in implementing CLT in colleges and universities, I bring attention to the importance of fostering students’ learning autonomy. Such autonomy can be achieved by offering them proper learning strategies and providing them opportunities for cooperative learning through group work, which is discussed in Chapter III.

Although CLT has been heatedly debated and challenged regarding its effectiveness, applicability, and feasibility, it still interests those people who have different perceptions towards it. Perhaps as Richards and Rogers (1986) explained such interest can justify its appeal: “CLT appealed to those who sought a more humanistic approach to teaching, one in which the interactive processes of communication receive priority” (p. 83). Nevertheless, language teaching is a “theoretical as well as a practical activity” and it is important for us to notice that “effective teaching materials and classroom procedures depend on principles deriving from an understanding of what language is and how it is used” (Widdowson, 1978, p. 75). This point exactly justifies what this thesis is trying to point out for the teachers of another language – understanding correctly what we are doing with our knowledge and practice is central to the improvement of our teaching activities. As communicative activities are task-based and often carried out through students’ collaborative learning, the following section focuses on the connection between task-based instruction and CLT.

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) Via Group Work

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which aims to “provide learners with a natural context for language use,” is an important component of CLT (Larson-Freeman, 2000, p. 144). It is one of “the most prominent perspectives within the CLT framework” (Brown, 2007, p. 50) and is at the very core of CLT (Ellis, 2003). The practice of TBLT is often realized through cooperative activities when students work in groups or pairs. In order to explain how TBLT works, this part will introduce the three definitions of task, characteristics of task, pedagogical tasks in TBLT, small-group interaction, group-work tasks, and the design of group-work tasks.

Task as an Activity. Task is defined varying in different perspectives. Some say “a task is ‘an activity which requires learners to use language with emphasis on meaning, to attain an objective’” (Bygate, Skehan, & Swain, 2001, as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 50). Learners are motivated to make use of the target language among group or pair members in real-life based activities by completing tasks such as finding a place or filling out a form. They are also encouraged to carry out role play tasks such as making reservations or borrowing books at the library. Task is also defined as “an activity in which a person engages in order to attain an objective, and which necessitates the use of language” by van den Branden (2006, p. 4). Here are a few examples of activities: (1) drawing a map while listening to instructions; (2) identifying and describing people; and (3) asking managers for job assignments and schedules. While students try to accomplish tasks through certain techniques such as role-play simulation, they are also processing language cognitively and psychologically.

Task as a Workplan. In addition, a task is also defined as “a workplan that requires learners to process language pragmatically in order to achieve an outcome that can be evaluated

in terms of whether the correct or appropriate propositional content has been conveyed” (Ellis, 2003, p. 16). This workplan is designed to make learners interact through communicative tasks. Learners are expected to listen to input that is slightly beyond their current ability; they are also encouraged to express themselves by negotiating meaning (e.g., clarification check, confirmation check, and comprehension check) during problem-solving tasks. In this sense, the purposes of carrying out tasks in teaching go “beyond the practice of language for its own sake” (Brown, 2007, p. 52). As language is practiced in term of its social, cultural, and pragmatic aspects through real-life communications in the classroom, students know when, where, and how the language is used.

Task as a Piece of Classroom Work. Nunan (2004) gave a conclusive definition by describing a task as:

a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form (p. 4).

The “classroom work” underscores the importance of group work among members, as the completion of tasks require a cooperative effort. The definition also reveals the interconnection between grammar and the produced language: the former is contributive to the latter. Above all, Nunan stressed a most notable feature of TBLT – to focus on meaning through cooperative interactions in class rather than form.

Characteristics of Task. Nunan (2004) informed us of five essential characteristics of tasks: (1) meaning is primary; (2) there is some communication problem to solve; (3) there is some sort of relationship to comparable real-world activities; (4) task completion has some priority; and (5) the assessment of the task is in terms of outcome (Skehan, 1998, as cited in Nunan, 2004, p. 5). Notably, with tasks designed in the framework of CLT, students are provided

with learning opportunities to practice the target language in real-world-like situations. Actively engaged in interaction, they have the chance to naturally apply the linguistic knowledge without rehearsal. Clearly, in TBLT, language is “treated a tool for communicating” and teachers and students function as ‘language users’ (Ellis, 2003, p. 252). Therefore, to this end, TBLT makes learners the center of the classroom, promoting learning in them.

Pedagogical Tasks in TBLT. The use of tasks is the core of teaching in the classroom (Brown, 2007). In a general sense, tasks can be seen as a means to realize the desired goal of communication. The pedagogical tasks provide opportunities for students to carry out tasks such as asking for information, apologizing, and making excuses. To some degree these tasks reflect the situations in the real world, and thus, are relevant to students. With the ability developed via the pedagogical tasks, it is hoped that students are enabled to accomplish the target tasks in real-life contexts such as hospitals, libraries, and airports. For example, students are to ask for ticket-selling information at a cinema or to apologize to a teacher about their delayed assignment. Such interaction in different tasks or real-life situations is thought to facilitate second language acquisition (Larson-Freeman, 2000).

Small-Group Interaction. Generally, in an instructional situation, to achieve a task is conducted through group/pair work in a cooperative manner. Thus, small-group interaction becomes a major representative of cooperative learning (CL) (Kagan, 1995). CL is in line with the goal of CLT – making meaningful use of the target language via interaction or negotiation. The interaction among group members to achieve a task involves receiving or producing comprehensible input or output that facilitates language acquisition (Krashen, 1982; Swain, 1985).

Group-Work Tasks. Group-work tasks can be applied to advance skills in speaking, listening, reading, and writing. For example, in a reading task that requires the group to present their understanding of an article, each group member is assigned a task such as describing features of the characters or defining certain terms. In a writing task each student in the group takes turns to write bits of a story in order to come up with a complete one. Tasks that require exchanging information can be helpful for learners to use not only their skills of listening and speaking but also their skills of team work. Jigsawing is good case in point, as it is “perhaps one of the most effective kinds of group-work activities because it ensures that each individual has a responsibility” (Seward, 1996, p. 426). One kind of jigsawing involves two levels of information exchange. At the first level the class is divided into groups of four or five. Each group is assigned a task and each member is responsible for parts of such a task. Group members share information among themselves. Then, at the second level, group members are re-arranged completely. They share information within the new groups. During the group activities, teachers are assisting students by providing answers to questions or making sure that students understand the requirement of the tasks. Group-work tasks like this enable students to practice not only their listening and speaking skills but also their reading skills.

The Design of Group-Work Tasks. Group-work tasks that embrace various aspects of real-life situations are very important in the communicative classroom. According to Seward (1996) four aspects must not be ignored when teachers are designing group tasks: (a) individual responsibility that ensures that each member of the group has a task; (b) a group product that involves the work of all individuals; (c) social skills that are demonstrated when students are working together; and (d) interpersonal interaction that happens among students. If students can use the language in the ‘artificial’ world of the classroom for a “real purpose,” they can be highly

engaged in completing pedagogical tasks of all sorts (p. 425). Clearly, group-work tasks are not only designed with a communicative intent, they are also designed to develop students' senses of responsibility, individuality, and team-work ethic.

In sum, task-based language teaching, focusing on communicating through interaction in the target language rather than analyzing discrete language points, has been broadly applied in communicative classrooms. Nowadays, task-designed syllabuses, spanning project-based, content-based, theme-based, and text-based instantiations aiming to help EFL learners develop conversational skills are crucial in classroom teaching and learner assessment (Nunan, 2007). Task-based instruction affords a channel for group-work interactional activities to occur in the L2 classroom. As the above literature reveals, group-work communication among peers is potentially beneficial for L2 learning. As Chinese universities have adopted more task-based textbooks, it is highly urgent for teachers to pay attention to “proper preparation of the task and of the students” (Cohen, 1994, p. 3).

English Education in China

The teaching of English in China goes back to the Chinese government started to notice its importance over one hundred years ago (Wang, 1981). It incorporated some of the early teaching methods in the beginning and the middle of the 20th century including the Grammar-Translation Method, the Direct Method, and the Audio-Lingual Method. While exploring these teaching methods, China has formed its own traditional way of teaching English, which has been heavily influenced by Confucianism. This section starts with a brief introduction of these methods. Following the explanation of the terms and terminology, it describes how English has been taught in China during three time periods.

The Grammar-Translation Method

The Grammar-Translation Method was popular in the United States in the early 1900s. The theory behind it is that the rules of lexicon and grammar are universal and the laws of speech are the same for all languages (Wang, 1981). Larsen-Freeman (1987) listed three of the objectives: (1) students will be able to read and to appreciate literature; (2) students will be able to “read and write their native language enhanced by their study of foreign language grammar;” and (3) students will be mentally stimulated and thus intellectually enriched (p. 52). Students are required to translate the foreign language into their native language and vice versa. The discussion of the passages is done in the students’ native language. Grammar is the core of the language teaching. Students memorize the grammar rules that are taught and explained explicitly and deductively. Students are also expected to apply the rules of the grammar to discrete sample sentences.

Many linguists attacked this method for the “tedium and the inefficiency of its instructional procedures” and learner’s “limited oral proficiency” (Larsen-Freeman, 1987, p. 52). In Wang’s (1981) work, he recounted the analogy used by a French linguist who said that “the Grammar-Translation Method may be likened to teaching cadets to fly a plane by giving lectures and explanations on the technique of flying a plane, but seldom asking the cadet to fly it” (p. 657).

The fact that “some version of this method had been practiced by language teachers for centuries” explains to us how influential it was and has been in the history of English teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 1987, p. 52).

The Direct Method

The Direct Method originated and was established in Europe (Larsen-Freeman, 1987). It was derived from the natural learning principles of the Natural Method that was supported by Sauveur, Gouin, and other linguists (Richards & Rogers, 1986). They believed “a foreign language could be taught without translation or the use of the learner’s native tongue if meaning was conveyed directly through demonstration and action” (Richards & Rogers, 1986, p. 9).

The goal of the instruction was “having students learn how to use a foreign language in order to communicate” (Larsen-Freeman, 1987, p. 52). It involves exclusive use of the target language most of the time. Meaning is the core of language teaching. The instruction focuses on associating meaning to the foreign language without the use of translation or the explanation of the grammatical rules. Teachers do so by using “realia, pictures, or pantomime” (Larsen-Freeman, 1987, p. 53). Students learn grammar inductively by deriving rules with the example sentences. Theoretical explanation is hardly provided. Language can be taught at real locations such as banks or markets, like on a field-trip. Teachers encourage direct and spontaneous use of the target language in the classroom (Richards & Rogers, 1986). Students often do oral substitution drills or conduct speaking exercises.

Wang (1981) informed us of the basic principle of the Direct Method that is "learn to speak by speaking" (p. 656). However, although this method was innovative, it is noticed that “it overemphasized and distorted the similarities between naturalistic first language learning and classroom foreign language learning and failed to consider the practical realities of the classroom” (Richards & Rogers, 1986, p. 10). Although the teaching is oral-based, it is very difficult for this method to be widespread because it often requires teachers of too high a level of language proficiency as well as skillful teaching methods (Larsen-Freeman, 1987). In contrast to

the Grammar-Translation Method, “students taught by the direct method are like cadets who are suddenly asked to fly, and who then fly high up in the sky, taking no heed of any danger that may occur in the flight” (Wang, 1981, p. 657).

The Audio-Lingual Method

During World War II, America had an urgent need of personnel who were fluent in foreign languages so that they could help translate or interpret. Students were expected to attain conversational proficiency of a variety of foreign languages. Students learned from a native speaker who would provide the source of phrases and vocabulary for them to imitate; they were also monitored by a linguist who knew how to derive the basic structure of the language (Richards & Rogers, 1986). Through guided conversation students were able to speak the language in a fairly short period of time. This military language program attracted a lot of attention from linguists and eventually grew into Audiolingualism in the 1950s (Richards & Rogers, 1986).

The Audio-Lingual Method is based on behaviorism, which holds that the following elements are crucial in the learning process: stimulus, response, and reinforcement. Of those, reinforcement as “the extrinsic approval and praise of the teacher” is the vital one because it will lead to the increase of good behaviors (Richards & Rogers, 1986, p. 50). These good behaviors are likely to occur again and eventually become habits. As a result, in order to develop good habits, students work hard to imitate, repeat, and memorize.

In class students focus on learning dialogues through which they learn new words and structures. Structures are learned through imitation and repetition. Students memorize dialogues, imitate sentence models, and do various drills. Grammar is not taught explicitly, but inductively.

Teachers control the class and try to correct students' oral errors for fear that "bad habits will be fostered" (Larsen-Freeman, 1987, p. 54). Consequently, students try to avoid errors. Teachers reinforce students' good habit by making positive appraisals of students who provide correct answers.

Unfortunately, this method was "monolithic on the American foreign language teaching scene" (Larsen-Freeman, 1987, p. 54). It received many challenges from linguistics. Chomsky attacked its structural theory based on his theories related to transformational-generative grammar and behavioral psychology (Bowen, Madsen, & Hilferty, cited in Larsen-Freeman 1987, p. 54).

Traditional Chinese Ways of Learning and Teaching

English learning and teaching in China have been under the heavy influence of the local traditional ways of learning and teaching (Hu, 2002). Han (2008) argues that these traditional ways are closely connected with Confucianism, which "has had a deep influence on conceptions of teaching and learning in China" (p. 49). Confucianism has impacted the life of the Chinese in terms of their attitude toward political issues and views of social value for over 2,000 years. Before the foundation of the new China in 1949, its ideology and principles served to establish state standards for ruling class, social conventions, and educational systems. It is not hard for us to detect the influence of the Confucian philosophy that is reflected through social values and attitudes toward life in the Chinese contexts such as classrooms and work places. Confucian ideology aims to build a harmonious society, advocating a totally submissive attitude to governmental authority. Its core is benevolence or humaneness, favoring taking other people's situation into consideration and fulfilling one's responsibility.

Although Confucianism's submissive attitudes toward leadership are criticized as too conservative, its ethical value of virtue has been adhered to and retained until the present day. Some key doctrines of its ethical value system include filial piety to parents, protection of children, loyalty and righteousness to friends, and respect to people of superior status. These ethical values have been so influential in Chinese learning and teaching styles that teachers and students still apply them in dealing with relationship between teacher and student. As a result, teachers of language are viewed as the sole authority in the classroom; they should not be "questioned, interrupted or challenged" (Penner, 1995, p. 6). Consequently, students are likely to consider it rude if they disrupt teachers in class; in their eyes, teachers are seen as absolutely authoritative and accurate.

It is noted that "Confucian ideology of education has shaped the Chinese conceptions of knowledge, the purpose of learning, and the teacher-student relationship" (Lee, 2000, cited in Han, 2008, p. 49). In the Chinese approach, teachers who are seen as the absolute holders of the knowledge are obligated to transmit whatever knowledge they master with full responsibilities and authorities (Penner, 1995). Students are expected to be modest and will be seen as offensive or disrespectful if they disrupt or challenge teachers in class. This classroom etiquette is very typical in China. Consequently, Chinese students tend to be passive or shy or intimidated. As they are used to being "spoon-fed" by the teachers, they often depend on their teachers for answers. As a result, they lack independence and autonomous learning strategies during their learning process.

"Following traditional Chinese scholarly practice and American and Soviet influences on the structure and content of Chinese education," the Chinese have their own way of teaching English (Burnaby & Sun, 1989, p. 222). The traditional way of Chinese learning and teaching

bears a considerable resemblance to the Grammar-Translation Method, which is centered on explaining grammar rules and translating passages or sentences. The traditional Chinese way of teaching English centered on intensive reading focusing on “academic study of grammar, literature, and in-depth analysis of literary texts” (p. 222). According to Wang (1981) traditional teaching of a foreign language in China has the following two characteristics: (1) decisions have to be made on which forms of the language are taught at the initial stage of learning; and (2) syllabus include the illustration of the use of these forms. The traditional Chinese method and the Grammar-Translation Method both use a structure-based syllabus, demand accuracy of utterances, and require a considerable effort in memorization, imitation, and repetition. The Grammar-Translation Method had a “successful” integration into the traditional Chinese approach because it was compatible with “the Chinese culture of learning” (Hu, 2002, p. 102). The integration also explains why Grammar-Translation was and is still influential in China.

From the introduction of CLT in the 1980s on, the traditional way of Chinese teaching and learning has been challenged. It is noticed that traditional Chinese teaching poses a big threat to the implementation of CLT (Anderson, 1993; Hu, 2002; Penner, 1995; Rao, 2002). Some researchers contend the failure of the implementation of CLT in China has much to do with the “traditional socio-cultural attitudes and values” that stem from Confucian philosophy (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996, cited in Zheng & Davison, 2003, p.70). Hu (2002) argued that traditional Chinese culture of learning is in conflict with CLT because of their opposing philosophies and sociocultural differences concerning learning and teaching, such as the student-centeredness of CLT vs. the teacher-centeredness of Chinese tradition, ignoring of errors of CLT vs. attention to accuracy in the Chinese way, and verbal activeness vs. mental activeness.

How English Has Been Taught in China

Although English education in China has progressed over time, it has also encountered many ups and downs since its first appearance. The following is a short briefing on the development of English teaching in China based on three time periods: 1862-1948, 1949-1976, and 1977- present.

1862-1948. From 1862 to 1948 two major methods were used in China: the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method.

During 1862-1922 the Grammar-Translation Method was popular in China. According to Wang (1981) the teaching of foreign languages as regular courses started in 1862. Beijing Normal University initiated the English curriculum officially in 1901 (Wang, 1986). During 1902-1922 the Qing Dynasty of China was constantly attacked by many other foreign countries as a result of its economically and politically weak status in the world. The Qing government realized the importance of learning more western civilization through learning foreign languages. At that time China underwent a transformation of its foreign language teaching styles by following Japan's model. As a consequence the teaching of English employed the 'Japanese model' that focused on reading comprehension and translation (Wang, 1981). Grammar rules were taught and everyday speech was not practiced because it was "vulgar and of no immediate value" (Wang, 1981, p. 654). Comparison of the new language and Chinese was involved. Grammar books compiled by Chinese teachers and scholars were published to tackle the different parts of speech and were used in schools.

During 1922-1949 the Direct Method was employed. As China was more open to western civilization during this period of time, the foreign language teaching model shifted from Japan's to those of western countries such as America and England, who had greater influence on China

then (Wang, 1986). Government documents indicate that discussion was held on the promotion of the teaching of foreign languages, particularly English, not only in colleges but in primary and secondary schools as well, in order to know more about Western culture and literature (Wang, 1981). English teaching underwent a gradual change in such aspects as textbooks and methodology. At the same time, as higher level institutions continued to offer English as a required course, middle schools and high schools started to train their students to gain more practical knowledge and use of the language. More aspects of the language, such as phonetics, were taught.

Schools of all levels especially colleges and universities experimented with the Direct Method by using English textbooks for courses of physics, chemistry, and mathematics. It was reported that “several publishers in China, . . . , either reprinted books from England and the United States or distributed English textbooks compiled by Chinese scholars” (Wang, 1981, p. 656). Some literature books included *Tales from Shakespeare* and *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*. These changes provided students opportunities to practice English. Consequently, English was popularly spread. The widespread use of English was also reflected in film, newspapers, magazines, advertisements, etc. The Chinese government demonstrated a positive attitude towards using the Direct Method to promote English. It was said that “the prevalence of English in the country greatly facilitated communications and personal contacts between the Chinese people and those of the English-speaking nations” (Wang, 1981, p. 657).

1949-1976. From 1949 to 1976 the English teaching was under the influence of several political struggles: China vs. Russia, China vs. Korea, and China vs. America. Consequently, the Russian style, the Audio-Lingual Method, and the Grammar-Translation Method were used.

During 1949-1956 Russian was popular and dominant as a foreign language. Because the tension between China and the United States became worse because of the Korean War, the foreign language taught in China shifted from English to Russian. Most of the schools including university and secondary schools were teaching Russian and using Russian textbooks. The method used to teach Russian was centered on carefully analyzing the syntax of sentences for the sake of reading comprehension. Unfortunately, teachers of English were forced to teach Russian instead. Only a limited number of universities were allowed to teach English.

During 1957-1966 the Audio-Lingual Method was practiced. This period was a time of an 'English Language Renaissance' (Wang, 1986, p. 154). As China set up diplomatic relationships with many other countries, more chances were created for its economic growth and political influence in a broader way. At the same time China's relationship with Russia worsened. As a result in addition to Russian, English was re-introduced in classrooms (Wang, 1986). In the 1950s the English teaching focused heavily on listening and speaking and was centered on pattern drills or dialogues through repetition. It was hoped that students could learn grammar unconsciously by mechanical repetition of pattern drills rather than being taught specifically (Wang, 1981).

As the intention of the foreign language teaching was to teach student "how to speak Chinese in foreign languages [while] using Chinese expressions, Chinese concepts and Chinese vocabulary," the texts based on Chinese subjects were filled with political jargon, and what was taught was a strange hybrid language (Lary, 1965, p. 3). The choice of material was limited to political works of great persons such as Chairman Mao or Lenin; their works were usually translated from Chinese into English by a Chinese person or a foreigner (Lary, 1965).

During 1966-1969 sadly, no English was offered. Due to the Cultural Revolution; schools of all levels were closed. Students were expected to be re-educated by working in the factories and countryside.

During 1972-1976 there was a revival of English teaching. The visit of President Nixon in China in 1972 helped to restart foreign language teaching. The Audio-Lingual Method was not continued but was replaced by a combination of the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method. When the Audio-Lingual Method faded away, there was no alternative to replace it (Larsen-Freeman, 1987). Consequently, China's English teaching went back to the Grammar-Translation Method and the traditional way of Chinese teaching, which is characterized by repetition, memorization of the pattern drills, and word substitution exercises. Sadly, due to the political atmosphere at that time, English teaching was greatly limited by textbooks that were full of political literature and slogans like those in the 1960s.

1977-Present. From 1977 on China's English instruction has undergone dramatic changes and challenges. As the old methods faded away, a new approach – CLT – has been introduced and promoted at schools of all levels. A key issue is that the principles and practice of CLT are in conflict with the traditional ways of Chinese teaching and learning.

During 1977-1999 CLT was introduced to China along with other teaching methods popular in the seventies in other parts of the world, such as Total Physical Response. As mentioned previously, CLT is seen as a general approach to teaching a foreign language rather than a method (Richards & Rogers, 1986). While the Grammar-Translation Method and the Audio-Lingual Method have their own prescribed rules centered on structural features of language, CLT is dynamic and subject to alterations in terms of teachers' experiences, their observations, knowledge in second language acquisition, and so forth. CLT suggests that

“grammatical structure might better be subsumed under various pragmatic categories” (Brown, 2007, p. 47). In some levels CLT is compatible with these methods in ways of teaching vocabulary or grammar; however, it pays more attention to the pragmatic use of language in real-world based situations. The characteristics of CLT are not in line with the traditional way of English teaching that shares close rationales with the Grammar-Translation Method. As a result, the Grammar-Translation Method is still influential.

In the eyes of many western linguists and specialists, this period of time was marked by “adaptation, innovation, experimentation and some confusion” (Richards & Rogers, 1986, p. 60). To the Chinese 1977 marked the end of the Cultural Revolution. China is now making every effort to raise the quality of English teaching (Wang, 1981, p. 658). More specialists from the English-speaking countries have been hired to teach in secondary schools, and especially colleges and universities. More experts and specialists are devoted to the study of linguistics and methodology. Most importantly, more attention is given to functional approaches.

New textbooks are supplemented with different auxiliary aural or visual materials such as maps, pictures, tapes, CDs, etc. Western teaching materials are imported from America or England. In addition to offering regular classes, schools also provide extracurricular activities such as watching English films, performing dramas, English speaking events or clubs, etc. Laboratories are currently available at most colleges and secondary schools; students have access to computers, online language programs, and other resources.

As the Grammar-Translation Method was a dominant method in China from the 1950s to the 1980s, much teaching during this time was still heavily focused on reading skills. The teaching was test-oriented to accommodate students who desired to achieve good grades in College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 (CET-4/6). Consequently, a lot of college students are

referred to as “deaf and mute” because of their incompetence in using the language communicatively (Zhang, 2008).

With the adoption of the “open-door policy” in the 1980s, Chinese people have realized that learning English means creating opportunities for a much better quality of life for themselves. This mindset fuels their enthusiasm for English learning. Consequently, these changes have boosted the Chinese’s interest in learning English. Exchange programs have been created to send teachers and students abroad to do research or pursue a higher level of learning. English classes are offered not only at public schools but also at some private schools.

China’s English teaching at all levels initiated several moves to promote CLT in the 1990s. Significant changes were made, particularly in the aspect of academic programs, teaching methods, and curricular design. According to Liao (2000, 2001) CLT was required to be implemented at the secondary schools by the State Education Development Commission (SEDC) in 1992. The SEDC also established a new syllabus that stated teachers should not overdo drills and translation but rather teach communicatively in classrooms.

CLT has made a big leap in colleges and universities since the issuance of the *1999 Syllabus of College English Teaching*, in which communicative competence was first stressed along with reading and writing skills. As the reform of English teaching advanced further, CLT has also been further promoted and expanded. Following the issuance of the *2004 College English Curriculum Requirements (Trial)* and *2007 College English Curriculum Requirements (Official)*, communicative competence was prioritized among the objectives.

Thus, although CLT has encountered many difficulties such as teachers’ low proficiency and traditional teaching or learning styles, it has been promoted in colleges and universities. The achievement and difficulties of CLT are described below.

However, CLT has been challenged by teachers at colleges and universities; the Eclectic Approach has been advocated by some of the educators (Dai, 2008; Liao, 2002; Hu, 2007). This approach incorporates some practical aspects of the western teaching methods into the teachers' own practice. As the Grammar-Translation Method and Direct Method had been dominant and influential in English teaching in the past decades in China, many teachers have still been practicing many aspects of these two methods. Liao (2000) reported that some key schools in Beijing and Shanghai in the mid-1980s explored the use of an eclectic method – the employment of elements of the communicative approaches while accepting traditional Chinese teaching methods.

Based on the eclectic approach, the Structural-Functional Approach, it is suggested that Chinese edit the foreign teaching materials taking into the consideration the needs of the Chinese in learning a language (Dai, 2008). In this way these “local materials” are more applicable to students. Accordingly, the structural materials for beginners are written by Chinese writers and elements of the target language are provided by native English speakers. Consequently, based on China's situation such as students' cognitive needs, the Structural-Functional Approach has come into being (Dai, 2008). It is hoped that students will improve communicative competence while trying to avoid grammatical errors.

While CLT has been promoted widely in China, Internet-based curricula are also being developed. They are composed of learning systems, learning source data systems, and teaching and learning management systems. Internet-based education has been incorporated in to the teaching of English in Chinese colleges and universities since the beginning of the 20th century (Zheng, 2008). The *New Horizon College English* series constitutes the first college English

teaching materials that systematically and innovatively integrate the computer-based network into college English teaching.

The issuance of the *2004 College English Curriculum Requirements (Trial)* put forth that English teaching is to be assisted by Internet technology while guiding students to attain individualized learning and autonomous learning in the long run (Hu, 2007). With the assistance of Internet-based teaching, students are provided with more channels to realize individualized autonomous learning, interaction, cooperative learning, and various ways of assessments. Many colleges and universities manage to incorporate computer-based curricula into college English teaching. The effectiveness of such practice was shown through trial and exploration in some demonstrative universities in China (Dai, 2008; Zhang, 2008; Zheng, 2008). This also indicates that current English instruction has been gradually shifting from teacher-centeredness to student-centeredness.

It is worth noting that current English instruction embraces a variety of teaching approaches while favoring the eclectic approach and also reflects the characteristic of learner-centeredness and autonomous learning (Hu, 2007). By and large, the current model, which is listening-speaking-focused, computer-assisted, and aims to develop students' sustainability in learning for the long run, has been acknowledged by more and more students and teachers (Zhang, 2008). It is suggested that this new model should be introduced and made known to students and teachers in a more intensive way.

Admittedly, the development of English education in China could not have gone this far without active involvement at all levels including teachers, students, and educational sectors. However, if we need to apply more appropriate methods that are more suitable to Chinese

learners, more work remains to be done on the connection between theories and practice in terms of language studying and teaching.

CLT and College English Teaching at Chinese EFL Colleges and Universities

As described in part one of Chapter 2, CLT is characterized by student-centeredness, cooperative learning among groups or pairs, the use of authentic material, task-based activities, more utterance fluency than accuracy, and less attention to form in the communicative classroom. Focusing on communicative functions and meaningful tasks, it aims to cultivate students' communicative competence in real-life situations including practical and meaningful use of the target language communicatively.

As China opened a wider door to outsiders in the 1990s, it felt the more urgent need for a greater number of more competent language users who could handle the international affairs. Because "foreign language is seen as an essential tool in developing and changing the core of the country's economic system" in China, foreign language teaching has been given increased attention by educational sectors of all levels and has also been "shaped" by such perception (Burnaby & Sun, 1989, p. 221). As CLT aims to develop learners' communicative competence, it is favorably promoted and expanded in a larger scope in colleges and universities. More and more studies demonstrate that students are starting to show positive views towards communicative approach (e.g., Fang, 2010; Jin et al., 2005). In Wang and Cheng's (2009) research, among 248 Chinese EFL college teachers interviewed, 75% of them indicated that CLT was useful in helping their students communicate in English; 68% of the teachers expressed comfort with the CLT method as opposed to the Grammar-Translation Method. Henrichsen (2007) noticed China has made dramatic improvements on educational facilities in particular; she

further confirmed the “variety and quality of English language teaching materials available, the influential English language examinations, the teaching/learning activities employed in English classrooms, and the use of English outside of school” (p. 3). With such progress, current Chinese college students are benefiting from easier access to more authentic language and they are also more open-minded toward challenges than they were two decades ago. The governmental authorities have also been able to make greater effort in training teachers, designing curricula, providing financial assistance, collaborating in international education programs, and so forth. The schools of higher education have benefitted from CLT, but they have also met up with limitations during the implementation of CLT.

Achievements of the Reform on College English Teaching

In the past 30 years China has made remarkable achievements in English language education (Dai, 2008; Zhang, 2008; Zheng, 2008). Remarkable achievements are the changes made through the operational and reformative policies. The teaching concentration has been shifted from reading skills to oral language use competence and cross-cultural interactive competence (Zhang, 2008). Dai (2008), who is the president of Shanghai Foreign Language College and the author of “A Retrospect of the Foreign Language Education in Chinese Colleges and Universities in The Last Three Decades,” concluded that China has made an extensive and profound reform in the following six areas: teachers’ education, curricular design, teaching materials development, teaching methods, education approaches, and testing systems.

Firstly, the qualification of the teachers has improved dramatically. More and more teachers have involved themselves in research so that issues arising from the classroom can be tackled on the ground of methodological and linguistic theories. Universities of all levels have

raised the bar for the teacher recruits. Continual in-service education programs of all sorts have been provided by educational bureaus across the nation.

Secondly, syllabuses have been revised and issued by the Education Ministry of China. Syllabuses have been revised more than once after test and trial. The educational sectors have made great efforts in explaining and promoting them so that they are well received by the teachers.

Thirdly, materials development has been upgraded. A variety of teaching materials has been made available for such courses as intensive English, intensive reading, listening, and speaking. Many foreign materials have been introduced to English learners after most of them are edited by the Chinese specialists.

Fourthly, various forms of teaching methods have been tried and profoundly studied (e.g., the Direct Method, the Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, and the Immersion Approach). Although Chinese English education is still under the influence of these methods, it is suggested that an eclectic way (the Structural-Functional Approach) is more reasonable. This new approach focuses on the development of communicative competence while making an attempt to reduce the number of grammatical errors.

Fifthly, education approaches have taken various forms. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) has been integrated to guide students to learn English. As CALL is able to provide a considerable amount of information and make possible teaching and learning interactively to a great degree, many students have benefited from it after making use of computer-assisted facilities such as language labs and language learning software.

Lastly, testing systems have taken various shapes. It has been realized that testing is an important part of language education. Following the nationwide launch of CET-4/6 in 1987,

there have been a few major changes in response to the needs for improved speaking and listening skills. For example, a test of speaking competence was added in the CET-4/6. What is more, the latest CET-4/6 has placed a significant stress on listening skills. If students fail the listening part, it is almost impossible for them to finish the sections for writing and speaking that are based on the listening.

Communicative Competence Syllabuses

The syllabus plays an important role in English teaching. It not only standardizes classroom teaching but also the teaching methods. It provides basic guidance for schools in terms of teaching goals, development of skills, concrete teaching content and order, teaching methods, and assessment approaches.

In response to China's fast economic growth and global involvement, the Chinese Education Ministry has made three major revisions to the syllabus and curriculum of college-level English. College English refers to the English language course for non-English majors in China (Chen & Zhang, 1998). These revised versions of the syllabus and curriculum serve as guidance for English teaching in colleges and universities. The syllabuses issued in 1985 and 1986 are focused on reading skills. The one issued in 1999 stressed the development of oral communicative competence along with other skills in reading and writing. *2004 College English Curriculum Requirements (Trial)* and *2007 College English Curriculum Requirements (Official)* put the development of communicative competence in first place.

As China has stepped up its effort in English language education, there have been several significant reforms of college-level English teaching in the past 3 decades. In order for us to have a solid understanding of English teaching reforms in China in these 30 years, it is necessary for

us to turn to the syllabuses published in 1985, 1986, 1999, 2004, and 2007 to look into the teaching objectives.

1985 College English Teaching Syllabus and 1986 College English Teaching Syllabus.

In 1985, the *College English Teaching Syllabus* for Science (hereinafter *1985 Syllabus*) was issued. The stated objective is “to help students attain a relatively strong ability in reading and certain level of ability in listening.”

In 1986, the *College English Teaching Syllabus* for Science and Arts (hereafter *1986 Syllabus*) was issued. The stated objective is “to help students attain a certain level of ability in listening and translating, as well as preliminary ability in writing and speaking; to help students use English as a means to obtain information relevant to their specialty; and to lay a good foundation for an upgraded level of English.”

Following the issuance of these syllabuses, CET-4 and CET-6 were launched officially in 1987 to assess students’ English skills, mainly reading and writing. CET-4 is used to test the students at the preliminary level; CET-6 is for students at the advanced level. These are state-level standard tests for Chinese non-English majors at colleges and universities. The students are tested in listening, reading, and writing. The adoption of CET-4/6 at the colleges and universities nationwide in 1987 helped to standardize the norms in English teaching; however, it has also led to the negative effect that much college English teaching has been test-oriented (Dai, 2008).

As most of the universities tie CET-4/6 to the issuance of the degree upon graduation and the passing rate on the tests are used to measure the teaching effectiveness of the school, English teaching often lays heavy emphasis on skills in reading and writing. Consequently, much of the teaching is structure-focused, and most of the students neglect speaking and listening skills. The CET-4 and CET-6 are blamed for being a factor that has been keeping Chinese College students

from actively taking a part in communicative activities (Chen & Zhang, 1995; Fang, 2010; Rao, 2002).

Admittedly, these two syllabuses concentrate on the reading skills of the students without giving attention to listening and speaking skills.

1999 College English Teaching Syllabus. In response to the fact that many non-English-majors seemed “deaf and mute” on English-speaking occasions in spite of their good reading skills that are stressed in the *1986 Syllabus*, China decided to embark on another round of the major reform of teaching English (Dai, 2008). In 1999 a revised *College English Teaching Syllabus* (hereinafter *1999 Syllabus*) was issued in response to the needs for more qualified personnel with special expertise in English in the 21st century. Its stated objective is “to help students attain a relatively strong ability in reading and certain level of ability in listening, speaking, writing, and translating; to enable students to communicate in English; teachers are to enable students to cope with situations in the societal development and economic business; and other roles of the teachers include helping students lay a solid foundation for language, acquiring good language learning strategies, and raising students’ awareness of culture.”

Different from the *1985 and 1986 Syllabus*, the *1999 Syllabus* stresses for the first time communicative ability. It thus started a nationwide wave of innovations in the curriculum designs, teachers’ training, and academic programs among universities and colleges. According to Zheng and Davison (2003), “the State Education Development Commission, a central government department, has promulgated a series of educational policies determining the goals, curricula, course books and even the teaching methods throughout the country” (as cited in Liao, 2000, p.4).

The *1999 Syllabus* conveys a very strong stance as to the development of communicative competence. Description concerning oral communicative competence is generally stated as a “certain level of ability in listening, speaking, writing, and translating.” As the stated objective does not exclusively describe the desired goal for communicative ability, this makes it hard to target an alternative to measure students’ competence to replace the CET-4/6 (Lu, 2007). Although this syllabus empowers CLT to be further promoted in schools of all levels, much of the teaching is still test-oriented due to students’ desire to pass CET-4/6. It is safe to say that CLT is popularly adopted, but it is not well-received.

The adoption of communicative approaches in college-level schools has met strong resistance due to cultural views and traditional teaching styles (Hu, 2002; Lu, 2007; Rao, 2002). Although teachers are able to include communicative activities such as role plays and group work as well as using teaching materials that are tailored to help students with communicative competence, they find it hard to get students engaged in classroom activities because students, pressured by tests of all sorts, are seldom interested in applying the language.

Although English teaching is in the midst of challenges, the innovation is going on. During this time, some universities have explored some trial curricula by incorporating computer-assisted language programs. For example, the *New Horizon College English* series that was published in 2001 has integrated computer-based networks into college English teaching.

2004 College English Curriculum Requirements (Trial) and 2007 College English Curriculum Requirements (Official). In 2004 the Education Ministry issued a temporary version of *College English Curriculum Requirements* (hereafter *Requirements*). The *Requirements* defines the objectives of the teaching of English that include, “to help students to attain ability in using English in an all-around way, competence in speaking and listening in particular; to enable

students to communicate in both the written and oral forms in their work places and social occasions; to gain autonomous learning; to enhance a comprehensive understanding in culture so that students could handle matters in China's economic development and international exchanges.”

The *2004 Requirements* indicates a significant breakthrough from the previous syllabuses. Although the *1999 Syllabus* points out the need of communicative competence, the development of it is particularly reinforced in the *2004 Requirements*, whose objective is “to help students to attain ability in using English in an all-around way”, and above all, “competence in speaking and listening in particular.” While the *1999 Syllabus* still indicates the importance of reading skills along with communicative skills, the focus of the *Requirements* is definitely shifted to listening and speaking. This certainly underscores the priority of language teaching – the communicative use of language. It is worth mentioning that these *Requirements* also include the development of learning strategies and enhancement of cultural awareness.

The *2004 and 2007 Requirements* indicate a significant innovation in recommended teaching styles; the teaching shifts from teacher-centered to student-centered and from traditionally classroom-based instruction to computer-based. Both *Requirements* put in first place the ability in speaking and listening. In addition, classroom-based instruction is desired to be integrated with computer networks by using Internet technology. Consequently, a model of Computer- and Classroom-based Multimedia College English Teaching has come into being (Chen, 2007; Jin, 2008). A system of computer- and Internet-based English teaching has been established and has been promoted in many other colleges and universities since then. According to Zhang's (2008) report, after a series of new learning software was used by a group of students

in a vocational college in Qinyuan, Guangdong, the students became competent communicatively and successfully applied English at an international trade fair.

In 2007 the revised *Requirements* were officially issued with some supplements. Similar to the trial version, its objective is to help students attain ability in exchanging information in English and enable them to become useful employees armed with practical ability in English. Obviously, communicative competence is the ultimate goal.

Based on the above information, the 2004 and 2007 *Requirements* mark a distinctive and remarkable initiative along the course of the English teaching reforms. They both particularly emphasize the importance of communicative competence. These initiatives echo the idea that the ultimate goal of language learning is to use the language to exchange information for communication.

The issuance of the syllabuses and requirements of all sorts is the result of our understanding and knowledge of language acquisition. The newer versions embrace many advanced aspects of language learning and teaching, such as cross-cultural communication, student-centered instruction, computer-based instruction, autonomous learning strategies, and so forth. Even so, among the changes and innovations, the significance of developing learners' communicative competence has remained central.

Limitations in Applying CLT

Although CLT has received support from governmental authorities and educational policy-makers, it has encountered enormous constraints since its introduction to China. Students who do not have strong motivation to speak English can be very frustrated by CLT. In Sun and Cheng's (2002) survey, three motivations of learning English for non-English majors were

identified: (1) to get a better job opportunity; (2) to be able to read relevant materials in the field; and (3) to pass examinations in order to graduate. As only a handful of students are able to study abroad, most of the students do not feel like speaking English in class (Anderson, 1993).

Hu (2002) argued that CLT conflicts with the Chinese culture of learning regarding the “nature of teaching and learning,” perceptions of the roles of teachers and students, learning strategies encouraged, and qualities valued in teachers and students (p. 93). In view of the differences in “educational theory, roles, expectations, methods, material use, and structural concerns, Chinese and some foreign educators advocate a new ‘Chinese way’ to be developed” (Penner, 1995, p. 12). Such arguments against the use of CLT suggest a basis for CLT’s limitations in China.

Based on the literature review on the use of CLT in Chinese colleges and universities, the limitations have been caused by (1) Chinese socio-cultural traditions of learning such as Confucian views on teachers’ roles, cultural differences between west and east, and social values; and (2) situational deficiencies such as large classes, evaluating procedures, lack of proper knowledge in CLT, teachers’ lack of in-service training, and students’ and teachers’ poor language proficiency.

The fact that cultural limitations restrict the implementation of CLT is reflected in five interrelated aspects. Firstly, based on the traditional culture, learning is a serious undertaking rather than light-hearted. Rao (1996) contended that “resistance to the communicative approach has an explanation rooted in Chinese philosophy, culture, and basic concepts of education” (p. 450). Based on Chinese Confucian philosophy, learning is a serious thing rather than entertaining because the students are to shoulder great responsibility for the future of their country. Chinese teachers and students regard education as a “serious undertaking that is least likely to be

associated with light-heartedness but requires deep commitment and painstaking effort” (Hu, 2002, p.97). Consequently, Chinese EFL students tend to think communicative activities not serious enough as opposed to the profound knowledge learned through the traditional way (Anderson, 1993; Penner, 1995). Under such influence of the Confucian educational tradition, students tend to be skeptical of the use of communicative activities that are full of entertaining elements in their eyes (Rao, 1996).

Secondly, teachers have every right to control the classroom while transmitting knowledge. In the traditional classroom a teacher of English is expected to transmit the grammatical knowledge of the English language focusing on the syntactical level (Wang, 1986). CLT promotes student-centered activities where students are given opportunities to develop their learning autonomy and teachers are acting as facilitator or counselor (Brown, 2007). On the contrary, in the Chinese culture teachers are authoritative figures who are obligated to control the students. As the small-group activities of communicative approach are to promote students interaction through individual participation, many teachers feel such practice is “a threat to their control and status” (Penner, 1995). They do not feel they are as responsible as a decent teacher because they neither remain the center in the class nor do they justifiably correct students’ errors like before. As CLT allows students freedom and spontaneity, Chinese teachers are less likely to adopt a methodology that may cause them to lose face (Hu, 2002).

Thirdly, students are supposed to be quiet, which is a way of showing respect to teachers. Chinese students are passive and quiet in the communicative classroom (Anderson, 1993; Penner, 1995). Hu (2002) revealed that traditional Chinese education focuses on “maintaining a hierarchical but harmonious relation between teacher and student” (p. 98). According to Penner (1995) CLT assumes the students are willing to actively engage in communicative activities

“whereas the traditional approach allows for seemingly passive receiver behavior” (p.7).

Therefore, students, viewed as knowledge receivers, are justifiably passive in the classroom.

They will not necessarily challenge their teachers because teachers are authoritative figures who know everything and are of course right about the professed knowledge. Any violation will be seen as disrespectful or rude or arrogant. Consequently, Chinese students who have been under such educational influence tend to be quiet and ready to receive knowledge in class. They are unwilling to engage in group or pair work, let alone take risks. They are afraid of losing face for their incorrect answers; therefore, they would rather stay safe by being quiet.

Fourthly, the traditional way of learning through memorization and recitation has dominated Chinese learners for thousands of years. The traditional way of learning literature is done by considerable memorization rather than empirical research. It is very common for students to memorize the knowledge passed down by teachers or imitate those master-like predecessors. P. Li (2004) researched how CLT was perceived by 24 university teachers of non-English major programs and four constraints limit CLT at the tertiary level in China. She identified difficulties arising from four sources: the educational system, the EFL context, the cultural tradition, and the students. A teacher interviewed by P. Li (2004) said, “[students] had learned in the traditional way since the day they went to school. They could not accept the new way of CLT teaching at university” (p. 59). Obviously, the ideas of CLT went against students’ traditional way of learning and thus they found it hard to accept CLT. Another teacher said, “One student suddenly stood up while I told them to work in groups and practice English. He said in front of the class, ‘It is a waste of our time. Please do not ask us to this [kind of] activity again’” (p. 58). Such requests can be very discouraging for teachers. In another interview a teacher said, “One student asked me straightway, ‘we are busy doing the task, but you seem to have nothing to

do and look very relaxed. Have you prepared your lesson?’” (p. 59). This indicates that students do not understand teachers’ roles in communicative classrooms.

Lastly, the traditional way of learning a foreign language concentrates on grammatical knowledge on the syntactic level rather than the meaningful use of the language (Wang, 1981). College students, especially those who have just graduated from high schools, have studied English in the traditional ways, focusing on grammatical knowledge in reading. They are not used to communicative activities that require them to talk a considerable amount in the target language in class. This often poses a sharp contrast to their previous learning experience during which they “comfortably” receive linguistic knowledge. After comparing their learning of English in colleges to their previous learning experience in high school, they complain of not learning enough grammatical knowledge of English in college (Han, 2008; P. Li, 2004).

Some students were reported to be keen on CLT at the beginning because they realized the importance of communicative competence. However, their enthusiasm for the communicative approach soon dwindled whenever they failed to see any remarkable or immediate progress as anticipated after some time (Han, 2008). Consequently, they resorted to grammatical learning and the recitation of vocabulary for the exams of all sorts (e.g., final exams, CET-4, CET-6, entrance exams to graduate schools, Test Of English as a Foreign Language, Graduate Record Examination, and so forth).

Although some students show some positive reaction toward CLT, they doubt its academic effectiveness as opposed to the traditional way of English teaching (Anderson, 1993). A teacher interviewed by Han (2008) complained, “At the end of the semester, the students complained that they learned nothing. Although they enjoyed the class [activities], they didn’t see they made any achievement or they made any progress through their English study” (p. 181).

Consequently, students would rather remain passive and resort to grammatical concentration (Penner, 1995).

In addition to the cultural limitations stated above, CLT is also limited by other situational difficulties including large classes, lack of proper authentic materials, low proficiency in the target language, lack of proper understanding of CLT, heavy work-loads of the faculty, lack of professional training, and so forth.

Large classes are complained of as a major problem (Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Chen & Zhang, 1998; P. Li, 2004; Y. Li, 2004). Normally the class sizes of non-English majors range in numbers from 30 to 60. They are usually provided 4 hours' instruction including intensive readings and courses on listening or speaking. Group or pair work is designed to engage students in pragmatic and authentic use of language (Brown, 2007). However, big classes make the control of the process exhausting for teachers. The size of a large class not only makes it hard for teachers to provide students with individual attention but also keeps students from individual participation (Penner, 1995). Besides, communicative activities create "noise" that is complained about by the neighboring classrooms. As Chinese teachers are such authoritative figures, loud "noise" is not supposed to occur. If it does occur, it is usually an indication of teachers' inability in classroom control (Penner, 1995, p. 11).

College teachers of English are reported to be overworked (Penner, 1995). Du (2002) revealed that teachers' workload was the key issue among the problems in teaching English after interviewing teachers from four Chinese colleges and universities. College teachers of non-English majors were reported to teach more than the regular 12-hour work load; some would have to teach over 20 hours during the week (Penner, 1995). Burnaby and Sun (1989) revealed that Chinese teachers of English found it hard to use communicative tasks among groups while

teachers were pressured to finish required curricular content in order to keep the same pace as the other parallel classes.

As many teachers are so occupied with preparing for class and grading assignments, they could hardly find time for designing communicative activities, nor could they read academic journals or carry out research projects. A teacher interview by P. Li (2004) showed her disappointment, saying, “I taught three classes. Except preparing for lesson and teaching, I did not have any extra time to be creative or use CLT. I did not have time to read the contemporary teaching theories, either” (p. 63). Obviously, heavy loads of work keep teachers from reflecting on their teaching behaviors or doing research concerning teaching.

Preparing for communicative activities is considered time consuming (Li, 1998). Because the teachers are overworked, it is less likely that they would devote time and energy to designing communicative activities or exercises for students. A teacher was complaining saying, “I spent a lot of time preparing for CLT lesson. My husband said to me, ‘You work much harder than other teachers, but have a look at how much you get paid. Do you get more? Why not teach like other teachers?’” (P. Li, 2004, p. 64). It is understandable for teachers to complain about the extra effort without being paid. However, it may also reveal that they do not see the potential long-term effect of the communicative activities.

The problem related to authenticity is revealed in two aspects: (1) an environment for the authentic use of the target language is lacking; and (2) authentic materials are not culturally practical for EFL students. CLT focuses on creating a life-like situation for the authentic use of English; however, such creation is hard in an EFL context (Sun & Cheng, 2002). College students are hardly exposed to authentic situations where English is used, nor can they find a chance to practice English with foreigners in their school life.

Although some textbooks are able to provide authentic language, sometimes they fail to serve as good language sources due to culture differences. If EFL students do not share the same social values towards life and work as those people presented in the authentic materials, they will find the authentic information irrelevant to them and thus show indifference to the language (Canagarajah, 1993). A teacher reviewed by Y. Li (2004) said this:

Sometimes it is very difficult to organize real communicative activities in the classes of China because of the cultural difference. For example, it is difficult for Chinese students to talk about western food if they have never tasted it or been to an English speaking country before. For another example, it is not easy for Chinese students to role play a Halloween Party because China does not have Halloween festival (p. 66).

Clearly, the cultural contexts of the target language can become obstacles for communicative activities if the values reflected are not familiar with Chinese learners.

Tests of all sorts pressure students and teachers. As revealed in the section entitled “China’s English Education” in Chapter 2, tests such as CET-4 and CET-6 are given the highest attention because they are tied to the graduation certificate, good job opportunities, and further academic promotion. Following the issuance of the *1986 College English Teaching Syllabus*, many colleges and universities have made the passing rate of the College English Test their “top priority” (Chen & Zhang, 1998, p. 73). College teachers of English are teaching to the tests to accommodate the students’ needs by concentrating on testing skills in reading. A teacher in P. Li’s (2004) study revealed the facts that students felt “it was more urgent and practical to study hard on grammar and vocabulary to pass the exam” and therefore she “had to respond to their need to pass the test, and give up teaching communicatively” (p. 65). Undoubtedly, having to help students relieve their pressure from various tests keeps teachers from carrying out communicative activities.

Chinese teachers of English have neither a high level of language proficiency nor strong sociolinguistic knowledge of the target language (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Hu, 2002). Hu (2002)

revealed that “many Chinese teachers of English find CLT highly threatening because it requires a high level of proficiency in the target language and strong sociolinguistic competence in the target language culture which they lack” (p. 99). Teachers using CLT will be required to have a “near native-speaker language proficiency”, and confidence is essential for these teachers (Penner, 1995, p. 11).

Most of the teachers surveyed feel they do not have good language proficiency (Han, 2008; P. Li, 2004; Y. Li, 2004). They complained that their oral competence was so limited that they often felt frustrated because they did not know themselves how to articulate what should be described. As a result, they often lacked confidence in using the target language. A teacher interviewed by Han (2008) felt the urgent needs of an improved level of oral competence as an English teacher, saying, “If you teach in communicative methods, the aspects of the content are more than the content in the textbook, so the [teachers’ required] English proficiency is far beyond classroom English. So I think the teacher’s English proficiency is the most important” (p. 145). Clearly, language proficiency is considered very crucial for teachers to organize communicative activities.

In addition to poor language proficiency, the lack of adequate sociolinguistic and cultural knowledge in the target language is also a problem for teachers (Hu, 2002; Penner, 1995). Although nine EFL college teachers in China who were interviewed by Y. Li (2004) demonstrated their certain understanding in CLT, most of them were discovered “overlooking [the] social and cultural aspects” of the materials. In P. Li’s (2004) survey, a teacher who used a new communicative textbook revealed that she found it hard to explain certain aspects of the cultural background based on the content of the new textbook. She was quoted as saying, “But actually, I did not know much about it. How could I explain it to my students?”(p. 66).

Admittedly, lacking sufficient knowledge of the target culture makes teacher feel less competent in teaching.

Lacking sufficient cultural or sociolinguistic knowledge in the target language, college teachers of English often also lack confidence in using the language themselves (Han, 2008). Although authentic materials have been available, the selection of them without proper sociolinguistic knowledge can be a hard choice. The teachers might end up choosing one that has too many unfamiliar idioms or too much slang; sometimes they simply do not know how to handle those western games (e.g., puzzles, Go-Fish card games) that are well-known for English-speaking countries.

Lack of training in the field makes the teachers feel less confident. A teacher interviewed in P. Li's (2004) survey revealed her desire to receive further training on teaching:

I taught junior students Cambridge Business English for a short period of time. The textbook itself was communicative-oriented, but it was too difficult to handle. Why was I not trained to use that textbook based on the communicative principles before I started? I gave up teaching [in the way of CLT] at last. (p. 60)

Without adequate training in the academic field, teachers will be less likely to take risks in teaching.

Lack of professional training also causes teachers of English to receive insufficient criticism from peer faculty members or superiors concerning their use of certain methodologies (Burnaby & Sun, 1989). Y. Li (2004) revealed that college teachers of English she interviewed tended to equate communicative skills to merely listening or speaking abilities without noticing the social and cultural aspects of the language. Consequently, communicative activities such as role-play, drama, story-telling, and the use of computers were still done "linguistically rather than communicatively-oriented" (p. 3).

Although some teachers manage to try out the communicative approach, sometimes they feel like they are struggling in the bewilderment between the traditional practice and the communicative approach because they are not sure if what they are doing is appropriate or not (Han, 2008). Han (2008) observed Lin who was able to engage her students in a heated discussion without leaving enough time to study the new words or explain the complex sentences in the text. Lin was said to have a feeling of confusion after class and quoted as questioning herself, “Is that an English class? What am I doing, teaching English or just talking in English?” (p. 209). Finding a balance between incorporating something new in the classroom and meeting the needs of the students for linguistic competence, many college teachers are in need of methodological consultation.

All in all, the implementation of CLT has been well received by the colleges and universities; it has also been limited culturally and environmentally by deficiencies such as teachers’ lack of professional training, lack of knowledge in CLT, low language proficiency, large classes, evaluating systems, etc. Although Hu (2002) contended CLT, as the imported method, fails to take into consideration “the Chinese culture of learning” (p. 93), and Rao (2002) suggested that we reconcile communicative activities with noncommunicative activities and “combine the ‘new’ and the ‘old’ to align the communicative approach with traditional teaching structures” (p. 85), many other Chinese scholars and researchers have not given up researching its feasibility and effectiveness in EFL contexts.

As the goal of achieving communicative competence remains central for the contemporary language teaching of English in colleges and universities, the good aspects of CLT such as cooperative approach will be fully implemented during the course of English education. No matter what methods are desired, be it the eclectic method suggested by Rao (2002), the

Chinese way of Hu (2002) and Penner (1995), or the total employment of CLT suggested by Li (1984), Liao (2004), and Fang (2010), researchers such as Zhang (2008) are confident that the teaching of English centered on CLT in Chinese colleges and universities will be further expanded with the assistance of computer-based instruction.

CHAPTER 3

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

China's English teaching has encountered constant changes during the past 3 decades. Communicative competence has definitely become a major objective for teachers of English so that highly qualified personnel for international exchanges can be produced. Chinese EFL colleges and universities have made some progress in adopting innovative and communicative approaches; however, the adoption of CLT has also encountered a considerable number of cultural and situational difficulties.

Answers and Discussions of the Findings

This part attempts to answer and discuss four research questions concerning the extent of the communicative activities, teachers' and learners' attitudes towards CLT, CLT's difficulties in Chinese colleges, solutions, and suggestions.

Research Question 1

What is the extent to which communicative activities are carried out in Chinese colleges and universities?

Answers to Question 1. First and foremost, the provision and availability of the task-based textbooks pave the way for communicative activities. Since the issuance of the *1999 Syllabus of College English* that underscores the importance of communicative competence, textbooks have been geared towards task-based activities. Such moves make it possible for EFL learners to be exposed more to authentic language and task-based activities. The use of authentic

materials is a characteristic of CLT (Larson-Freeman, 2000). Language materials that focus on the target features are usually contrived, and they fail to prepare learners for the reality of language use (Carter & Nunan, 2001). As authentic material can expose learners to meaningful language as it is typically used, most researchers stress the importance of authenticity and its motivating effects on learners. The following paragraphs explain how authentic resources are incorporated into task-based textbooks in the Chinese EFL classrooms.

Communicative activities are being carried out with the help of three authentic-language-related resources. First, native-English-speaking teachers have been hired to offer authentic language to the Chinese learners; these expatriate teachers tend to allow more “free talk” in class (Li, 2007). The advantage of hiring expatriate teachers is that they use CLT more often in oral classes as opposed to their Chinese colleagues; they also show more comfort in using group work in class (Anderson, 1993; Li, 2007). Second, authentic textbooks have been adopted in colleges and universities. For example, *Transition* is imported from English-speaking countries without contrived examples of the target language (Han, 2008). To some degree such changes in the textbooks have pushed EFL teachers to incorporate communicative activities into English classrooms (Han, 2008). Third, the incorporation of the computer and internet resources has been able to provide authentic language to communicative classrooms. A teacher observed in Han’s (2008) survey was reported to download news reports from the Internet to draw students’ attention. For example, she had students listen to live CNN news reports on China’s Shengzhou-6 spaceship, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, bird flu, and the Super Girls Campaign. Then she would put them into groups for discussion. Clearly, the use of the Internet lends teachers a tool to make authentic language available for EFL learners.

In addition to borrowing authentic-related resources, EFL teachers also include task-based group-work activities: mini-dramas, interviews, debates, news reports, word games, presentations, role plays, singings, group/pair discussion, vocabulary practice, peer writing evaluation, and the use of the Internet and computers (Han, 2008; P. Li, 2004; Li, 2007; Y. Li, 2004). The following is an account of how role-play is carried out in a speaking class based on Y. Li's (2004) study:

[The] teacher first gives students a hand out, say, a scenario of two friends meeting at the supermarket and then asks students to role-play the scenario. Students are divided into a few groups. Three students may be put in each group – two friends and a shop assistant. They may say whatever they can imagine of a supermarket in their mind but they are required to use a few sentence patterns, such as “I am glad to see you.” “How have you been recently?” and “What can I do for you?” The teacher usually expects them to form long conversations. (pp. 59-60)

Another example of how a cooperative activity was carried out in a reading class in Han's (2008) study:

..., each group worked together to find out the vocabulary for the university facilities and sent a representative to chalkboard what they had found. Or in the “House Fair” task, each group found the vocabulary for a house and designed the living room, bedroom, washroom, dining room, and kitchen; they set up a booth to introduce the functions and designs of their house, and negotiated the price with the customers—students from another class. (p. 233)

These two accounts best exemplify how task-based activities have been carried out in Chinese colleges and universities. It is also worth noting that there are three factors that contribute to the possible or broad use of such activities. First, teachers have some right to choose suitable materials. Some teachers are flexible enough to tailor the teaching material to their instructional needs and to the students' learning interests; others are able to provide preplanned activities according to the instruction (Han, 2008).

Second, students are given freedom to carry out simulated activities. In Han's (2008) study, the subjects from six different colleges in China who were observed were able to organize

various classroom activities in the courses like listening and speaking. Some of the teachers she interviewed believed it would benefit students greatly if students were given freedom to use the language.

Third, the use of the computer-assisted teaching mode broadens the scope of communicative activities. Following the issuance of the *2004 and 2007 Requirements for College English*, computer-based assistance has been integrated into the teaching of English in over 180 experimental universities (Zhang, 2008). The broader use of the Internet makes up for the inadequacy of sufficient authentic language in the classroom. Most universities are equipped with projectors, language labs, and Internet connection. In addition to the aforementioned communicative activities, more styles have included emailing and online correspondence or feedback.

Discussions of Question 1. Three concerns are worth mentioning concerning the communicative activities that have been practiced.

First, although communicative activities have been conducted, the weight of grammatical teaching still has a strong influence on both teachers and students. Teachers are able to provide communicative activities; however, they are often forced to do lectures on the exact use of language and structure to prepare students for CET-4 or CET-6 (Han, 2008; P. Li, 2004; Y. Li, 2004). Han (2008) noticed that communicative activities were likely to be carried out in oral-oriented classes; however, they were less used for courses such as *Advanced English* and *Translation* because these courses involve a great deal of knowledge in linguistic features and theories (Han, 2008). This lends teachers another excuse not to include communicative activities.

Second, although Chinese colleges and universities are able to incorporate authentic material in teaching, the values presented might not echo with those of Chinese students' and

thus cause difficulties in communication (Hu, 2002). For example, some of the games are thought to be childish or some teachers have no idea how they work (Anderson, 1993).

Third, although now Chinese college students have more access to the Internet to make contact with the outside world by using the target language, they often fail to make good use of the Internet resources to improve learners' learning autonomy (Jin et al., 2005). What's more, the use of Internet-mediated conversation cannot replace the weight of person-person conversation. After all, social and meaningful communication between learners and peers or others using the target language is "critical to the development of language and intercultural competence" (Chapelle, 2009, p. 747). The heavy reliance on the Internet should not interfere with students' social skills in actual social situations.

Research Question 2

What attitudes do the college EFL teachers and learners hold regarding CLT?

Answers to Question 2. Based on researchers mentioned in this part who did quantitative and qualitative studies on college English teaching through interviewing students and teachers, collecting questionnaires, and observing classes, I present the answer from the angles of teachers and students respectively.

On the part of EFL teachers, their attitudes can be summarized as the following: (1) most of them favor CLT conceptually but sometimes their implementations fail to reflect the characteristics of CLT (Fang, 2010; Han, 2008; P. Li, 2004; Y. Li, 2004); (2) some of them mistakenly believe that CLT means merely speaking and listening aspect of the language, rather than grammatical competence (Fang, 2010; Y. Li, 2004); (3) they believe as teachers they are obligated to address students' needs in learning grammar (Han, 2008; P. Li, 2004; Li, 2007); and

(4) they think CLT requires a higher level of teaching skill as well as language proficiency concerning socio-cultural knowledge of the target language. They feel they had better resort to the traditional way of teaching lest they lose face for unfamiliar knowledge or poor language proficiency.

On the part of students, they have the following summarized attitudes: (1) communicative activities arouse their interest in learning (Han, 2008; Jin et al., 2005); (2) their teachers do not appear as responsible as teachers who teach in the traditional ways (Han, 2008; P. Li, 2004; Y. Li, 2004); (3) the socio-cultural values such as independence from parents and working part-time during school years do not seem valid or practical in Chinese culture (Han, 2008; P. Li, 2004; Rao, 1996); (4) grammar is not explained explicitly in communicative classrooms (Han, 2008); and (5) the chance of using English in students' professional careers is slight (Y. Li, 2004; Li, 2007).

Discussions of Question 2. These attitudes or beliefs are forged by situational and socio-cultural traditions. Many of them are a result of the traditional way of teaching, whose characteristics are revealed in the literature reviewed. This phenomenon coincides with Ellis's (2007) belief that social and cultural factors are a determinant in dealing with teaching situations in Asian countries, where the teacher's traditional role is dominantly knowledge "knowers" and students are "receivers." Teaching viewed as teacher-directed or teacher-controlled process is very typical in China. This view goes against western teachers influenced by western education, where teachers focus on "individual learner creativity" and facilitate students' independent learning (p. 107).

Although CLT has been favored conceptually by teachers and students, it has not been able to be totally embraced as a result of the traditional roles of the teachers and students in the

classrooms, as discussed in Chapter 2. In CLT teachers are perceived as planners, managers, quality controllers, group organizers, facilitators, motivators, empowerers, or team members (p. 106). Teachers' roles often alternate according to the teaching situation and sometimes they overlap. However, based on the deep-rooted traditional learning culture, it will take a lot of efforts for the teachers to make a fundamental shift from their traditional roles as "knowledge transmitters" to the above-mentioned roles. These new roles necessitate series of teachers' trainings that can "promote their theoretical awareness as well as their linguistic abilities" (Yu, 2001, p. 197). With teachers' fundamental changes in minds and actions, they can be influential in turning favorable attitudes of students into a positive driving force during the implementation of CLT.

Research Question 3

What are the situational and socio-cultural difficulties of CLT?

Answers to Question 3. Students and teachers have encountered situational and socio-cultural difficulties introduced in the third section of Chapter 2. The following is the summarization of them. On the part of teachers and students, they: (1) lack language proficiency; (2) are negatively influenced by traditional teaching and learning styles where teachers are seen as authoritative knowledge-givers and students as receivers (Hu, 2002; Liao, 2001; Rao, 1996); (3) are pressured by grammar-oriented examinations such as final exams, CET-4/6, graduate entrance examination, exams for studying abroad, and so forth.

On the part of students, they (1) lack an authentic context to use English (Jin et al., 2005; Liao, 2001); (2) lack motivation and confidence in expressing themselves in the target language; (3) feel reluctant to engage in the communicative approach that involves light-hearted activities

rather than only structurally profound or grammatically informative instruction; (4) lack independent ability and learning autonomy (Jin et al., 2005); and, above all, (5) are more concerned with their grammar ability because they are pressured to pass the standard tests that are associated with their qualification for degree (Gan et al., 2004; Jin et al.). Students who have the intention to study abroad also expect to strengthen their grammatical ability in order to pass the TOEFL (Test Of English as a Foreign Language), GRE (Graduate Record Examination), or IELTS (International English Language Testing System).

On the part of teachers, they (1) teach too large classes (ranging from 30 to 60 people); (2) lack specific cultural background knowledge in teaching (Han, 2008; P. Li, 2004; Y. Li, 2004); (3) resort to grammar-translation when they fail to facilitate CLT activities (Han, 2008); and (3) lack profound and further study on the connection between their teaching theory and their realization of CLT in the classroom; this leads them to a statement of confusion and a sense of loss (Han, 2008).

Discussions of Question 3. The aforementioned difficulties are deeply connected with traditional social and cultural influences. As the explanations and analysis concerning these difficulties mentioned in “Limitation in Applying CLT” of Chapter 2 has revealed, the merits of CLT clash with the traditional way of learning and teaching that is impacted by Chinese socio-cultural practices. The difficulties of CLT’s implementation have been present; however, they are not unmanageable. The solutions to the difficulties are presented below.

Research Question 4

What are the currently existing and proposed solutions to these difficulties?

Answer to Question 4. Currently existing proposed methods include (1) making a role change from the knowledge transmitter to the communication facilitator; (2) integrating the use of internet resources into big classes; (3) providing on-going academic training for teachers; (4) resolving the misunderstanding of the relationship between grammatical competence and communicative competence; (5) providing testing alternatives for an increased attention to oral competence; (6) helping students become autonomous learners by teaching them communication strategies; (7) teaching students learning strategies; (8) integrating EFL contexts into Chinese curriculum is an alternative, and (9) incorporating task-based group work.

Discussion of Question 4. The above methods or solutions are brought forth by Chinese educational sectors, Chinese researchers, and linguists in the field. They shed light on our understanding of learners' needs for learning strategies, developing learning autonomy, and cooperative learning. The following are discussion of the nine solutions to difficulties mentioned in question 3.

First, teachers need to make a role change from the knowledge transmitter to the communication facilitator. The traditional way of teaching is teacher-centered and authoritative that deprives learners of their independence and learning autonomy. Therefore, EFL teachers' changing roles from the traditional ones to CLT's becomes most important. Teachers' roles in CLT classrooms, reviewed in chapter 2, include advisor, counselor, observer, etc. To make the changing roles of traditional Chinese teachers possible, it is preliminary for Chinese EFL teachers to help students understand the theories behind communicative activities before carrying out activities. Some of the literature has presented some examples on how to approach this. It is reported that some of the EFL teachers started out communicative approaches by diminishing students' fear of English conversation before engaging students in conversational interactions

(Anderson, 1993). Forseth, a foreign teacher at Jiangxi University in China, before initiating his syllabus first explained to students the rationale of the approach and gave specific examples and explanations of communicative activities such as pronunciation exercises, information gap activities, problem solving, free discussion, and so forth (Anderson, 1993). Anderson (1993) also further points out students will be more willing to accept teachers' roles and, therefore, more willing to try out the new methods if EFL teachers are able to take into consideration students' needs and learning style.

Second, it is necessary to integrate the use of internet resources into big classes. Chinese EFL teachers find it hard to conduct communicative activities in big classes for fear of creating chaos and losing classroom control (Han, 2008). Chinese educational policy-makers and educational authorities are well aware of such existing problem for CLT. One way to tackle this problem is to step up financial investment in providing resources needed by EFL colleges. Zhang (2008) reported that the Higher Education Ministry funded 180 Chinese universities for experimental projects concerning computer-based English instruction. These colleges were sufficiently equipped with technology facilities such as English labs where students could use the Internet and other learning resources created by the faculties for free. More than 10 million students were involved in the experimental projects; they claimed they gained confidence and their listening and speaking ability also improved (Zhang, 2008). Some software programs have been specially-designed for specific vocational needs such as hotel management and band operation. It is hoped that EFL learners will connect with other learners after having been provided free access to such language-learning programs at English labs via the use of the Internet.

Third, it is necessary to provide on-going academic training for teachers. In order to effect a fundamental change in the current difficulties facing teachers and students, teachers must “undergo training that will promote their theoretical awareness as well as their linguistic abilities” (Yu, 2001, p. 197). Providing on-going academic training is necessary for teachers to improve their language proficiency and help them be aware of the connection between teaching theory and the practice of CLT. Nowadays a great number of English teachers have been sent abroad to do collaborative research on teaching theories with experienced linguists (Zhang, 2008). It is hoped that teachers can make connections between teachings and teaching theories by upgrading their knowledge of CLT so that their roles in communicative settings are more likely to be fulfilled. Richards and Lockhart (1994) stated that teachers establish their own roles within the classroom based on their theories of teaching and learning and the kind of classroom interaction most supportive to these theories. However, if Chinese EFL teachers have a hard time finding such connection between theories and practice or lack enough academic knowledge concerning their teaching, their teaching might not have a strong theoretical background. Therefore, having teachers receive training and helping them study their classroom pedagogies are necessary.

Fourth, it is necessary to resolve the misunderstanding of the relationship between grammatical competence and communicative competence. Characteristics of CLT such as the focus on meaning and the use of the target language in the communicative classroom are perceived by many Chinese learners and students as being in contradiction to the form-focused instruction that has been dominant for decades in colleges. As reviewed in Chapter 2, grammatical competence is part of communicative competence. It is the preliminary condition for language performance and affords students with basic vocabulary and grammatical

knowledge. Forms remain “important components of language” that enable learners to engage in the functional use of language; however, it is not the central focus in a communicative classroom (Brown, 2007, p. 46). Like other methods such as Grammar-Translation, CLT also teaches grammar but does it within a CLT framework. CLT advocates “specific focus on forms, rules, and principles of language organization” and includes “helpful controlled exercises, grammatical pointers, and analytical devices” (p. 46). Current research acknowledges the importance of such form-focused instruction in task-based communicative classrooms. Swain and Lapkin (1995) claimed that comprehensible output can help learners notice the grammatical form through interactive tasks. To stimulate learners to notice specific form during activities, tasks should be carefully structured and sequenced. As CET-4 and CET-6 are still widely used as a criteria to evaluate their English ability, EFL learners still pay more attention to the “accuracy” of the target language over “fluency.” As long as there is pressure for students and teachers in those tests, the solution to resolving the misunderstanding of the relationship between grammatical competence and communicative competence will remain a key issue for CLT.

Fifth, it is necessary to provide testing alternatives for increased attention to oral competence. CET-4 and CET-6 are nerve-racking to students because they are often tied to students’ candidacy to degrees. Language testing like CET-4/6, heavily focused on form, has been undergoing gradual change in response to improving students’ all-around ability in language, especially in oral communication. There has been some improvement made in the changes on the test designs, making them more task-based and focusing more attention on speaking and writing rather than reading (Wu, 2001). Chinese higher education authorities have been flexible in dealing with the issues related to standard testing systems. They have started to offer oral tests in CET-4 and CET-6 to encourage students to work more on their speaking skills

than grammatical skills (Zhang, 2008). New forms of language testing have been launched. Since 2003, College EFL learners have been encouraged to take the Public English Test System (PETS). PETS is a collaborative project designed by both the Chinese and British governments with British exports' professional technology. This test is built on the model of communicative interaction and behavior, concentrating on examining students' communicative competence. Because PETS focuses more on learners' communicative competence, many colleges have invested quite a lot of time and resources in its promotion.

Sixth, it is important to teach students some communication or interaction strategies. An efficient application of CLT principle requires careful design of tasks that can aid learners to develop strategies for acquisition (Brown, 2007). It is suggested that Chinese EFL teachers teach students communication or interaction strategies and learning strategies in order to improve their language proficiency, increase independent ability, enhance learning autonomy, and gain more confidence (Jin et al., 2005; Zhang, 2005). To produce an effective utterance requires learners to have some basic communication strategies of the target language. Learners might end up stopping the flow of the communication without such strategies. Communication strategies (e.g. avoidance, approximation, paraphrase, circumlocution, transfer, and appeal for assistance) are "an undeniable event of language use" and play a salient role in second language communication (Bialystok, 1990, p. 116). Their integration into L2 learning frameworks is a result of our perspectives on language learning and teaching. Selinker first brought up communication strategies along with his coinage of "interlanguage" in 1972. Interaction strategies through small group tasks enable the participants to acquire better attentive listening and communicative skills (Bejarano et al., 1997). Tarone (1983) claimed learning communication strategies facilitate the flow of language, and thus, L2 learners can obtain more target language input. Tarone also held

that communication strategies competence can be taught to students. Therefore, it is advisable that communication strategies should be incorporated into English instruction so that learners can have incentive and confidence to participate in communicative activities in class.

Empirical studies targeted at Chinese college-level students demonstrate that communication strategies help students to gain fluency in utterances. Gao's (2000) research drew teachers' attention to using communication strategies to help students improve communication skills. She studied 164 students from two universities, among which 133 were non-English majors. Her research studied how students used the following strategies: L2-based strategies (e.g. paraphrases, synonyms, and examples), a cooperative strategy, a stalling strategy, a paralanguage strategy, and a reduction strategy. The research found that the reduction strategy was the most employed. Interestingly, it was also discovered that students who tended to use the first four strategies were able to notice the weak areas in their language learning. These students were able to convey their ideas more fluently. Her findings pointed out the necessity to develop learners' communication strategies to further facilitate their learning.

Gao's (2000) research on communication strategies indicated that Chinese students tend to avoid participating because they are afraid of embarrassment when making mistakes. As discussed in Chapter 2, this is associated with the traditional learning culture. As a result they tended to pay much attention to the accuracy of the language. This mindset is very typical of Chinese students and poses an obstacle to their language flow. Being aware of such a difficulty, EFL teachers may provide strategy trainings to help them decrease such feelings. In his research on communication strategy training Wang (2002) found that strategy trainings are able to not only increase the students' opportunities to use the target language but also enhance their communicative ability if they learn how to use circumlocution, stalling devices, and so forth. His

research further revealed that the use of stalling devices could directly increase fluency in communication.

Dong and Li (2008) did a study entitled “Preexperimental Study of Communication Strategies Training in English Oral Teaching” by providing non-English-major college students training in communication strategies. In order to explore the teachability and effectiveness of strategies, they conducted a preexperimental study of strategies training to 30 non-English-major first-year college students at China University of Geosciences. They spent 3 weeks training the students on the strategies mentioned in Gao (2000); training was conducted 6 times each week. They used training methods from Chamot and Rubin (1994). The teachers involved in the research provided the following training: (1) helping students identify and organizing them to discuss the existing strategies being used; (2) introducing and defining the strategies; (3) explaining and exemplifying the use of the strategies; and (4) providing different approaches to practicing strategies. During training sessions, students learned how to apply those strategies in simulation activities. After teachers conducted prequestionnaires and postquestionnaires, kept an observation or evaluation diary, and made audio-tape recordings, the data demonstrated that students’ anxiety level was reduced from 85% to 20%, and their fear reduced from 30% to 0. Before the training, 30% of the students said that they knew a few communication strategies; after the training, this percentage rose to 100%. Most impressively, 93% of the students reported that they gained confidence through the training. Encouragingly, 83% of them showed a positive attitude towards such training. Teachers’ observation diaries revealed that students became more engaged in interactive activities. The audio-recording also demonstrated oral fluency in conversations. Their research, together with the other two studies mentioned above, suggests that

the application of communication strategies is not only teachable to students but also effective in producing their oral proficiency.

Seventh, teachers should help students become autonomous learners by teaching learning strategies. This can stimulate students to attain learning autonomy and independence. Learning strategies (e.g., selective attention, self-management, advance preparation, problem identification, repetition, asking for clarification, making study plans, note taking, summarizing) are helpful for learners' cognitive mechanisms for second language processing (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Oxford (1994) contended that "the L2 learner is not just a cognitive and metacognitive machine, but, rather, a whole person" (p. 4). Besides intellectual strategies, teachers should also help students develop affective and social strategies "based on their individual learning styles, current strategy use, and specific goals" (Oxford, 1994, p. 4). Oxford (2007) revealed researchers have discovered that successful L2 learners used more learning strategies and employed them more frequently as opposed to their less successful classmates. Jin et al. (2005) pointed out in their findings that Chinese students lack ability in both learning autonomy and independence as a result of the traditional way of learning. They suggested that "perhaps Chinese EFL teachers should help students develop some language learning strategies and capacity to learn automatically and independently" (p. 15). It is suggested that Chinese EFL learners be provided with opportunities to develop autonomous skills so that they can think critically and act independently (Jin et al., 2005). It is hoped that students gain communicative competence while learning to be responsible for their own language learning and eventually develop a critical way of thinking.

Empirical studies based on Chinese college students show that teaching students learning strategies can promote their learning autonomy. In order to guide the Chinese EFL learners to

enhance their awareness of learning strategies, Zhang (2005) did a survey of 80 college students in Shandong University entitled “English learning strategies and autonomous learning.” His research reveals students’ positive attitudes towards learning strategies. After the experimental group had participated in a 2-year learning-strategy program, compared with the control group, they benefited from English learning strategies and autonomous learning while controlling and monitoring their own learning. For example, a student who had been taught how to manage or evaluate his or her learning said, “[After I had learned some learning strategies] I now know how to establish goals and make long-term/short-term objectives; I am also more aware of how to monitor my studying process” (p. 52). Zhang’s research demonstrates that it is highly necessary for EFL college teachers to promote students’ learning autonomy through teaching students strategies that enable them to take charge of their own learning with individualized and task-oriented strategies. This in turn reflects two important characteristics of CLT – student-centeredness and learning autonomy.

Although research has revealed learners were able to learn how to apply strategies, it cannot be stressed enough that teachers should understand the purpose and goals of the use of the strategies (Liu, 2005). The application of learning strategies occurs during the whole course of L2 tasks (Oxford, 2007). However, teachers may not notice what strategies are needed by the students. Relevant research is needed to ascertain learners’ needs. Sometimes, even though learners are informed of needed strategies, it does not mean that students are equally capable of knowing how to apply them. Learning strategies involve a considerable effort of process, but it is not the goal of the strategy training. The goal is to enhance learner autonomy (Zhang, 2005). Therefore, it is advisable for teachers to understand that learning strategies may contribute to learning autonomy – the goal of strategy learning.

Eighth, integrating EFL contexts into the Chinese curriculum is an alternative. Sun and Cheng (2002) proposed a context-based communicative curriculum development in the EFL context after they had done a case study at the private Pui Ching Commercial College in China. They suggested adapting the English language education program to the Chinese context. This integration is assumed to enable both teachers and students to make a shift from the traditional way to the communicative way, where the teachers' task is to monitor the process of the activity, and they teach grammar and vocabulary when necessary. According to their experiment local teachers are able to adopt some communicative methods while teaching grammar or offering more discussion activities based on the content of the textbooks. The school they researched was able to design its own syllabus based on the needs of their students. In such a syllabus, grammar and vocabulary are integrated into task-based teaching activities.

As in some other research (e.g. Y. Li, 2004; Han, 2008), teachers are criticized for lacking the underpinnings of the communicative activities and students do not have readiness for using the target language. The problem still lies in the fact that even though teachers were able to introduce CLT into classrooms, they tended to overwhelmingly concentrate on grammar and discrete language points as a result of traditional methods. However, the integration of EFL contexts into the Chinese curriculum proposed by Sun and Cheng (2002) can be seen as an exemplar of eclecticism of the Chinese traditional method and CLT espoused by many other researchers studying Chinese English education (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Penner, 1995; Rao, 2002; Zheng, 2008). It points out the importance of developing a context-based communicative curriculum by studying the context and serving the needs of the students first. So far, the feasibility of such a method is still being explored by many other Chinese educators.

Ninth, task-based group work should be practiced more in the classroom. Group work is the core of task-based instruction. As reviewed in Chapter 2, it is a means of CLT to realize interpersonal interaction among learners. Bo Hai University tried out a task-based teaching model on first-year college students from nine classes in 2004 (Sun, 2007). During the term teachers designed some activities based on students' specialties or their interest to arouse their active involvement in group work such as brainstorming, debating, role-playing, simulated-translating, and story-telling. Teachers' effort started before class and extended to after class. Not only did teachers design activities before class, they also included some after-class activities. The before-class group work included collecting different information assigned or resource collecting; after-class group work included reporting and question-discussing. The collectively cooperative work was carried out through the whole experimental period. The use of task-based group work also triggered some changes in the testing system. New items such as their involvement in group discussion, performance, and self-evaluation were added to evaluate students. Two things were worth noticing. One was that teachers were able to encourage less-talkative students to talk by finding them topics that interested them. The other was that teachers cared for students' cognitive needs in grammatical learning. They provided students with immediate feedback during the group work. They also sorted out students' grammatical errors and explained to students such errors at a given time. These methods practiced later indicated that students made progress orally and academically.

Students tend to rely on peer feedbacks or teachers' feedbacks for affirmative answers during group work. Although such informal assessment may not be sufficient, learners have gained a channel to utter meaningful and fluent language while building confidence in the course of language acquisition. The task-based group work triggers interactional modification when

learners are exchanging information, which increases the possibilities for language acquisition (Long & Porter, 1985). However, Pang and Wu's (2000) research showed that Chinese students are reluctant to provide feedback in class due to their traditional role as good listeners and their fear of making mistakes. The students in his research were spotted just merely talking instead of exchanging information interactively. This indicates that Chinese students need some learner-training in order to understand the purpose of group work and how to partake in it. This also includes teaching them some learning strategies and communications strategies discussed previously.

CHAPTER 4

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION

Following the findings to the researcher questions and discussions from the previous chapter, this chapter begins with presenting implications based on literature review and findings regarding the implementation of CLT in Chinese EFL colleges and universities. The ideas brought up through the implications also serve as recommendations. Through these ideas, this section not only offers insights into English teaching and English learning under the framework of CLT, but also attempts to inspire Chinese college-level and university-level English teachers to make connections between language teaching and second language acquisition. Finally, limitations of this study and closing remarks are offered.

Implications

From the literature review in the previous chapters, we are informed that the promotion of CLT in colleges and universities has been pervasive, especially in the last 20 years. However, as revealed in the difficulties encountered by the Chinese EFL teachers and students, this phenomenon does not signal the complete and proper use of CLT. Given what I have discussed in the previous chapter regarding some of the potential methods and solutions to CLT's difficulties, I further present nine implications by looking into responsibilities shouldered by both teachers and educational authorities collectively.

First, EFL teachers are responsible for explaining the teaching and learning assumptions underlying teaching activities (Penner, 1995). Wyss (2002) suggested the following four guidelines for language teachers: (1) know themselves; (2) inform their learners; (3) emphasize

learners' progresses; and (4) stay their ground. It is hoped that teachers gain students' understanding to facilitate the desired pedagogical approach and eventually learning. These four guidelines are consistent with the practices of Forseth, an EFL expatriate teacher in a Chinese university (Anderson, 1993). According to Anderson's introduction, before carrying out interactive activities such as problem solving and filling information gaps, Forseth tried to get his students familiar with his intention by "explaining the rationale of [his] approach, varying the format, designing a progressive and challenging syllabus, and maintaining a warm and controlled atmosphere" (476). In a similar vein, Fang (2010) encouraged college English teachers to arm themselves with sufficient knowledge so that they can guide students more appropriately. His study reports that less than 30% of the EFL students know much about the meaning of "communicative competence" (2010). This in turn stresses the necessity of informing students of the purpose and characteristics of CLT. If students can attain an improved understanding, they are likely to be more engaged in communicative activities. Because such moves will contribute to learners' learning processes, the way to realize this is to familiarize students with instantiated classroom activities (Wyss, 2002).

Second, understanding students' learning styles and needs is very important. Savignon and Wang (2002) noted attitudes and perceptions of learners are vital to the success of a new approach. Similarly, Rao (2002) encouraged teachers to identify students' learning styles and provide instructional alternatives. After studying research articles written by several successful EFL expatriate teachers who practiced CLT in China, Anderson (1993) inferred that the key to the communicative approach is to take into account Chinese learning styles and try to satisfy learners' needs.

Third, teachers should use tasks to help learners notice forms through form-focused instruction (Grove, 1999). Belittling the learning of grammar is a misunderstanding of CLT. Ellis (1995) and Wang and Cheng (2009) favored the approach that helps learners notice grammatical features in the language input by comparing the forms in the input with those in the output. Similarly, Nassaji (2000) suggested using activities “that result in attention to form while maintaining meaningful communication and using form for communication” (p. 244). Grove (1999) applauded form-focused instruction associated with such approaches as negative feedback and hypothesis-testing through “output reworking” that enables learners to quickly notice “the formal properties of the language” in a communicative context (pp. 825-826). It is hoped that learners will improve language accuracy by using their acquired grammatical forms in the target language. These suggestions may be more applicable to Chinese students because they pay particular attention to the learning of grammar as a result of the long exposure to the traditional grammatical framework of language learning.

Fourth, the role of learners’ first language (L1) in the communicative classroom should not be rejected (Ellis, 2007). Ellis pointed out that L1 maintenance can ensure that learners achieve a high level of both oral fluency and literacy in their L1. He also claimed that L2 learning is more successful if learners have the opportunity to learn within an L1 speaking group. In the similar vein, EFL teachers who are able to learn the differences between the L1 and the target language can handle teaching better (Huang, 2010). Studying the salient linguistic features of Chinese, teachers should be able to help learners facilitate “the accommodation of these features in their L2 discourse (p. 162)”. The use of L1 can help students clear up some misunderstandings in their choice of lexical items or rhetorical strategies.

Fifth, learning strategy training is helpful to learners (Oxford, 2007). Nunan (2007) stressed that language classrooms have a dual focus: one is on teaching language and the other is on developing learning process. Helping learners recognize the power of consciously using language learning strategies can make learning more effective, contribute to learners' autonomy, and maximize their potential (Chamot & Rubin, 1994; Dong & Li, 2007; Lee & Oxford, 2008; Nunan, 2007; Oxford, 2007; Zhang, 2005). Above all, learning strategy training helps learners continue to learn after their formal study of the target language (Larson-Freeman, 2000). However, although many Chinese EFL learners are getting keener on studying English, they do not have much knowledge of learning strategies of English.

Sixth, it is necessary to make the texts of the target culture relevant and accountable in EFL contexts (McGarry, 2008). EFL teachers should take learners' valid cultural value into account in guiding them to really experience the target language. Language in which culture is embedded is seen as a "social phenomenon" (McCarthy, 2001, p. 43). As culture reflects the everyday lifestyle of people who use the language, language takes on a form of ideologies that "represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group" (Kroskrity, 2000, p. 8). Such ideologies are presented to language learners through textbooks. However, Canagarajah's research (1999) indicated that the cultural and social values that underlie the target language may not be appreciated by another culture, and thus, may become the reason for students' opposition in English classes. For example, his Sri Lanka subjects seemed puzzled when seeing the illustrations that featured the "hotel-like" cell of Western prisoners. Similarly, Chinese students find it hard to connect to Western cultures presented in their textbooks. Activities like camping and vacationing of all sorts are not part of Chinese students' experiences. EFL students are less likely to participate in

practicing the language that has little relevance to their life. Canagarajah suggested that local language be used to build solidarity between teachers and students; and using graffiti that features local context can be helpful to build connections. McGarry (2008), in agreement with McCarthy, proposed that “in order for texts to be authentic in a given classroom, they must be sufficiently accountable to the local culture to engage the willingness of the students to perform authenticity, which is local and dynamic” (p. 109).

Seventh, the integration of CALL-based instruction into college English teaching is helpful for EFL learners to attain autonomous learning and to understand socio-cultural background of the target language (Mao, 2007; Zhang, 2008). As we have learned from Chapter 2, following the publication of the *1999 Syllabus of College English Teaching*, and the *2004 and 2007 College English Curriculum Requirements respectively*, the use of technology related to computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has been broadened in the communicative classrooms and has made progress in 180 experimental colleges and universities in China (Zhang, 2008). The Chinese Higher Education Ministry hopes that students should acquire individualized and autonomous learning through computer-mediated techniques. In addition, as the question of the cultural background of English is extremely complex, the use of computer-based resources is helpful to activate students’ schemata so that they can understand the target culture better (Mao, 2007). For example, teachers use a video clip or some pictures when explaining yard sales that are not familiar to Chinese students at all. This helps Chinese students connect the idea of a yard sale with what they know about pawnshops from old China; in this way, the distance between the classroom and the “real” world is shortened and students can be drawn near to the real world.

There are two problems in computer-based classrooms that need to be addressed. Although many Chinese universities are able to provide networked computer labs, the efficient use of technology is problematic for EFL learners. For example, they have little experience with emailing, typing in English, or editing. Students are often stuck in applying the technical skills instead of focusing on communication. Given this situation, teachers need to provide support to prevent students from being overwhelmed by technology-related difficulties (Warschauer & Whittaker, 2007). Perhaps arranging technology-training sessions is necessary. Another problem is that some research finds that CALL programs are insufficient to promote rich oral interaction (James, 1996, p. 15). Chinese researchers such as Mao (2007) complained that there is less interaction between teacher and student with the computer-assisted teaching styles integrated into college English teaching in the current teaching mode. Given these two problems related to CALL, James (1996) suggested, it is important to integrate CALL technologies with methodologies that have particular pedagogical goals rather than to merely rely on the development of software and hardware. As for how CALL can be best integrated into college teaching of English, it requires further investigation and research.

Eighth, test designs should also include listening and speaking skills. In order to promote communicative competence, Chinese educators and policymakers have insisted on the implementation of CLT in EFL colleges; educational authorities have been able to focus on speaking and listening, and more task-based test design is included. However, such improvements are still not enough to keep Chinese EFL learners from being “deaf and mute.” Traditional testing systems that are built on structuralism are still centered on testing vocabulary or grammar skills. As speaking skills take a considerable human effort as well as specific funds, tests of oral competence have not been available in many schools. However, in order for the test

to positively impact teaching and learning, Jin (2008) strongly called for a revision of the test design and improving the washback of the test.

Ninth, more in-depth research should be conducted (Huang, 2010; Wu, 2001). Wu (2001) called for “systematic and nationwide research and informed practice” to upgrade current English language teaching (p. 194). Huang (2010) encouraged EFL teachers to organize research-like activities that identify the role of learner’s L1 in their L2 acquisition. There has been a great deal of research done by Chinese scholars to justify the connection between theories and practices and the choices of various teaching approaches. How the existing classroom conflicts are caused by the different learning of culture can be explained through further research (Penner, 1995). This suggests that it is always necessary, valuable, and worthwhile for educators to continuously carry out research to bring solutions to current issues.

All in all, the successful implementation of CLT involves teachers, students, and educational authorities. On the part of the teacher, they should be strongly motivated, acquire good knowledge of CLT, and have communicative skills; on the part of the students, they should be motivated by the practical need in the global market, learn of the nature of language learning, and learn some effective learning strategies (e.g. learning autonomy); and for the authorities, they should further make policies that initiate educational innovation in traditional teaching and facilitate a flexible testing system.

Limitations

This study was done within a short period of time by reviewing literature and collecting data from relevant studies on CLT; therefore, there exist limitations regarding its research findings, discussions, and implications. First, as this study referred to classroom observations

documented in previous studies and also did not use other techniques such as recording or video-taping to document the subjects, the extent to which how CLT is implemented may not be sufficiently demonstrated and studied. Second, as the data it used were collected from other relevant studies that provided questionnaires for students and teachers and in-depth interviews with students and teachers, the answers regarding attitudes and beliefs of Chinese college EFL teachers and students may not be fully representative. Third, as it based its research findings on other studies and lacks its own participants, the solutions to the difficulties that CLT has encountered in Chinese colleges and universities may not be applicable sufficiently to other similar issues, and the implications may be subjective as a result of the insufficient research methods. Overall, future studies can be more reliable and more representative if a large pool of participants across a wider range of the country can be included in a larger-scale study.

Closing Remarks

Since the 1980s the application of CLT has met much resistance among students and teachers who have been under the influence of the traditional way characterized by Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and rote learning. ELT in some colleges is still centered on syntactic structures rather than oral communicative competence. Teachers complain of lack of socio-cultural knowledge of the L2; large classes and students' poor language proficiency make it hard for them to practice CLT. Students have little knowledge of what CLT is; they are not satisfied with the current teaching method. This study investigates such difficulties and asserts that they are caused by cultural and situational factors. Although CLT has been introduced to colleges and universities on a nation-wide scale, it is rather well-received but not well-used. The difficulties

revealed in this study seem overwhelmingly great to college teachers and students. However, this does not mean CLT is not applicable in the Chinese classroom. Some positive results stand out among these difficulties and bring us positive indications.

While CLT has encountered cultural and situational constraints since the beginning, it has also been shaping Chinese EFL teachers' and policy-makers' conceptions, applications, and attitudes towards language teaching. Over time college EFL teachers have been able to make adjustments to apply, explore, innovate an approach, and research communicative approaches. Chinese EFL teachers are reported to have preferences for using and learning technology related to CLT, as revealed in the research of Han (2008), P. Li (2004), Li (2007), and Wang and Cheng (2009).

Littlewood's (2000) research reported that Asian students are willing to learn in a cooperative fashion. Her research revealed Asian students do not want to be spoon-fed by their authoritative-figure-like teachers; instead, they want to "explore knowledge themselves and find their own answers" together with their fellow students in a friendly and supportive atmosphere (p. 34). Similarly, in previous research as in Fang (2010), Jin et al. (2005), and Gan et al. (2004), college EFL learners, faced with a globally-expanding market worldwide, voluntarily desire to become fluent speakers. These attitudes are positive indicators of task-based cooperative learning among students. Given Ning's (2010) recent finding that "using group work and getting learners actively involved in the actual use of English are highlighted more than before," and the fact that more task-based curricula are used in colleges and universities, it is inevitable that Chinese college students will learn to alter from passive listeners to active partakers in group/pair work, peer evaluations, peer talk, teachers' feedback, and self-monitoring evaluations (p. 1).

Following a thorough literature review and a meta-analysis of a few recent empirical studies on CLT, this study highlights that CLT is an applicable approach to improve students' communicative competence. The study points out the importance of teachers' professional development. It is crucial for EFL teachers to build knowledge that provides guidelines describing their instructional role and exploring issues related to classroom management in the CLT context (O'Donnell, 2009). Based on Oxford's (1990) notion that "appropriate language learning strategies result in improved proficiency and greater self-confidence" (Oxford, 1990, p. 1), and given the fact that Chinese EFL learners have dependent dispositions in L2 learning (Jin et al., 2005; Penner, 1995; Rao, 1996), this study calls attention to learners' strategy training. As the integration of the computer is expanding interactional and learning opportunities in the language classroom (James, 1996), the study also points out the importance of the effective use of CALL.

English is being taught as an international language at the current time. The rapid exchanges among global nations for various reasons secure the role of English as an 'international language' (EIL) – a notion favored by Pennycook (1994). In his view, English in the world is linked to "social and economic power both within and between nations" as a result of the global spread of English (p. 35). This indicates the growing demand for effective English teaching programs that aim to develop communicative competence. In response to increased global collaborations, China's ELT is shifting its focus from grammatical structures to communicative competence for international communication. Fang (2010) expressed that CLT should be implemented in Chinese EFL classrooms with a global perspective. Chinese educational authorities have been active to initiate cooperative educational programs with other countries; CLT is playing an important role in such a cross-cultural and inter-collegial effort.

ELT is now in a postmethod era. Informed by the reviewed historical accounts of ELT in China, we learn that China has gone through different changes in applying various methods in the past decades. Such changes are a response to the changing pedagogical theories in the language teaching profession; the efforts are also indicating we are in the “postmethod” era that is progressing toward “better diagnosis, treatment, and assessment” (Brown, 2007). In such an era, it is unavoidable that we might still encounter some use of the old methods; however, the advance of time and technology informs us that the teaching profession is embracing a wider range of language teaching contexts and purposes. In response to learners’ growing needs for English learning and their changing learning styles, it is necessary for teachers to develop well-established principles while carrying out existing classroom techniques. Chinese EFL teachers are also in a postmethod era, in which they are encountering a diversity of language learners (Brown, 2007; Kumaravadivelu, 1994). In such an era, the profession demands “an electric blend of tasks” that is tailored for specific groups of students with particular purposes in different situational contexts (Brown, 2007, p. 41). Nunan (1991) once cautioned that it is almost impossible to find an ideal method for all. Therefore, it would be lacking sufficient groundings for this paper to jump to the conclusion that “CLT is best for China” as applauded by Liao (2004). However, given the trend that communicative competence is the primary goal for the current Chinese EFL learners in colleges and universities, it is safe to say that CLT is still playing a significant role in the profession of English teaching, at least for the time being.

As an innovative approach conflicting with traditional teaching styles, CLT has been both attacked and applauded in the EFL context. Hu (2002) contended that CLT clashes against traditional Chinese culture and argues for “a cautiously eclectic approach” (p. 93). On the contrary, Henrichsen (2007) held that the traditional methods “that were supposed to hinder

innovation appear to have been overcome” (p. 11). Whatever attitudes there may be towards CLT, the existing difficulties should not pose a threat for Chinese EFL college teachers to march forward to a higher level of language teaching; nor is it reasonable to decide that CLT is not workable in China. One thing that is clear is that CLT is neither the only nor the final solution for English teaching in colleges and universities in China. As many other researchers in the field have unanimously agreed, further changes are expected to occur in ELT and further research is necessary to verify outcomes pertaining to current methods that claim to be effective.

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