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A STUDY OF CHINESE UNIVERSITY EFL TEACHERS  
AND THEIR INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE TEACHING

by

Yi Zhou

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
through Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the  
University of Windsor

Windsor, Ontario, Canada

2011

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A Study of Chinese University EFL Teachers and  
Their Intercultural Competence Teaching

by  
Yi Zhou

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## ABSTRACT

As a result of globalisation, the increasing communication among people from different language and cultural backgrounds makes intercultural competence teaching a significant objective for second and foreign language (L2) education. This study aims to gain an insight into the teacher knowledge of Chinese university English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers regarding their intercultural competence teaching: to what extent they would like to and are academically prepared to support this new objective of language teaching, and whether or not their current beliefs about and cultural teaching practices are directed towards students' acquisition of intercultural competence?

A mixed methods research design shaped within a narrative framework was employed to inquire how Chinese university EFL teachers experience and narrate their educational experience with respect to intercultural competence teaching. Quantitative data were collected through a survey from 201 Chinese university EFL teachers. Among them, eight teachers participated in the follow-up interviews. The findings of this study suggest that participating teachers' perceived cultural teaching objectives reflect various aspects of an intercultural perspective toward cultural teaching. The most commonly shared objective is to promote the acquisition of a body of cultural knowledge. Though most of the teachers recognize the importance of cultural teaching, both cultural teaching in the broad sense and intercultural competence teaching have not yet become an important component or a regular focus in their EFL classes. Most of the time, teachers follow the traditional teacher-centered approach of cultural teaching. Teachers'

intercultural competence and their beliefs about cultural teaching were found to have an impact on their teaching practice. How participating teachers developed their established beliefs and teaching practices regarding intercultural competence teaching was also discussed within a three-dimensional narrative space. The findings have pointed to a need for in-service teacher training program which particularly focuses on intercultural competence teaching. Teachers need a curriculum and teaching materials that support cultural teaching and assist them in cultural integration in terms of cultural content and instructional pedagogies.

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **INTRODUCTION**

When communication is between people with different world views, special skills are required if the messages received are to resemble the messages sent. The most important overriding skill is understanding the context within which the communication takes place. This context is to a large extent culturally determined (Seelye, 1993, p.1).

Over the last few decades, a rich understanding of the relationship between language and culture has emerged. The relationship is believed to be both interactive and mutually dependent (Bush, 2007; Liddicoat, 2008; Seelye, 1993). Language denotes culture and culture is realized through language (Liddicoat, 2008). It is through the use of language that people are able to approach and understand the intangible values, beliefs, perspectives, and thoughts that frame the culture shared by a community (Seelye, 1993). Moreover, as suggested by Seelye, when we consider language as communication, language cannot be separated from the cultural frame of reference in which communication takes place. Without cultural knowledge, it is difficult to understand the meaning of a language.

It is, therefore, necessary and important to integrate cultural teaching in second and foreign language (L2) education. The purpose of this study is to research the teacher knowledge of Chinese university English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers', with a focus on how their intercultural competence, beliefs about, and practices of cultural



teaching help to support students' acquisition of intercultural competence.

### **Coming to the Research – Personal Narrative**

My research interest in teaching intercultural competence comes from my own experience as an EFL teacher and learner. I started learning English when I was in grade seven in the early 1990s. Our class was grammar based. My English teacher did not incorporate cultural knowledge except for briefly mentioning some major holidays and customs in English speaking countries. Later on, I taught College English (an English course required for non-English major students in all Chinese universities and colleges) for about two years when I was studying in a Master's program in China. I taught English the same way as I had been taught – my focus had always been from the linguistic perspective (including components such as phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics, and morphology). Actually, I did not see any problems with that at the time. We rarely saw people from other countries in Harbin, the capital city of my home province in North-eastern China, and we had very little opportunities to be involved in authentic intercultural communication. Students' English learning and practicing primarily occurred in class and at home in the form of reading and writing.

Before I came to Canada in 2004, I thought I would have no problem communicating in English, as I thought I knew the grammar and believed I could speak and understand the language well. However, after I arrived, I found that I often needed cultural knowledge to understand and interpret speakers of English and their nonverbal behaviours — I did not always know the implicit meanings behind their words. I also

realized that I was not always aware of my Chinese values, beliefs, and perspectives implied in my English, which sometimes made it difficult for people to understand me. I learned from my lived experience that besides language itself, cultural competence is also important and necessary to achieve effective intercultural communication.

For instance, I once had difficulty in communicating with a white English speaking Canadian friend, Jack, over a discussion of the death of a family member. I said that when my grandfather was diagnosed with cancer the diagnosis was withheld from him. Jack, in contrast, said that when his father was diagnosed with cancer he was fully informed by his family and the doctor. The different ways in which this fundamental life problem was handled generated a discussion between Jack and me, which revealed underlying values that influenced practices. In this situation it seemed that expressing truth and showing care for others were conflicting cultural values in relation to death. It is a topic that is treated quite differently in talk between different cultures and even within Chinese and Canadian cultures. The cultural value expressed in my story is not necessarily unique to the Chinese. It is, however, important in Chinese culture in which people believe that one's physical well-being depends heavily on one's emotional and spiritual well-being. Jack, in contrast, interpreted the situation from the human rights perspective, namely, an individual has the right to know the truth.

There is another story of mine that made me start to reflect on the cultural values behind my language and way of thinking. When I shared the happy news to my Canadian

friends in a party that I was inviting my parents to come and visit my family in Canada and live with us for half a year, I was puzzled at my friends' "weird" reactions:

"What? Are you serious?" said Joann.

"You must be kidding!" Christine responded.

"It will kill me if my parents live in my house for that long" said Jenny.

When I went on to explain to them how I had been very close to my parents and would like to live with them for as long as they could stay, Jenny said to me: "I'm very close to my parents too, but it doesn't mean I would like to live with them for that long. I don't understand why you want to do that." The conversation was over as I was frustrated and confused at the moment and did not know what to say further.

Ultimately I realized that my friends and I were both trying to understand and justify each other's behaviours from our own cultural perspective, which caused frustration and misunderstanding. Our thinking and language expression was embedded in our different cultural values, beliefs, and traditions, which we were not always aware of. Experiences such as these led me to undertake the study of the cultural dimension of EFL education that had been largely missing in my teaching and learning experience. My language learning experience has not prepared me in terms of how to deal with and reflect on the cultural differences emerged in communications with people from other cultural backgrounds. The reason is, as Seelye (1993) suggests:

This is not to say that our need to know culture for effective communication automatically guarantees that we will pick up the culture as we learn a second (or

third) language. This is one of the principal differences between learning a language within its indigenous setting and learning it in an alien cultural context. Learning a language in isolation of its cultural roots prevents one from becoming socialized into its *contextual* use. (p.10)

Through a review of the current literature on cultural teaching in second and foreign language education, I came across the term *intercultural competence* which is a relatively new emerging paradigm of cultural competence proposed in language education (Byram, 1997; Crozet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999; Fantini, 2000). The most widely accepted conceptualisation of intercultural competence stems from the work of Michael Byram (1997). According to Byram, intercultural competence allows individuals to act as a mediator between their home culture and the foreign world — they are ready and willing to seek out opportunities to interact with people from other cultural backgrounds, explore their cultures, and make necessary change to prepare for intercultural encounters.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As a result of globalisation, the increasing communication among people from different language and cultural backgrounds is challenging the objectives of second and foreign language teaching. Many researchers suggest that achieving only communicative competence, which has been regarded as the goal for language education for more than two decades, is no longer sufficient (Byram, 1997; Corbett, 2003; Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 1999; Sercu, 2006; Xu & Stevens, 2005). Canale and Swain (1980) identified communicative competence as having three minimal dimensions: grammatical

competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Communicative competence teaching focuses on developing students' skills to conduct meaningful communication in the target language in purposeful situations and its key objective has been to achieve effective exchange of information and message between the interlocutors (Canale & Swain, 1980). However, as some researchers point out, the major concern with communicative competence teaching has been that the effectiveness of exchange of information is determined by how the message that is sent is perceived by the receiver in another cultural context (Byram, 1997; Seelye, 1993). The notion of communicative competence largely neglects the exploration of culture that is necessary to facilitate and make sense of how exchange of information is performed effectively and appropriately in various cultural settings (Corbett, 2003).

A body of research has suggested that communicative competence should be broadened to include the notion of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Crozet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999; Damen, 1987; Sercu, 2006; Xu & Stevens 2005; Wen, 2004). Foreign language education should promote students' acquisition of both language and intercultural skills in order to conduct successful communication with the target people who are different and accepted and respected as such. As Byram (1997) proposes, intercultural competence requires not only the development of language proficiency as stated in communicative competence, but also emphasizes an equally important ability of intercultural exploring, understanding, interpreting, and mediating. Corbett (2003) further points out that intercultural competence teaching is intended to equip students with the

strategies to observe and make sense of the target culture and help them to acquire cultural skills which allow them to view different cultures from a perspective of informed understanding in order to achieve effective and appropriate intercultural communication.

In recent years, Chinese EFL educators are beginning to understand with greater urgency the role culture plays in foreign language learning and beginning to address the need to integrate a cultural dimension into English classrooms (Wen, 2004; Lin, 2006; Zhang, 2006; Pan, 2007; Xiao, 2007; Yang & Zhuang, 2007; Wang & Liu, 2008). In 2004, for the first time in history, China's national *College English Curriculum Requirements* (for non-English major students) (China Ministry of Education, 2004) required that cultural enhancement, which aims to help students to achieve effective intercultural communication, should be included in EFL education in order to meet the need for China's economic development and international communication.

In order to advance intercultural competence teaching, Sercu (2006) proposes that teachers are expected to adjust their current communicative competence oriented teaching practices, develop their own intercultural competence, and become aware of the cultural assumptions, perspectives, and attitudes they express in teaching and their influence on students, so as to help students to achieve intercultural competence. Despite the increasing awareness of the need for teaching intercultural competence in second and foreign language education, the intercultural dimension has been, to a large extent, underdeveloped in language classrooms, as "language teachers have not been adequately prepared to understand and deliver it with confidence" (Garrido & Alvarez, 2006, p. 174).

The need to develop the teaching of intercultural competence gives rise to new and further professional development demands on language teachers and teacher educators for their redefined tasks (Garrido & Alvarez, 2006; Larzen-Ostermark, 2008, 2009; Sercu, 2006).

Intercultural competence teaching has just started to gain attention from Chinese university EFL teachers as an educational innovation (Liang, 2008; Wang & Liu, 2008). Despite the fact that the importance of cultural teaching has gained attention from Chinese EFL teachers and scholars, classroom teaching still falls behind theoretical expectation: linguistic teaching still dominates most university EFL classrooms in China and cultural teaching has not been very effective in terms of promoting students' acquisition of intercultural competence and preparing them for intercultural communication (Xiao, 2007; Zhang, 2003). This makes teaching intercultural competence a significant goal of EFL education in China and a heavy responsibility on language teachers' professional development, which requires additional objectives and focus for teacher education and training programs. Xu and Connelly (2009) point out that teacher education and development for educational reform should begin with teacher knowledge in the local educational contexts. It is suggested that how educational innovation is implemented, to a large extent, be dependent on teachers who carry it out in various classroom settings (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Xu & Connelly, 2009). In this sense, teachers are *curriculum planners* rather than implementers (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988). Xu and Connelly (2009) state that an understanding of teacher knowledge, which is

defined as “a narrative construct which references the totality of a person’s personal practical knowledge gained from formal and informal educational experience” (p. 221), is critical in order to develop curriculum and help teachers to achieve new teaching objectives. In teacher education and educational reform research, the framework of narrative inquiry proposed by Connelly and Clandinin (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Xu, 2008) has been increasingly used to study teacher knowledge and development as life experience (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004, 2008; Liu & Xu, 2011; Xu, 2006; Xu & Liu, 2009; Xu & Stevens, 2005). Narrative inquiry as a way of thinking about teacher knowledge will be discussed in more detail in the methodology chapter.

The introduction and promotion of innovations in teacher education should not proceed without taking into account teacher knowledge and teachers’ established practices in current teaching (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Xu & Connelly, 2009). Studies have been conducted to explore Chinese university teachers’ beliefs about EFL teaching objectives and their teaching practices (Zhan, 2008; Zhou, 2005). However, little has been known about their teacher knowledge regarding intercultural competence teaching. For instance, to what extent they would like to and are academically prepared to support this new objective of language teaching, and whether or not their current beliefs about and teaching practices of cultural teaching are directed towards supporting students’ acquisition of intercultural competence?

The purpose of this study is to gain an insight into the teacher knowledge of Chinese EFL teachers’, regarding intercultural competence teaching with a focus on their



intercultural competence and their existing beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching. A narrative thinking framework is employed to inquire how Chinese university EFL teachers experience and narrate their educational experience (Xu & Connelly, 2009). An understanding of the current beliefs and teaching practices will help teacher educators and researchers to identify potential issues that could be addressed in pre-service education and in-service teacher training, and help to determine the practical and effective way to introduce and promote intercultural competence teaching within the context of Chinese EFL teaching.

In China, all primary and secondary teachers and post-secondary professors are called teachers. For those who teach at the universities, *professor* is their title, but *teacher* is considered their profession. In this thesis, I follow the Chinese custom and use *teacher* to refer to professors at universities.

### **Research Questions**

A pilot study for this dissertation was conducted by myself with my co-supervisors Dr. Shijing Xu and Dr. Jonathan Bayley (Zhou, Xu, & Bayley, 2010) in the summer and fall of 2009. In the study, through a mixed methods research design which was shaped within a narrative framework, we studied 20 Chinese university EFL teachers regarding their beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching. The process of conducting the pilot study collaboratively with two senior researchers helped me to refine the mixed methods research design of this dissertation and form a narrative approach toward the research process.

For this present study, though it is not a narrative inquiry in a strict sense, it follows the narrative way of thinking throughout the study. Quantitative data were first collected through a survey questionnaire to identify potential issues in teachers' existing beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching. Follow-up qualitative data were generated from narrative interviews to develop an in-depth understanding of the issues which emerged from the quantitative data. Data were collected from 201 Chinese university EFL teachers at five universities in Harbin (the capital city of a North-eastern province in China). Data were analysed in order to gain an insight into the following research questions:

1. What are Chinese university EFL teachers' beliefs about cultural teaching?
2. What are Chinese university EFL teachers' self-reported cultural teaching practices? How, and to what extent, do their teaching practices support students' acquisition of intercultural competence?
3. What, if any, is the relationship between teachers' intercultural competence and their beliefs about and practice of cultural teaching?

### **Significance**

It is anticipated that this study will contribute to the EFL teacher education community in the following ways:

First, the findings from this study will direct attention to second and foreign language teacher education and professional development with respect to intercultural competence teaching.

Second, it is the purpose of the study to provide Chinese EFL teacher educators with some valuable information about teachers' existing beliefs, cultural teaching practices, and their readiness to implement intercultural competence teaching. Teacher education and training programs built upon existing and established teaching practices will better accommodate teachers' needs and help to prepare them to meet emerging challenges in the culture-integrated curriculum.

Third, this study will contribute to the Canadian educational context. On the one hand, many Canadian educational agencies and institutions offer professional training programs to Chinese EFL teachers. This research will provide information for the design and development of such programs. On the other hand, a large number of Chinese students and new immigrants enter Canadian ESL programs each year and the number is increasing (Li, 2007; CIC, 2010). Knowing Chinese EFL teachers' cultural teaching practices informs Canadian ESL teachers and curriculum designers about their Chinese students' cultural learning experience in China. This will help Canadian educators to make informed decisions relating to their teaching and curriculum planning.

Fourth, this study was conducted in China, but it will help teacher educators and researchers in other similar EFL education contexts, such as in some Asian countries where English is also taught as a foreign language. It will provide some useful information for educators and researchers to conduct teacher education and training regarding intercultural competence teaching.

Last but not least, the narrative framework of this study benefits the participating teachers by providing them with the opportunity to reflect on the nature and objectives of their subject matter, and redirect their present teaching practice. This was evident in the pilot study for this dissertation, in which narrative inquiry allowed participating teachers to reflect on their lived teaching and learning experience and develop a new construct of what it means to be an EFL teacher in Chinese cultural and social context and an understanding and knowledge of what cultural teaching practice they want to conduct.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This chapter is a comprehensive literature review pertaining to intercultural competence teaching in second and foreign language (L2) education. It consists of five sections. First, the evolution of the conception of language competence and the development of cultural teaching in L2 education is addressed. Next, the call for intercultural competence teaching in both local Chinese context and worldwide is discussed. In the third section of the literature review, theories of intercultural competence in different educational domains are presented. A detailed analysis is presented with respect to Byram's (1997) model which provides a working definition of intercultural competence for this study. The fourth section starts with the new demands that intercultural competence teaching brings to language teachers and it focuses on some important research findings in western contexts regarding teachers' beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching. In the fifth section, cultural teaching in Chinese EFL context is addressed, at both theoretical and practical level. Special attention is given to teachers' intercultural competence, their beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching.

#### **Cultural Teaching in L2 Education**

Culture has long been a focus of discussion by second and foreign language educators and researchers. Over the last few decades, a rich understanding of the relationship between language and culture has emerged, which is believed to be both interactive and mutually dependent (Bush, 2007; Liddicoat, 2008; Seelye, 1993). On the

one hand, language expresses culture and culture is realized through language (Liddicoat, 2008). It is through the use of language that people are able to approach and understand intangible values, beliefs, perspectives, and thoughts shared by a community (Seelye, 1993). On the other hand, as suggested by Seelye, when we consider language as communication, language cannot be separated from the cultural context in which communication takes place. Without culture knowledge, it is difficult to understand the meaning of a language. The mutually dependent relationship between language and culture could be best supported by Hall's (1973) well-known statement that "culture is communication" (p.97). However, culture had not been considered a major or integral part in L2 education until about a decade ago.

### ***Conceptualisation of Language Competence***

In L2 education, teachers teach in order to develop students' language competence. Then what is language competence? What does it mean to be a competent L2 speaker? The answer to these questions is important to L2 teachers and researchers. The conception of language competence sets up the primary goal of L2 teaching that in turn determines the curriculum planning and choice of teaching approach. What L2 class involves is largely dependent on what is believed to be language competence. Cultural teaching would not be a necessary component in L2 class if there were no cultural dimension in the conception of language competence. The development of the concept 'language competence' will be discussed first.

In L2 education history, language competence has long been perceived from a

linguistic perspective (including components such as phonetics, phonology, syntax, semantics, and morphology). L2 had been mainly taught as a linguistic code in the traditional grammar-accuracy orientated teaching approaches in which little cultural teaching was incorporated.

The interactional dimension of language competence was proposed in the 1970s. In his critique of Chomsky's (1957) formalistic, context-free grammatical competence, Hymes' (1972) proposed the notion of communicative competence as language competence for native speakers learning their first language. According to Hymes, communicative competence includes knowledge of the language and the ability to use the language. Hymes suggests that authentic speech could be a practical objective of language instruction and that language classrooms could reflect a natural social setting where students learn the language from conducting interactional tasks. Canale and Swain (1980) identify four dimensions of communicative competence in foreign language education: grammatical competence, socio-linguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. The researchers further propose a communicative language teaching approach which requires that L2 classes reflect natural communication settings where students learn the language from conducting interactional and transactional tasks. Communicative approach is based upon the belief that L2 can, and should be, beneficially learned through meaningful communication in the target language in purposeful situations (Canale & Swain, 1980). Communicative approach has become the most widely used L2 teaching approach in many countries, China included.

However, the transfer from Hymes' (1972) communicative competence in first language acquisition to L2 learning has been challenged (Byram, 1997). According to Byram, it is misleading as it sets achieving native-speaker-like language proficiency as the objective of L2 learning; it is an impossible goal and doomed to be a failure, and it neglects "the significance of the social identities and cultural competence of the learner in any intercultural interaction" (p. 8). As van Ek (1986) suggests, although socio-linguistic competence is encompassed in communicative competence, it refers to "the awareness of ways in which the choice of language forms . . . [it] is determined by such conditions as setting, relationship between communication partners, communicative intention, etc., . . . sociolinguistic competence covers the relation between linguistic signals and their contextual – or situational – meaning" (as cited in Byram, 1997, p. 10). While focusing on teaching how to do things with the language, the communicative approach neglects the exploration of culture that is necessary to make sense of and deal with the differences in how interactions and transactions are performed meaningfully and appropriately in various social and cultural settings (Byram, 1997; Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 1999).

In L2 education history as discussed above, cultural component has not been a criterion for a competent L2 speaker. A new conceptualisation of language competence, intercultural communicative competence, was proposed in the late 1990s. It expands communicative competence to include a cultural component, namely, intercultural competence. It takes the notion that promoting student's effective intercultural



communication should be the ultimate goal of second and foreign language education. Intercultural competence will be discussed in detail in the next section.

### ***Cultural Dimension in Language Classrooms***

Although cultural teaching had not been a major and integral part of L2 teaching, some consideration has long been given to the teaching of the target culture in a language class. Crozet, Liddicoat and Lo Bianco (1999) identified four paradigms of cultural teaching in the history of L2 education, namely, the *traditional* paradigm, the *culture studies* paradigm, the *culture as practices* paradigm and *intercultural* language teaching. The researchers argue that the evolution of these paradigms parallels that of the conceptualisation of culture.

Within the traditional paradigm, “cultural competence, in foreign language education, is viewed as control of an established canon of literature, which can be measured in terms of the breadth of reading and knowledge about the literature” (Crozet et al., 1999, p. 18). According to the researchers, cultural teaching in the traditional paradigm is realised through teaching literature, which is treated as an add-on of language and the primacy of cultural literature only involves reading the text.

From the 1970s, the traditional paradigm began to be replaced by the *culture studies* paradigm which, according to Crozet et al. (1999), was influenced by “a view of culture as area studies – a learning about countries” (p. 18). As suggested by the researchers, within this paradigm, cultural teaching is considered teaching the knowledge about the target country, for instance, its history, customs, geography, and so on. Though cultural

teaching provides social and cultural knowledge for understanding the language, it is still not treated as an integral part of language teaching and it does not encourage learners to explore the connection between language and the contents of *culture studies* (Crozet et al., 1999).

Crozet et al. (1999) state that the third paradigm *culture as practices* became influential in the 1980s. This paradigm views cultural competence as “knowing about what people from a given cultural group are likely to do and understanding the cultural values placed upon certain ways of acting or upon certain beliefs” (p. 19). This paradigm, as the researchers argue, mostly leaves learners to see and interpret the target culture from their home cultural perspectives; and culture is viewed as being rather “static and homogeneous” (p. 19), which may result in stereotyping the target culture, especially for foreign language learners who do not have many interactions with the target community.

Within the above three paradigms, cultural teaching has all been treated as a separate part of language teaching. Language education has not gone beyond the concept of language learning as only acquiring language skills and some knowledge about the target countries. Crozet et al. (1999) point out that this situation had not been changed until late 1990s, when intercultural language teaching, a new emerging paradigm in language education, was proposed marking the milestone of teaching culture as an inherent part of language teaching. In the attempt to provide an appropriate mix of intercultural and linguistic features in L2 instruction, Crozet et al. (1999) proposed intercultural language teaching approach, which “aims at supporting the development of

intercultural competence through the learning of foreign languages and by extension through the learning of how language and culture connect in one's first and target language" (p.21). The researchers have reflected on language and culture in an integrated way aiming to prepare learners to use the foreign language in intercultural communication situations. They propose three primary and fundamental aspects in language teaching to promote students' acquisition of intercultural competence: "The teaching of links between language and culture; the comparison between learners' first language/culture and target language/culture; and intercultural exploration" (p. 22-23). The third aspect is at the core of intercultural language teaching.

Byram (1997) suggests that intercultural competence requires not only the development of language proficiency as stated in communicative competence, but also emphasizes an equally important ability of intercultural exploration, understanding, interpretation, and mediation. It requires attention to and respect for both the target and learners' home language and culture and the dynamic system of the beliefs, values, perspectives, and norms which frames the two cultures (Byram, 1997, Corbett, 2003, Knutson, 2006). Byram believes that learners with intercultural competence are able to act as mediators between the target and their home culture: they understand the target language and the behaviours of its people and can explain them to people from both their home culture and the target culture.

Crozet et al. (1999) believe that intercultural competence teaching reflects a fresh yet deeper understanding of the relationship between culture and language and the nature of

intercultural encounters. As Corbett (2003) suggests, it does not aim to replace or downplay the advances made by the current communicative approach, rather, it seeks to build on and complement them by teaching intercultural competence so that “(1) culture becomes a regular focus of the information exchanged, and (2) learners have the opportunity to reflect upon how the information is exchanged, and the cultural factors impinging upon the exchange” (p. 32). Researchers believe that intercultural language teaching seems to be, at present, the most “complete and versatile tool available to understand and to experience how language and culture shape one’s and others’ worldviews, which is the essence of intercultural communicative competence” (Crozet et al., 1999, p.11).

### **Call for Intercultural Competence Teaching**

#### ***Global Context***

There is a global interest in promoting the teaching of intercultural competence in L2 education. The desire comes from a variety of reasons, such as a consequence of increasing world dynamics in the process of globalisation and the call for the promotion of respect, tolerance, and understanding in education in multicultural societies.

Globalisation refers to “the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole” (Robertson, 1992, p. 8). The globalisation process is posing new challenges for cultural teaching in L2 education. There is increasing interconnectivity among nations in the globalising world at national, social, and individual level. Individuals have more contact with people who come from different

cultures. The value of intercultural understanding and awareness needs to be reflected and emphasised in foreign language education in order for people to achieve successful intercultural communication. Teaching intercultural competence in second and foreign language classrooms is appropriate and significant for this purpose. Corbett (2003) points out that it differs from previous cultural teaching in that it not only includes the tangible or visible dimension of culture, but also evokes the power of the invisible and subjective dimension underneath, for instance, the values, symbols, interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish people from one country to another.

Many countries, such as Canada, Australia, the United States of America, and some European countries, have a diverse cultural population that prompts the need for intercultural understanding and communication. To promote mutual respect and understanding in the multicultural society, some countries have required L2 educators and curriculum planners to bring tolerance and understanding through language teaching (Larzen-Ostermark, 2008). Teaching intercultural competence is highly valued in this respect. Researchers urge that L2 teaching pedagogy expand the traditional communicative approach to include the acquisition of intercultural competence (Byram, 1997; Crozet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999; Fantini, 2007; Xu & Stevens, 2005). Teaching intercultural competence will not only satisfy the need for successful L2 acquisition, but also facilitate and support the socialisation of a multicultural society and the globalising world.

### ***Local Chinese Context***

A large number of Chinese people (e.g., students, scholars, tourists, and immigrants) go to English speaking countries each year to visit, study, work, and live. English has been a major barrier for overseas Chinese when adapting to their new life. For instance, researchers point out that Chinese English learners have been widely recognized as quiet and reticent learners who lack the willingness to communicate – they are reluctant to ask questions or express their own opinions in class (Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Wen & Clement, 2003). One of the reasons might be that it is difficult for them to conduct successful intercultural communication with native English speakers if they do not have a certain level of intercultural competence. There is a tremendous difference in social and cultural values, norms, beliefs, and perspectives between Chinese and people from English-speaking communities. Improved intercultural competence helps to increase Chinese students' willingness to communicate in English. Students need to build intercultural competence in their EFL class in China before going abroad in order to achieve successful social interaction and communication and intercultural adaptation, which would help them to succeed in their study and work.

For millions of Chinese students who do not have the opportunity to go abroad, it is still important to acquire intercultural competence. As an immediate consequence of its booming economy, China is establishing international links and cooperation with the western world, which has an increasing demand for intercultural communication. Over the past 10 years, the number of people from other countries going to China to work,

study, or visit has dramatically increased. Chinese people are having many more face-to-face interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds and English serves as the dominant language for such interactions. For this to take place, it requires a quality EFL education in China with an integral component of intercultural competence teaching.

Last but not least, even if some students never get a chance to have interactions with people from other cultures, or never speak English beyond language classrooms, they will retain and benefit from the awareness, understanding, and perspectives about their home and other cultures in the globalising local contexts (Byram, 1997). As Byram points out, this international dimension of the acquisition of intercultural competence and the understanding of other countries and societies is important for students, in their lifetime, to have indirect interaction with other cultures through printed and multi-media such as magazines, newspaper, movies, TV programs, and the Internet.

### **Theories of Intercultural Competence Teaching & Learning**

Culture has been conceptualised in different ways. Intercultural researchers emphasize the cognitive and interpretive perspective of culture, which makes it possible to explain the relationship between culture, language and behaviour. For instance, Scollon and Scollon (1995) conceptualise culture as group shared ideas, interactions, and behaviours, which are used to operate people's instinct sense of "cohesion and membership" (p. 127), and distinguish group members from other identities. Banks (2007) defines culture as: "*not* its artifacts, tools, or other tangible cultural elements but how the members of the group interpret, use, and perceive them. It is the values, symbols,

interpretations, and perspectives that distinguish one people from another in modernized societies” (p. 8). The researchers are not to deny the visible dimension of culture, but to prompt the invisible dimension underneath. They see culture more as the meaning people perceive and interpret from artifacts rather than the artifacts themselves.

### ***Defining Intercultural Competence***

Intercultural competence is a complex construct and no consensus has been achieved in intercultural literature about its terminology and definition. It has been labelled in different terms, though some terms only encompass limited perspectives of a more complex notion, such as intercultural competence (intercultural communicative competence) (Byram, 1997; Crozet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999; Fantini, 2006), cross-cultural awareness (Knutson, 2006), intercultural awareness (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2005), intercultural sensitivity (Bennett, 1993). Among them, intercultural competence and intercultural communicative competence have been frequently used in foreign language education (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2006; Crozet, Liddicoat & Lo Bianco, 1999, Sercu, 2006; Wen, 2004). In this study, intercultural competence is used instead of intercultural communicative competence as it focuses on the intercultural dimension of language teaching and learning. However, as Sercu (2006) suggests, it by no means indicates that intercultural competence can be separated from communicative competence.

It is difficult to define or identify the constructs of intercultural competence due to the complex nature of the concept (Deardorff, 2006). In foreign language research, some researchers (e.g. Byram, Gribkova & Starkey, 2002) argue that intercultural competence



differs from knowledge and facts about another country and culture, and it is the competence that allows learners “to interact with people of different cultural backgrounds, multiple identities and a specific individuality”(p. 33). Byram (1997) proposes that people with intercultural competence could act as mediators between their home culture and the foreign world — they are ready and willing to seek out opportunities to interact with people from other cultural backgrounds, explore their cultures, and make necessary change to prepare for intercultural encounters.

Fantini (2000) describes intercultural experience as a “‘double-edged’ nature” (p. 26), that is, “development of competence in another culture and proficiency in its language provide the opportunity for powerful reflections into one’s own native world view. This notion is captured in the expression ‘looking out is looming in’” (p. 26). Intercultural competence has also been referred to as “the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures” (Meyer, 1991, p. 137).

Although intercultural competence has been defined in various ways, Fantini (2000) concludes that three key components appear to be often included and generally identified: “1) the ability to develop and maintain relationships, 2) the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with minimal loss or distortion, and 3) the ability to attain compliance and obtain cooperation with others” (p. 27).

### *Theories of Intercultural Competence*

Before the concept of intercultural competence was introduced to second and foreign language education, it was first conceptualised in the field of intercultural communication. The most widely recognised theory from intercultural communication literature has been Bennett's (1993) the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The model is based on the assumption that an individual's intercultural competence increases when he or she experiences cultural difference in a more complex and sophisticated way.

According to Bennett (1993), the DMIS includes six stages, which represent the development of intercultural competence along a continuum. The first three stages (denial, defence, and minimization) are ethnocentric, meaning that an individual experiences his or her home culture as central and fundamental to all reality. "All the various functions commonly attributed to ethnocentrism, such as racism, other negative evaluation of dissimilar cultures, and the construction of in-group/out-group distinctions can be seen as derivative of the 'centrality' assumption" (Bennett, 1993, p. 30). The first stage, denial, refers to the condition that a person does not acknowledge the existence of cultural difference and keeps oneself isolated physically and/or psychologically from cultural difference. At the second stage, defence, a person recognizes cultural differences but perceives them as threatening to his or her home culture that is believed to be the only good culture. At the third ethnocentric stage, minimization, an individual clearly recognizes cultural difference, not in a denigrating or negative manner. Rather, the

individual trivializes cultural differences – he or she perceives that cultural differences are unimportant and that all cultures share basic and universal characteristics.

Bennett (1993) proposes that the latter three stages (acceptance, adaptation, and integration) are ethnorelative, meaning that an individual experiences his or her home culture in the context of other cultures. Cultural difference is not perceived as good or bad, just different. Cultural integrity is respected, including one's own. "Fundamental to ethnocentrism is the assumption that cultures can only be understood relative to one another and that particular behaviour can only be understood within a cultural context" (Bennett, 1993, p. 46). The first ethnocentric stage, acceptance, perceives other cultures as complex yet different constructions of realisation and regards cultural difference as necessary and preferable human condition. At the second stage, adaptation, cultural difference is appreciated and skills are acquired and developed for effective communication with people from other cultures. An individual at this stage is able to shift perspective, which allows him or her to construct meaning in another culture and worldview. In an intercultural encounter, an individual can engage in another culture securely without compromising his or her own cultural identity. According to Bennett, at the last ethnocentric stage, integration, a person's conceptualisation of self includes the capability of moving into and out of different cultural contexts and redefining his or her relationship to multi-world views.

Bennett's (1993) DMIS is grounded with a cognitive framework and thus has potential as a cognitive development structure that second and foreign language teachers

and their students can use to understand their intercultural competence developmental stage. Based on DMIS, Hammer and Bennett (1998) created the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) to measure the six developmental stages proposed in the model. The IDI contains 50 5-point scale items. IDI was proved to have validity and reliability (Hammer, Bennett, & Wiseman, 2003) and was soon commercialised in intercultural communication training business and related research fields as well.

In the field of second and foreign language education, Byram (1997) was the first to introduce intercultural communication to language classrooms in his well-known model of intercultural competence. Byram’s conceptualisation of the five components of intercultural competence stems from three general categories: knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Table 2.1). Byram proposes that knowledge and attitude factors are preconditions, but they can be further developed in actual intercultural encounters through the use of two kinds of skills.

Table 2.1

*Factors in intercultural competence (Byram, 1997, p. 34)*

	Skills interpret and relate ( <i>savoir comprendre</i> )	
Knowledge of self and other; of interaction: individual and societal ( <i>savoirs</i> )	Education political education critical cultural awareness ( <i>savoir s'engager</i> )	Attitudes relativising self valuing other ( <i>savoir être</i> )
	Skills discover and/or interact ( <i>savoir apprendre/faire</i> )	

The components of intercultural competence are defined as follows. The first category of skills is that of interpreting and relating. They are skills of comparing. It allows learners to identify and interpret cultural perspectives of the target culture and establish relationships between the target and one's home culture. In terms of objectives in language teaching, this category of skills is defined to, for instance, promote students' ability to:

(a) identify ethnocentric perspectives in a document or event and explain their origins; (b) identify areas of misunderstanding and dysfunction in an interaction and explain them in terms of each of the cultural systems present; (c) mediate between conflicting interpretations of phenomena . . . . (e) readiness to engage with the conventions and rites of verbal and non-verbal communication and interaction.

(Byram, 1997, p. 61)

The second category, skills of discovery and interaction, requires learners to be able to identify, understand, and acquire, in new intercultural interactions, "new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills" (Byram, 1997, p. 52). Intercultural encounters can provide learners with opportunities to discover and students with such skills will be able to "establish an understanding of a new cultural environment" and "interact in increasing rich and complex ways with people whose culture is unfamiliar to them" (p. 53). In terms of objectives in language teaching, this category of skills is defined, for instance, to promote students' ability to:

(a) elicit from an interlocutor the concepts and values of documents or events and develop an explanatory system susceptible of application to other phenomena. (b) identify significant references within and across cultures and elicit their significance and connotations . . . . (e) identify contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other culture and society. . . . (g) use in real-time knowledge, skills and attitudes for mediation between interlocutors of one's own and a foreign culture. (Byram, 1997, p. 63)

The knowledge dimension of intercultural competence is associated with the question of content - what culture and whose culture. The teaching of knowledge is to allow students to understand how people in one country perceive another country, and what influence that has on the process of interactions between individuals and social groups of the two countries. In terms of objectives in language teaching, knowledge dimension is defined, for instance, to promote students' acquisition of the knowledge about:

(a) historical and contemporary relationships between one's own and one's interlocutor's countries . . . . (c) the types of cause and process of misunderstanding between interlocutors of different cultural origins. (d) the national memory of one's own country and how its events are related to and seen from the perspective of other countries . . . . (i) social distinctions and their principal markers, in one's own country and one's interlocutor's . . . . (k) the processes of social interaction in one's interaction in one's interlocutors' country. (Byram, 1997, p. 59)

Attitudes are defined as “curiosity” and “openness” towards other cultures, as well as willingness to question and revise one’s worldview (Byram, 1997, p. 57). For instance, students with such attitudes should be able to suspend their “disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own” (p. 57). In terms of objectives in language teaching, attitudes dimension is defined to promote students’:

- (a) willingness to seek out or take up opportunities to engage with otherness in a relationship of equity, distinct from seeking out the exotic or the profitable. (b) interest in discovering other perspectives on interpretation of familiar and unfamiliar phenomena both in one’s own and in other cultures and cultural practices. (c) willingness to question the values and presuppositions in cultural practices and products in one’s own environment. (Byram, 1997, p. 58)

Finally, intercultural competence involves “an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries” (Byram, 1997, p. 63). This ability is defined as Critical cultural awareness/political education. In terms of objectives in language teaching, critical cultural awareness is defined, for instance, to promote students’ ability to:

- (a) . . . use a range of analytical approaches to place a document or event in context (of origins/sources, time, place, other documents or events) and to demonstrate the ideology involved. (b). . . [*be*] aware of their own ideological perspectives and values (‘human rights’; socialist; Moslem; Christian etc.) and evaluates documents or events with explicit reference to them. (Byram, 1997, p. 64)

Byram (1997) proposes that intercultural competence teaching is expected to help students to develop a cognitive and evaluative orientation towards the target and their own society; and become aware of their own values and how these values influence their view of others. Some teaching strategies for achieving intercultural competence have been proposed based on Byram's model. For instance, researchers (Byram & Fleming, 1998; Corbett, 2003) have suggested approaches through drama, interview, ethnography, and the use of literacy, media, and cultural studies.

Byram's intercultural competence model has helped to shape the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001), and serves as "the guiding concept for the overall aim of FL education" (Larzen-Ostermark, 2008, p. 528). As Sercu (2006) points out, many aspects of intercultural competence proposed in intercultural communication and second and foreign language literature are encompassed in Byram's model. Byram's five major components and their objectives in foreign language education provides an understanding and a working definition of intercultural competence for this study in order to explore the extent to which Chinese university EFL teachers' existing beliefs and practices of cultural teaching support students' acquisition of intercultural competence. The cognitive framework of Bennett's (1993) DMIS does not provide as many instructional implications for foreign language teaching as Byram's model does for the Chinese EFL context. DMIS is grounded on the assumption that learners' intercultural competence will increase as they experience cultural difference in a more complex and sophisticated way. In China, cultural teaching is often conducted in



classrooms without direct contact with the target people and community. Students have limited opportunity to experience cultural difference in an informal, or outside of a classroom intercultural context. It is difficult for EFL teachers to set up their language classroom to represent various authentic intercultural contexts in an increasingly complex and sophisticated way.

### **Intercultural Competence Teaching in L2 Education**

The importance of intercultural competence teaching has been widely recognised and documented in second and foreign language curricula and educational policies in Europe, Australia, and North America since late 1980s (Garrido & Alvarez, 2006; Lo Bianco, Liddicoat & Crozet, 1999; Liddicot, 2004; Sercu, 2006; Knutson, 2006). For instance, in Europe, the acquisition of intercultural competence has been addressed in the Council of Europe's (2001) *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*. The framework provides a structure for intercultural competence development based on Byram's (1997) model. Foreign language teachers and educators across Europe are encouraged to interpret and implement it with respect to their particular context (Garrido & Alvarez, 2006). In 2002, the British Quality Assurance for Higher Education requires an intercultural dimension in language education (Garrido & Alvarez, 2006). In the United States, five national standards for foreign language education have been proposed, including communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities, which are referred to as the five Cs (Standards, 1996). Teachers are encouraged to adjust their current communicative competence oriented

teaching practices in order to help students to acquire intercultural competence.

Despite the fact that many countries' national curricula for language teaching have been following the intercultural shift in theory, researchers (e.g., Garrido & Alvarez, 2006; Sercu, 2006) argue that both cultural teaching in the broad sense and intercultural competence teaching have not yet become a common practice in second and foreign language classrooms. Studies conducted by European researchers, regarding cultural teaching practices, suggest that most language teachers' current cultural teaching practices do not yet have desired outcomes as specified in the theoretical literature (Larzen-Ostermark, 2008; Sercu, 2006; Sercu, Mendez Garcia & Castro Prieto, 2005). Sercu (2006) reported that the majority of European foreign language teachers who participated in her study fell into two categories in terms of cultural teaching practices. Teachers in the first category focused "primarily and almost exclusively" on teaching communicative competence (p. 67). For those in the second category, though their primary focus was to promote the acquisition of communicative competence, they also taught knowledge about the target language country and its cultures. The researcher points out that their teacher-centered activities and techniques employed indicate that their cultural teaching practices broadened students' cultural knowledge, but did not engage students to seek cultural information from various sources and reflect critically on it.

In her study with EFL teachers in Finland, Larzen-Ostermark (2008) identifies cultural teaching practices in three categories: (1) Pedagogy of information. Teachers in this category mainly treated cultural teaching as transmission of cultural knowledge to

students though their instructional activities were shifting from teacher-centered to more student-centered. Their underlying philosophy was still that “students need to ‘be informed’” (p. 539). (2) Pedagogy of preparation. The few teachers who fit into this category engaged students in cultural learning through the stories of teacher’s intercultural experience and conducting intercultural dialogues, with a focus on the differences between home and the target cultures. Their teaching helped to prepare students for their appropriate behaviours while communicating with people from English speaking countries, mostly Britain and the United States of America. (3) Pedagogy of encounter, which reflects a true intercultural perspective in language teaching. The very few teachers who belonged to this category were found to be novice female teachers who had extensive personal overseas experience. They tended to engage their students in experiencing both “authentic encounters such as visits by native speakers or virtual contacts,” and “simulated encounters such as role-plays or mental constructs” (p. 540). Their teaching reflected a “reciprocal” and “dialog” perspective which included both the home and the target culture (p. 540). The researcher points out that most of the teachers belong to the first category which indicates that few of them conduct instructional activities beyond the transmission of cultural knowledge.

### ***Cultural Teaching in Chinese EFL Contexts***

Intercultural competence teaching has been initiated by L2 educators and researchers in many western countries. Consequently, it has received greater attention from curriculum planners in the past two decades. In recent years, Chinese researchers

pay increasing attention to the shift of intercultural approach.

***Theoretical development.*** Starting from the 1980s, Chinese foreign language scholars started to realize the important role culture plays in language learning and began to address the need to integrate cultural teaching in EFL classes (Han, 2002; Pan, 2001; Xiao, 2007). Firstly, there has been an increasing awareness of teaching both home and target culture (Pan, 2001; Si, 1998; Zhao, 2004). Researchers propose that the interaction between home and target culture should replace mere input of target cultures, and the teaching of both cultures is equally important (Gao, 1994; Zhao, 2004). The reason to teach home culture is varied. For some scholars (e.g., Su, 1996; Xiao, 2007), it is more to facilitate the learning of target language and culture as they believe increased understanding of home culture has a positive effect on learning the target culture. For others (e.g., Xu, 2004), it is to protect traditional Chinese culture from being lost in the process of learning a foreign language. From the intercultural communication perspective, Xu (2000) states that the acquisition of both home and target culture allows the interlocutors in intercultural communication to voice one's cultural identity and at the same time achieve maximum mutual understanding. In these views cultural teaching is considered to help students to learn cultural knowledge. Cultural teaching strategies proposed under such views mostly revolve around teaching cultural knowledge (Zhong & Zhao, 2000).

Further, Chinese EFL scholars began to identify the goal of foreign language learning as a means of achieving successful intercultural communication, which requires

redefining the nature and objectives of cultural teaching. Teaching cultural knowledge alone is no longer sufficient for students to attain effective intercultural communication. The objective of cultural teaching has been expanded to include promoting the acquisition of cultural knowledge, awareness, and understanding (Cao, 1998; Chen, 2000; Han, 2002; Pu, 1997; Zhang & Zhang, 2002). Some scholars suggest that intercultural communicative competence should be the ultimate goal of cultural teaching in foreign language education and some teaching pedagogies have been proposed with the intent of promoting the acquisition of intercultural competence (Chen, 2001; Jiang & Fan, 2002; Hu & Gao, 1997; Wang, 1999).

Though a large body of literature has discussed intercultural communication and intercultural competence from a theoretical and pedagogical perspective in China (Chen, 2000; Lin, 2006; Pan, 2007; Wang, 2008; Xiao, 2007; Yang & Zhuang, 2007; Zhang, 2006; Zhao, 2004), the teaching and learning of intercultural competence have not been sufficiently researched through empirical studies (e.g., Li & Wang, 2007). There have been many studies on intercultural learning experience of Chinese students attending British, North American, and New Zealand universities (e.g. Holmes, 2005; Gu & Maley, 2008, Spencer-Oatey & Xiong, 2006; Wang & Falconer, 2005). These studies mainly aimed to explore Chinese students' intercultural experiences and their social and academic challenges in adapting to a new country and educational system, in order to improve the intercultural learning experiences of Chinese students in western institutions. They also provided useful information for the universities to offer appropriate support and

programs to assist Chinese students in terms of academic and intercultural adaptation.

***Cultural teaching at Chinese universities.*** China's national *College English Curriculum Requirements* (for non-English major students) (China Ministry of Education, 2004, 2007) outlines the objectives for College English course as to (a) develop students' comprehensive ability to use the language in order for them to conduct effective communication in English, (b) enhance their self-learning ability, and (c) foster their comprehensive cultural competence. It states that College English is more than a language course that provides basic language knowledge, it is also a revenue for students to broaden their views and get to know about different cultures in the world; and it requires cultural enhancement which aims to help students to achieve effective intercultural communication in order to meet the need for China's economic development and international communication. However, in terms of specific language teaching objectives, the curriculum tends to focus more explicitly on the linguistic and communicative competence dimensions in the form of the five skills in English, namely, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating skills. It does not provide a detailed curriculum structure or articulate the objectives for cultural teaching.

Despite the fact that the importance and contents of cultural teaching have gained attention from EFL scholars, classroom teaching still falls behind theoretical expectation. As Xiao (2007) points out, linguistic input dominates most classrooms and for those who do incorporate cultural content in their teaching, it is largely dependent on their personal preference as what and how culture is taught. Studies show that university English major

students have a limited knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture (Lu, 1999; Shi & Wang, 2001). A gap exists between Chinese university students' cultural competence and the desired outcomes of intercultural language teaching. Zhang (2003) investigated 204 university students who took English as a major or English combined major. Her findings suggest that a great discrepancy existed between students' linguistic and cultural knowledge and competence. Students believed that their teachers, textbooks, and teachers' teaching practices could not meet their needs in terms of cultural learning. Her investigation with 33 EFL teachers also showed that they did not integrate enough cultural teaching in their English class.

The fact that cultural teaching has been either missing or remained at the stage of teaching knowledge about English speaking countries makes teaching intercultural competence a significant goal of EFL education in China and a heavy responsibility on language teachers' professional development. The practices of intercultural language teaching need to be proposed based on the kinds of instructional activities that are already used successfully in Chinese EFL classroom (Corbett, 2003).

### **Teacher Knowledge and Teacher Education**

Garrido and Alvarez (2006) suggest that the reason why EFL teaching has not yet met the objective of promoting students' acquisition of intercultural competence learning is, in part, due to the fact that language teachers are not confident and fully prepared to implement it. Teachers play a key role in any educational reform (Fullan, 2001; Kennedy, 1996). As researchers have argued, intercultural competence teaching should not be

separated from L2 teaching; it should be taught in conjunction with the language from the very beginning of L2 instruction (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1997). It increases language teachers' duties and responsibilities, and consequently demands professional development to place intercultural competence teaching as an integrated part in language education (Sercu, 2006). Intercultural competence teaching as an innovation brings to language education and teacher education and development many theoretical and practical implications, which, on the one hand, need to be addressed to, and understood by language teachers; on the other hand, need to be transformed and realised in language classrooms (Garrido & Alvarez, 2006).

### ***Teacher Knowledge***

What can teacher educators do to prepare and help teachers to achieve intercultural competence teaching? Before answering this question, it is important to understand what impacts teachers' teaching practices. Researchers (e.g., Connelly & Clandinin, 2000; Xu & Connelly, 2009) make a distinction between *knowledge-for-teachers* and *teacher knowledge*. The former refers to the knowledge and skills that are taught to teachers in order to implement the required curriculum, and the latter refers to, as Xu and Connelly (2009) define, "a narrative construct which references the totality of a person's personal practical knowledge gained from formal and informal educational experience", which includes knowledge-for-teachers (p.221). The researchers suggest that it is their holistic experience, rather than what they are taught, that determines their teaching plans and actions. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) use a metaphor of *teachers as curriculum*



*planners* to describe the central role that teachers play in curriculum. They argue that how a curriculum is implemented is not determined by the demands and expectations specified in the curriculum, but rather by teachers who actually live out and experience the curriculum. In this sense, they believe that teachers are not curriculum implementers, but rather curriculum planners. It is therefore critical to approach and inquire into their teacher knowledge as holistic experience in order to understand their teaching practices and help them to achieve new teaching objectives. The present study inquired into how Chinese EFL teachers experience cultural teaching in their teaching practice. It focused on two dimensions of their teacher knowledge, namely, their beliefs and intercultural competence.

***Teacher beliefs.*** Teacher beliefs reflect an important attitudinal and cognitive dimension of teacher knowledge and it is found to have an influence on teachers' teaching and learning practices. What teachers believe influences what they say and do, helps to form their instructional behaviours, and consequently has an impact on teaching innovations (Castro, Sercu & Mendez Garcia, 2004; Errington, 2001, 2004; Farrell & Tan Kiat Kun, 2007, Johnson, 1992; Pajares, 1992). Errington (2004) defines teachers' beliefs as "dispositions regarding teaching and learning. These encompass held beliefs about what teachers believe they should be teaching, what learners should be learning, and the respective roles of teachers and learners in pursuing both" (p.40). The researcher argues that teachers' beliefs "appear to have a potentially significant impact on innovation by influencing what is possible, desirable, achievable and relevant from the teacher's own

governing perspective” (p. 40). Tillema (1994) found that teachers’ beliefs also filter their own knowledge acquisition process and therefore learning is more likely to be achieved if the content of teacher training corresponds with teachers’ beliefs. The researcher proposes that an understanding of teachers’ established teacher knowledge, especially their beliefs, should be taken into consideration in order to achieve effective teacher training and development.

In second and foreign language education, it has been largely claimed that teachers’ beliefs have an impact on their instructional practices and play a critical role in their effective implementation of innovation (Dill & Associates, 1990; Freeman, 1989, 2001; Johnson, 1992; Richards & Nunan, 1990). It is suggested that beliefs from an intercultural perspective about language and cultural teaching would help teachers to promote students’ acquisition of intercultural competence (Sercu, 2006).

North American and European researchers have conducted studies pertaining to second and foreign language teachers’ beliefs and perceptions about intercultural competence teaching (Castro, Sercu & Mendez Garcia, 2004; Larzen-Ostermark, 2008; Sercu, 2006; Sercu et al., 2005; Sercu, Mendez Garcia & Castro Prieto, 2005). Their findings suggest that most language teachers still perceive that their primary role is to develop students’ linguistic competence, which to a certain extent prevents them from implementing intercultural competence teaching. Sercu (2006) explored foreign language teachers in seven European countries regarding the intercultural dimension of language teaching. She concluded that most teachers are moving towards intercultural competence

teaching. However, the majority of them still consider teaching communicative competence as the key in foreign language education. In the study, the teachers believed that cultural teaching could be realised through teacher-centered transmission of cultural knowledge. In Larzen-Ostermark's (2008) study, though most Finnish EFL teachers believed that cultural teaching was important, they also perceived cultural teaching as the transmission of cultural knowledge, which was associated with their conceptualisation of culture as factual knowledge. Few teachers were able to identify the understanding of and respect for otherness as the objective of cultural teaching which aims to promote empathy and tolerance in language teaching. Few teachers believed that they were well prepared to approach cultural teaching from an intercultural perspective.

Teachers' beliefs about intercultural competence teaching has been mainly researched and discussed in English speaking countries in the context of teaching English as a second language (ESL); or in the context of teaching a foreign language in proximity to the target community, such as teaching French in other European Union countries. These contexts have one thing in common: most teachers have close contact with the target culture, which may help to shape their particular perceptions of cultural teaching. Little consideration has been given to other foreign language teaching settings, where language teachers have little interaction with the target culture and community, such as Chinese EFL context.

Studies have been conducted to explore Chinese teachers' beliefs about the objectives of EFL teaching (Zhan, 2008; Zhou, 2005). For instance, Zhan's (2008) study

suggests that EFL teachers at secondary schools perceived language proficiency and language use as the major objectives of their teaching. In another study by Zhou (2005), linguistic dimension was regarded by teachers as the key objective and major component for university EFL teaching. According to Xiao (2007), cultural teaching at the post secondary level has not been very effective in terms of promoting students' acquisition of intercultural competence and preparing them for intercultural communication. Very few studies were found to be particularly focused on Chinese EFL teachers' beliefs about and understanding of cultural teaching from an intercultural perspective.

***Teachers' intercultural competence.*** As Byram (1997) suggests, increased intercultural competence allows teachers to be more aware of their subconscious cultural perspectives (for instance, teachers' prejudice or stereotype about the target culture acquired through their personal history and experience), how they are expressed, and the subtle influence they have on students. In this sense, language teachers are intercultural learners themselves (Byram, 1997; Larzen-Ostermark, 2008). Very few empirical studies have been found to explore language teachers' intercultural competence and its impact on cultural teaching. Park's (2006) study is among the few that provided empirical findings. He explored Korean secondary EFL pre-service teachers' intercultural competence. His findings suggest that, in terms of intercultural competence, these teachers clearly recognized cultural difference, but they perceived that cultural differences were unimportant and that all cultures shared basic and universal characteristics. Park's study focused on the relationship between EFL teachers' linguistic and intercultural competence

and did not discuss the impact of teachers' intercultural competence on their cultural teaching.

Most Chinese EFL teachers learn English in China and only a very small number of them get a chance to visit or study in an English speaking country even for a short period of time. Their personal experience in the relatively homogeneous Chinese culture community does not help them to develop intercultural competence either. The literature I reviewed reveals that very few studies explored Chinese university EFL teachers' intercultural competence and its relationship with teachers' beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching.

### **Summary**

Intercultural competence teaching marks a significant shift in L2 education history and provides us with a new perspective for viewing the relationship between language and culture. Over the past decades, great effort has been made to promote the teaching of culture as an integral part of L2 teaching, much of which, however, remains at the theoretical level. A review of the literature reveals that, there is a wide diversity of L2 teaching demands and contexts worldwide and it is hard to propose a 'one size fits all' approach. It is particularly true for this new emerging approach of intercultural competence teaching, as it has not yet fully developed and only provides L2 educators with the outline for a theoretical framework. Teachers' beliefs about the intercultural dimension of language teaching and their cultural teaching practices have been mostly discussed in western contexts. Little consideration has been given to other foreign

language teaching settings, where the language is treated primarily as a school subject and the majority of learners have little interaction with native language speakers, such as the Chinese EFL context.

The major objectives of current teacher education and training programs in China still focus on developing linguistic proficiency and learning language teaching theories which only enables teachers to teach linguistic competence (Zhou, 2005). Chinese EFL teacher educators and researchers need to give more attention to intercultural dimension. Teacher training will help teachers to acquire intercultural competence, to develop new beliefs about and understanding of intercultural teaching, which would help them to redirect their teaching practices in order to enrich their educational experience. Before any further implementation can be designed and carried out, it is important to gain insight into teachers' existing teacher knowledge, which will help teacher educators in planning and conducting in-service teacher training and help explore the practical and effective way to introduce and promote intercultural competence teaching within local Chinese EFL educational contexts.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

A mixed methods research design shaped within a narrative framework was used in this dissertation, which was developed through conducting a pilot study together with my co-supervisors.

#### **Pilot Study**

In the summer and early fall of 2009, a pilot study (Zhou, Xu & Bayley, 2010) for this dissertation was conducted with a convenience sample of 20 EFL teachers from different universities in China, who were attending a summer program in Beijing to prepare them for doctoral programs in universities outside China. In the pilot study, we employed a mixed methods design shaped within a narrative inquiry framework with Dr. Jonathan Bayley guiding the survey design and Dr. Shijing Xu helping to shape the study from a narrative inquiry perspective.

The pilot study helped me, for the quantitative portion of the dissertation, to verify the internal reliability of the questionnaire and make sure that the language of the questionnaire was understandable and the items were understood as they were intended to be. Necessary changes were made in order to achieve higher validity and reliability. This will be discussed in more detail in the *Instrument* section below.

In terms of the qualitative portion of the dissertation, through conducting the pilot study, I developed a new understanding of qualitative methodology and re-shaped my dissertation within a narrative thinking framework which is different from my dissertation

proposal. The pilot study was the first time that I embraced a qualitative method – previously I undertook quantitative study where I looked at things from a purely quantitative perspective and saw participants as subjects to be researched. However, my experience with the pilot study has a great impact on me in terms of my belief about and understanding of the nature of teacher education research and research in general. I learned by doing – the pilot study provided me with the apprenticeship opportunity to work side by side with Dr. Xu who guided me through the interviews and qualitative data analysis and discussion. Throughout the process, she modeled for me a narrative way of inquiry, and more importantly, a narrative way of thinking.

I used to believe that what teacher educators should do is to inform teachers what to teach and how to teach it. However, the experience with the pilot study opened up a new window for me through which I am able to see how teachers' beliefs and teaching practices are not shaped by what is being told or taught to them, but rather by their teacher knowledge, which is believed to be their *personal practical knowledge* (Xu & Connelly, 2009). According to Connelly and Clandinin (1988), personal practical knowledge lies in “the person's past experience, in the person's present mind and body, and in the person's future plans and actions” (p.26). I began to realize that we as educators should first understand and appreciate teacher knowledge as personal practical knowledge, and then work with them to help achieve desired teaching objectives (Xu & Connelly, 2009). Through the pilot study, I also started to see the value and rationale in approaching teachers' lived experience through narrative thinking, which helped me to



understand and explain the on-going life space that helps shape their personal practical knowledge. This is how I came to a narrative thinking framework to gain an insight into Chinese EFL teachers' beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching.

## **Research Design & Narrative Framework**

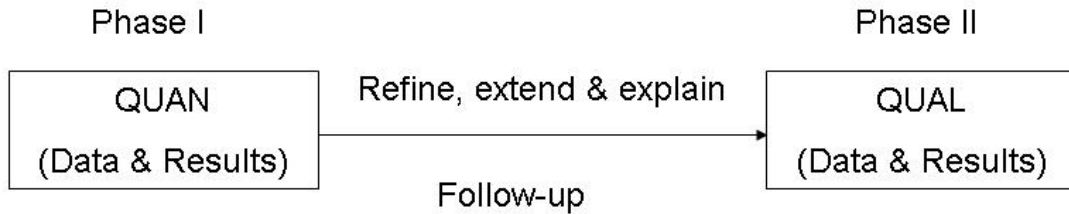
### ***Research Design***

A mixed methods research design shaped within a narrative framework was used to collect quantitative and qualitative data. A mixed methods design can be used when a researcher chooses to combine, both quantitative and qualitative data to explore a research problem (Creswell, 2007). According to Creswell, in mixed methods study, the researcher can obtain more comprehensive data than if either method is used alone to understand the complexity of a research problem and the combination of quantitative and qualitative data can make use of the strength of both approaches.

In this study, I employed the explanatory mixed methods design, which “consists of first collecting quantitative data and then collecting qualitative data to help explain or elaborate on the quantitative results” (Creswell, 2007, p. 560). Figure 3.1 is a presentation of explanatory mixed methods design. Data were collected through two phases. In phase I, quantitative data were obtained using a survey questionnaire; in phase II, open-ended follow-up interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data.

Figure 3.1

*Explanatory mixed methods design (Creswell, 2007)*



In order for the results to be meaningful for a significant population of university EFL teachers in China, quantitative data from a large number of teachers were needed (a) to generate the average of their intercultural competence, (b) to describe the broad trend of commonalities and variations of their beliefs and self-reported teaching practices, (c) to explore statistically the relationship between these variables, and last but not least, (d) to identify complex and/or puzzling issues that need to be inquired into in order to gain a comprehensive insight into teachers' beliefs and practices. The documented literature in the literature review chapter and the pilot study show that teachers' beliefs and teaching practices are rather complex, which is difficult to be explored comprehensively by using a survey questionnaire alone. Qualitative data in this study allowed me to (a) explore teachers' various beliefs about and understanding of cultural teaching which were identified in quantitative data; (b) extend a complex picture of whether, when, and how their cultural teaching practices occur in specific contexts, and (c) inquire into how teachers develop their beliefs and practices over time through lived experience. A flexible interview protocol provided participants with the opportunity to express their views in their own words without being limited by the length and written form of a questionnaire.

The explanatory mixed methods design, using both quantitative and qualitative data, has the potential to reveal a fuller and more meaningful understanding of the concerned issues than if either dataset had been used alone.

### ***Narrative Framework***

The mixed methods research design is shaped within a narrative thinking framework. Different lines of narrative research have been found in many social sciences and humanities disciplines (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Riesman & Speedy, 2007). This study follows the line of narrative research based on Connelly and Clandinin's theoretical framework of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Xu & Connelly, 2008, 2009). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) define narrative inquiry as: "a way of understanding experience. It is a collaboration between researcher and participants, over time, in a place or series of places, and in social interaction with milieus" (p.20). This theoretical framework of narrative inquiry has been used increasingly in teacher education and development research (Elbaz-Luwisch, 2004, 2008; Liu & Xu, 2011; Xu, 2006; Xu & Liu, 2009; Xu & Stevens, 2005).

Though this dissertation is not a narrative inquiry in the strict sense of the term, it follows the spirit of narrative inquiry, that is, *to think narratively*. Researchers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Xu & Connelly, 2009) propose that to think narratively is to think of life experience in a three dimensional space including *temporal continuum*, *personal-social continuum*, and *place*. A temporal continuum (past-present-future) in narrative thinking is, as Xu and Connelly propose, to see things as "flowing out of the past and into

the future” (p.224). The researchers point out that, for personal-social continuum, narrative thinking means to see an individual in constant interaction with the social contexts – “personal qualities, their social qualities, the environment and teacher interactions between the personal and the social” need to be taken into consideration at the same time in a teacher development setting (p. 224). The researchers further state that the personal and social qualities and the interaction between them should also be seen in a temporal continuum as an on-going and ever changing phenomenon, which takes place at different places. According to Xu and Connelly, the third dimension, place, is a determining factor which shapes one’s identity in the personal and social interactions. Thinking narratively, as the researchers summarize, means “using one’s mind to imagine life spaces that flow in time, that consist of personal and social interactions, and that move from place to place” (p. 225).

The present study is shaped within a narrative thinking framework. It is expected that the study would provide an insight into Chinese university EFL teachers’ beliefs and practices of cultural teaching through an understanding of the three dimensions of their on-going life space (Connelly & Clandinin, 2005; Xu & Connelly, 2009). Qualitative data were collected to reflect the *temporal continuum*, *personal-social continuum*, and *place* in their cultural teaching experience and teacher development, which helps to shape and frame their individual teacher knowledge regarding cultural teaching.

## **Participants**

This study involves a convenience sample. In convenience sampling, participants are recruited simply because they are willing and available to participate in the study (Creswell, 2008; Huck, 2008). Due to the large population of Chinese EFL teachers, it is impossible to include each individual. Using a convenience sample with participants who are easily accessible to the researcher is a practical choice (Creswell, 2008). According to my own research experience with Chinese teachers, many of them may not return the survey unless the researcher is personally connected to them (for instance, through a friend or colleague). Therefore, only teachers from the five universities where I have personal contacts were invited to participate in this study, so as to increase response rate. As a result of taking a convenience sample, I may not be able to say with confidence that the sample is representative of the population, but the sample can provide useful data for understanding the research problem and answering the research questions posed (Creswell, 2008).

I attempted to solicit response from approximately 750 university EFL teachers, including assistant lecturers, lecturers, and associate and full professors (who are all referred to as teachers in China) in five universities (A, B, C, D, and E) located in Harbin, the capital city of Heilongjiang province in North-eastern China. Harbin has a population of 10 million (including the suburban areas). There are 25 post secondary institutions in the city, including 16 universities and 9 colleges. Most of the prestigious universities in China are located in Beijing, Shanghai, and cities in Eastern and Southern China;

according to Chinese University Evaluation Report (CUAA, 2009), none of the five participating universities' comprehensive ranking is among the top twenty. EFL teachers in these five universities are representative of teachers in many Chinese universities.

In Chinese universities, EFL teachers can be found in two departments, namely the English (Linguistics and Literature) department and College English department. In the former case, EFL teachers teach English major courses to students who are specialized in English (linguistics and/or literature); in the latter case, teachers are responsible for English courses for non-English major students across the university. The term College English actually refers to University English – it has been called this because the word *college* used to be referred to as both university and college in earlier times.

China has the largest number of students in higher education worldwide (CYOL, 2007). Approximately 18,593,000 students were enrolled in higher education in China, and the number has increased due to university and college enrolment expansion since 1999 (CYOL, 2007). There are 15,000 to 30,000 students enrolled in each of the five participating universities in this study. All undergraduate students (non-English majors) are required to take College English courses for the first two years (4 semesters) of their four years of learning. Each week, students have four English classes, two for (*intensive*) *reading*, and two for *listening* and *speaking*. Reading class is normally situated in a regular classroom and listening and speaking class is in a language lab with multi-media equipments. Because of the high demand nature and the large enrolments in the College English course, there are a large number of College English teachers in the five

universities. Approximately, there are 750 EFL teachers in these five universities. Among them, 230 teachers are from English departments and 520 are from College English departments.

### ***Teachers' Pre-service Education***

In China, university EFL teachers have different degrees ranging from B.A. to Ph.D. They normally receive their B.A. in English Linguistic and Literature from the English department at a university (Hu, 2007). For those who have a M.A., the degree is traditionally in the field of English literature, translation, and linguistics.

At most universities, a doctoral degree is now a requirement for hiring new teachers to the English department to teach English major students though it was not the case before. At many prestigious universities, a doctoral degree is required for hiring new teachers to College English department as well. The requirement for a doctoral degree creates peer pressure and some in-service teachers who do not have a doctoral degree including those who teach College English and English major courses begin to consider pursuing a doctoral degree.

Cultural teaching has just started to gain attention from the Chinese EFL education community. When current teachers were studying in their Bachelor of Arts program at the English department, their academic courses mainly revolved around the linguistic dimension of language learning. The courses offered at that time included courses for the development of language skills, such as *Intensive Reading*, *Extensive Reading*, *Listening*, *Speaking*, *Writing*, and *Translation*; literature courses such as *An Introduction to*

*American and British Literature*; linguistic courses such as *An introduction to Linguistics*; and survey courses about the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Cultural dimension was not a focus in curriculum at that time. In recent years, some English departments have started to offer Master of Arts program in the field of intercultural communication.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

#### ***Phase I: Quantitative Data***

In the first phase of this study, quantitative data were collected through a survey questionnaire (Appendix B). A paper and pencil survey questionnaire was distributed to all potential participants across the five participating universities. Due to some personal reasons, I was not able to collect quantitative data in person in China. A few of my personal contacts who are EFL teachers in the English and College English departments at all five universities offered their help with collecting the data. They served as the procedure/administrative alternates. A personal contact from each department was designated to distribute and collect the questionnaires.

The personal contacts were asked to put a questionnaire envelope in each teacher's mailbox in their department. The following was enclosed in the envelope: a letter of invitation (Appendix A), a copy of the questionnaire (a contact information sheet was attached to the questionnaire for participants to write their name, phone, and/or email on), and a return envelope. The invitation letter (1) explained the purpose of the study; (2) invited teachers to participate; (3) asked them to put the questionnaire into the return



envelope after they finished it (within two weeks) and put the sealed envelope into the personal contact's mailbox (the person's name was provided); and (4) invited them to participate in follow-up interviews. Those who were willing to be interviewed were asked to leave their contact information: (1) if they would like to be identified, they could write their information at the end of the questionnaire; (2) if they would not like to be identified, they could leave their information on the separate contact information sheet and put it into the personal contact's mailbox, separate from the envelope.

Ten days after distributing the questionnaires, the personal contacts were asked to put a friendly note in each teacher's mailbox reminding him or her to fill out and return the questionnaire and informing them that, if needed, they could go to the personal contact for another copy of the questionnaire.

### ***Phase II: Qualitative Data***

In the second phase, qualitative data were generated from follow-up face-to-face and phone interviews. I contacted those who had indicated their willingness to participate in an interview. In the end, eight participants agreed to be interviewed. Four of them taught English major courses, three taught College English courses, and one taught both. They had 8 to 25 years of teaching experience.

I contacted each participant a number of times by telephone in advance in order to schedule a time and place for the interview. It also helped to build rapport and a trustful relationship with the participants, which is important in order to achieve high quality data (Flick, 2006; Riessman, 2008). I knew five of the participants personally: three of them

used to be my classmates when I was studying in my Bachelor of Arts program and I have known them for 12 to 13 years; one was my classmate in my Master of Arts program and I have known her for 9 years; and the other one was my professor in both my Bachelor and Master of Arts program. Their relationship with me and our shared history of teaching and learning helped them to diminish the anxiety during the interview and allowed them to share freely their teaching and learning experience, as well as their beliefs, feelings, and emotions, which helped to achieve the validity and reliability of the interview data.

An interview was conducted at a time convenient for each participant at his or her university, either in his or her office or an empty classroom, except for one participant who was interviewed at her home. The interviews were audio taped and conducted in Chinese, because it was thought to be much easier for a person to express complicated ideas, values, and opinions using his or her own native language.

During the interviews, participants shared with me their lived stories of cultural teaching and learning. They elaborated on their beliefs about and understanding of cultural teaching in language education; whether, when, and how their cultural teaching practices occurred in specific contexts; the challenges they had in cultural teaching; things they felt they would like to improve in terms of cultural teaching in their perspectives; and their expectations for teacher training program. Interviews were guided by, but were not restricted to, a predetermined protocol which was generated according to quantitative

results (see Appendix C). The interviews were constructed in such a way that they reflected the narrative thinking framework.

During the interview, the interviewer-interviewee relationship was transformed into one of narrator and listener. Broad questions were framed which invited personal narratives and encouraged teachers to share their lived experience of teaching and learning, which provided me with the opportunity to get meaning out of the authentic contexts of their voices and stories (Silverman, 2001). Any emerging themes, stories, subjects which the teachers were willing to share were welcome. Follow-up phone interviews were conducted with some participants after the initial interviews, so as to catch up with the participants and develop a “temporal continuum” and holistic narrative understanding of their teaching experience and teacher development (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p. 223).

### **Survey Instrument**

The questionnaire was written in simple English. The questionnaire was pilot tested with a convenience sample of 20 EFL teachers from different universities in China, who were attending a summer program in Beijing in 2009 to prepare them for doctoral programs in universities outside China. The pilot study helped to make sure that the language was understandable and the items were easily understood. Some changes were made, such as changing *Slightly important* to *Somewhat important* on the four-point scale for questions 9 and 10, and changing *Slightly agree/disagree* to *Somewhat agree/disagree* on the 4-point Likert scale for question 11. Some wording was also subtly changed in

order to make the language more appropriate and easy to follow for this particularly population. For example, in Chinese contexts, *listening* and *speaking* usually come in pairs to indicate both notions while talking about EFL teaching and learning. Therefore, they were addressed in a combined way in the questionnaire to make it easy for the Chinese teachers to follow. It was the same with the expression of *reading* and *writing*. All Chinese university EFL teachers have a Bachelor's degree in English and some have a Master's or a doctoral degree (Zhou, 2005). Therefore, the participating EFL teachers in this study had little or no problem understanding items in the questionnaire.

Considerable thought was given to the design and construction of the questionnaire in order to make it “well-written and manageable” (Nardi, 2005, p. 67) and “readable, visually pleasing, and comprehensive” (p. 87). For instance, an effort was made to keep the questionnaire at an appropriate length and at the same time inquired about various facets of teachers' beliefs and teaching practices as comprehensively as possible. The formatting of the questionnaire was given much attention to make it look un-crowded with “clear spacing and visually appealing fonts” (Nardi, 2005, p. 72). It was divided into three sections and all questions were numbered continuously, which made it easy for participants to follow. Instructions were clearly stated and key words were underlined in an effort to help participants to focus on key words. The questionnaire was in a booklet form in order to make it more visually appealing. The questionnaire contained the following three sections.

### ***Section 1***

In the first section (questions 1-8), participants' demographic information was obtained, such as age, gender, educational level, courses taught, years of teaching experience, and experiences of living/studying/visiting abroad.

### ***Section 2***

In the second section (questions 9-15), participants' beliefs about cultural teaching and their self-reported cultural teaching practices were explored. The design of the questions in this section was guided by Sercu et al.'s (2005) instrument. The questions were shaped to be appropriate for the university EFL educational context in China. This section contained 4-point scale questions. The questions inquired into various facets of teachers' beliefs and teaching practices as comprehensively as was possible while taking into consideration an appropriate length of the questionnaire.

***Teachers' beliefs (questions 9-11).*** In this study, teachers' beliefs about cultural teaching were approached in terms of: (1) their beliefs about the objectives for EFL teaching. Participants were required to indicate in question 9 the degree (on a 4-point scale from *Not important* to *Very important*) to which they believed specific objectives were important for EFL teaching. Nine objectives were listed that reflect the teaching objectives required by China's national *College English Curriculum Requirements* (for non-English major students) (China Ministry of Education, 2007) and some key objectives required in the *Outline of English Teaching for English Major Programs at Higher Institutions* (China Ministry of Education, 2000); (2) their understanding of the

objectives for cultural teaching. This part reflects how teachers understand cultural teaching by identifying cultural teaching objectives. Participants were asked to indicate in question 10, the degree (on a 4-point scale from *Not important* to *Very important*) to which they believed the objectives were important for cultural teaching. Eight objectives were listed which reflect the concept of the knowledge, attitude, awareness and skills dimension in Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model; and (3) teachers' beliefs about some aspects of cultural competence teaching. Participants were asked to indicate in question 11 their attitudes toward six statements about cultural teaching on a 4-point Likert scale from *Strongly disagree* to *Strongly agree*.

***Cultural teaching practice (questions 12-15).*** Teachers' cultural teaching practices were explored through the contents of their teaching and partly the pedagogies applied to promote the acquisition of intercultural competence, namely the dimension of *what to teach* and *how to teach*. They are reflected in the following aspects: (a) the frequency of culture related topics that teachers touched upon and the frequency of applying intercultural competence teaching in their EFL classes; and (b) the frequency of instructional activities regarding cultural teaching incorporated in class. Participants were asked to indicate the frequency by choosing one from four options, namely, *Never*, *Sometimes*, *Frequently*, and *Always*.

***Content validity & internal reliability.*** Content validity refers to "the extent to which the questions on the instrument and the scores from these questions are representative of all the possible questions that a researcher could ask about the content or

skills” (Creswell, 2007, p. 172). According to Huck (2004), content validity identifies the degree to which questions asked on an instrument measure all that they are supposed to measure. A common way to establish content validity is to have experts evaluate whether the items measure what they are supposed to measure (Creswell, 2007; Huck, 2004). In order to address the issue of content validity for this questionnaire, reviews from the professors on my dissertation committee were received. The professors have expertise and have conducted extensive research in the field of survey design, teacher education, and intercultural communication respectively.

According to Creswell (2007), “reliability means that scores from an instrument are stable and consistent” (p. 169). Huck (2008) defines internal reliability, which is also called internal consistency reliability, as:

consistency across the parts of a measuring instrument, with the ‘parts’ being individual questions or subsets of questions. To the extent that these parts ‘hang together’ and measure the same thing, the full instrument is said to possess high internal consistency reliability. (p. 79)

If internal reliability is achieved, an individual’s response from the instrument is “reliable” and “accurate” across questions on the instrument (Creswell, 2007, p. 171). The internal reliability of the second section of the questionnaire (question 9-15) was examined. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, edition 13.0) software was used to calculate coefficient alpha (or simply called alpha), a method used for evaluating internal reliability (Huck, 2008). As suggested by Creswell (2007), “if the items are

scored as continuous variables, the alpha provides a coefficient to estimate consistency of scores on an instrument” (p. 171). The result of coefficient alpha is a number between 0 and 1 and the closer the number is to 1, the better the instrument is in terms of internal reliability (Huck, 2004). For this study ( $n=201$ ), the coefficient alpha of .852, .861, .903, .879, .858, .927 (for questions 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, and 15, respectively) suggest that the questions comprising section 2 were internally consistent.

### ***Section 3***

In the third section, participants’ intercultural competence was evaluated. Due to the complex and multi-dimensional make-up of intercultural competence, it appears rather difficult to assess an individual’s intercultural competence, particularly with quantitative methods (Byram, 1997, 2000). Fantini’s (2007) Assessment of Intercultural Competence (AIC) is among the few scales that use a survey instrument to measure individual’s intercultural competence. AIC measures four constructs of intercultural competence - knowledge, skill, attitude, and awareness. Although the four constructs are not defined under Byram’s (1997) intercultural competence model, they are very similar to the conception of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and critical cultural awareness dimensions identified by Byram. AIC has recently been increasingly documented and used in educational research. It was proved to be both valid and reliable (Fantini, 2007; Sinicropo, Norris & Watanabe, 2007; Wang, Peng & Lu, 2006). O’Neill (2008) developed an Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) survey based on Fantini’s questionnaire



in order to make it appropriate for children in the American and Korean contexts (O'Neill, 2008).

AIC was modified to fit this study. Special attention was given with respect to crafting and shaping the questions in order to make them appropriate for a Chinese university EFL educational context. Some ideas were drawn from O'Neill's instrument. In total, the modified AIC contained 20 6-point scale questions. Among them, five, four, seven, and four items were used respectively to evaluate the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness dimension of intercultural competence. Participants were asked to indicate their opinions towards each statement from 0 (*Not at all*) to 5 (*Very high*).

The coefficient alpha was also performed for the Intercultural Competence questions in section three to examine internal consistency reliability. The coefficient alpha of .960 suggests that the questions comprising section three was internally consistent.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

#### ***Quantitative Data***

Quantitative data obtained in phase I were computer-coded. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, edition 13.0) was used to perform data analyses. The trend and variations of teachers' intercultural competence, their beliefs about and self-reported practices of cultural teaching were summarized and described using descriptive statistics. How teachers' cultural teaching practices reflect the objectives of intercultural

competence teaching was explored. Further, correlational statistics analyses were performed to examine the relationships posed in the research questions.

### ***Qualitative Data***

The follow-up interviews were audio taped and transcribed verbatim in Chinese and saved as an individual Microsoft Word file for each interview. Transcripts were analysed in Chinese in order to keep the authenticity of the contexts where the interviews were conducted. Findings were translated into English and reported in the Qualitative Results chapter below.

The following procedures were followed to analyse qualitative data: (a) each transcript was first read through in order to capture an overall flow and gain a general understanding of the teachers' beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching; (b) transcripts were manually coded. While reading along the transcript line by line, emerging themes were identified and a descriptive term was assigned as the name of the theme. The name of the theme was inserted as a comment into the Word file using *Insert Comment* in Microsoft Word, which also divided the transcript into "meaningful analytical units" (Johnson & Christensen, 2008, p. 534) and marked the beginning and end of the units, thus making it easy to catch up in follow-up analysis; Reoccurring themes across the transcripts were marked with the same descriptive term consistently. Over 50 themes were generated; (c) individual themes were categorized into group themes to identify thematic patterns that emerged in the interview data, such as *Perceptions about Cultural Teaching, Constraints in Cultural Integration, and Teacher*

*Professional Development*; (d) a Word document was created with a list of all themes identified in the transcripts including both group themes and the individual themes that go under them; and (e) meaningful analytical units were pasted from the original transcripts to the theme list under corresponding theme, thus forming clusters of analytical units under each theme. Data were then analysed and synthesised to gain an insight into teachers' beliefs and teaching practices.

When I was learning English as a foreign language in China, intercultural competence teaching was not a focus in my class. After I arrived in Canada and started to learn English as a second language, I was involved in intercultural encounters on a daily basis. I found that I definitely needed intercultural competence in order to achieve effective intercultural communication. However, in China, most EFL teachers do not experience intercultural interactions as frequently as I do here in an ESL context. Therefore, they may not have as strong beliefs about intercultural competence teaching as I do, which is quite reasonable, though not preferable. While collecting data, I constantly reminded myself not to show this bias to the participants in my interactions with them, in order to minimize my influence on their response in both questionnaire and interview. While analyzing and interpreting data, I took into consideration the Chinese EFL educational context and discussed participants' responses in an objective and fair manner without being influenced by my personal bias.

## CHAPTER IV

### QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

Quantitative data were analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, edition 13.0). The trend, commonalities, and variations of teachers' intercultural competence and their established beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching were described and the relationships between them were discussed. The complex and/or puzzling issues that emerged in quantitative data are explained and supplemented by the qualitative findings in Chapter V.

#### Demographic Information

Two hundred and seven ( $n=207$ ) Chinese university EFL teachers participated in the study. Among them, six did not complete the whole questionnaire. Therefore, 201 teachers were included in data analysis. There are four ranks of professors at Chinese universities, namely, assistant lecturer, lecturer, associate professor, and professor. In data analysis I did not differentiate these titles and addressed them all as *teachers*, which is also the most respectful way to address someone in a teaching profession in China.

Participating teachers came from two departments at each of the five universities: the College English department and the English department. A total number of 127 teachers were from the College English departments, where they taught College English courses, a required course to all non-English major students in Chinese universities. Seventy-four teachers were from the English department where they taught English major courses, and 17 teachers taught both. Those teachers who taught both courses were from

the College English department and thus mainly taught College English courses. They may teach one or two English major courses if in the English department there is a shortage of teachers in some subject area (such as translation, American literature, and linguistics) and they happen to have expertise in the area. Therefore, the 17 teachers who taught both courses were counted as College English teachers in data analysis, which made a total of 127 College English teachers. The demographic information of the participating teachers is presented in the table below.

Table 4.1

*Demographic information*

Demographics	College English teachers (n=127)	English major teachers (n=74)
Gender %		
Male	21.3	25.7
Female	78.7	74.3
Age %		
20-25 years old	5.5	1.4
26-30	40.9	25.7
31-35	34.6	33.8
36-40	11.8	21.6
41-45	4.7	10.8
46 & over	2.4	6.8
Years of teaching %		
1-6 yrs	46.5	29.7
7-13 yrs	38.6	33.8
13 yrs & over	14.9	36.5
Degree %		
Bachelor	12.6	9.5
Master	85.8	82.4

PhD	1.6	8.1
Overseas experience		
Yes %	17.3	32.4
Length of time	8.07 months	13.13 months
Teaching load %		
5-7 hours	18.1	27.0
8-10	32.3	39.2
11-13	36.2	27.0
14-16	5.5	5.4
17-19	6.3	1.4
20 & over	1.6	0
No. of students/class %		
30 or less	19.7	63.5
31-40	12.6	20.3
41-50	22.8	1.4
51-60	17.3	6.8
61 & over	27.6	8.1

Among the 127 College English teachers, 78.7% were female, and 21.3% were male. The majority of them (81%) were young teachers under the age of 35. Nearly half of the College English teachers were novice teachers with one to six years of teaching experience. Of all the College English teachers, 12.6% had a Bachelor's degree, 85.8% had a Master's degree, and 1.6% had a Doctoral degree. A small number of them (17.3%) had been to other countries, and their average length of stay was 8.07 months. In terms of their teaching load, 68.5% taught eight to 13 hours per week. The majority of the teachers (67.7%) were required to teach large classes with over 41 students in each of their College English classes.

In comparison with College English teachers, those who taught English major courses were older and more experienced: 39.1% of them were older than 35 and the majority of them had been teaching English for more than seven years. More English major teachers had a Doctoral degree (8.1%) and more of them (32.4%) had overseas experience as compared to College English teachers. They also had less teaching load: 27.0% of them taught five to seven hours per week, 39.2% eight to ten hours, and 27.0% 11 to 13 hours. Most English major teachers (63.5%) taught smaller class with less than 30 students in their classes.

The demographic information presented above reflects the status quo of university EFL teachers in China. Chinese higher education underwent an expansion mainly from 1999 to 2004, which resulted in an increase of student enrolment from 6 million to over 20 million (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). As a result, a great number of new teachers were recruited particularly for subjects such as College English, which is a required course for all non-English major students at all universities. Due to the high-demand nature of College English courses and the substantial number of students enrolled, the teacher-student ratio has always been high for College English courses and these teachers generally have a heavy teaching load.

Moreover, English major teachers have traditionally had smaller classes in order to provide students who major in English with more opportunities to practice the language in class. Teachers who teach English major courses are required to have higher qualifications so as to help their students to become more advanced English learners.

## Teachers' Intercultural Competence

The participating teachers were asked to rate their ability, knowledge, or willingness related to intercultural competence on the modified 20-item AIC instrument which was set up on a 6-point scale from 0 (*Not at All*) to 5 (*Very High*). A single, composite intercultural competence score was also generated for each participant by adding up and then averaging the score of all the 20 items, which range from zero to five. The mean score of 3.24 indicates that teachers' perceived intercultural competence was slightly above *Average* in the 6-point scale.

The instrument measures four dimensions of intercultural competence, namely, knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes. An individual score was calculated for each of the dimensions by adding up and then averaging the score of the items that measure the dimension. The score of the four dimensions of teachers' intercultural competence all fell slightly above *Average*, which indicates that teachers demonstrated average intercultural knowledge, awareness, skills, and attitudes. Among the four dimensions of intercultural competence, the participants demonstrated highest level for attitudes ( $M = 3.51$ ) and lowest level for knowledge ( $M = 3.02$ ).

An Independent-Sample  $t$  test was performed to compare the intercultural competence of teachers who taught English major and College English courses. An Independent-Sample  $t$  test "is used to determine if the means of two unrelated samples differ" (Bryman & Cramer, 2009, p. 175). Statistically significant difference was found between the two groups of teachers in their intercultural competence. Participating



teachers who taught English major courses showed higher intercultural competence than those who taught College English courses ( $t = 2.11, p < .05$ ). Compared with College English teachers, teachers who taught English major courses demonstrated stronger intercultural attitudes ( $t = 2.34, p < .05$ ) and skills ( $t = 2.43, p < .05$ ). It is interesting to note that both groups of teachers had the highest level for attitudes dimension, which is followed by skills and awareness, and the lowest level for knowledge. The result of a  $t$  test indicated that teachers who had overseas experience showed a higher level of knowledge dimension of intercultural competence as compared to those who had not been abroad ( $t = 2.05, p < .05$ ).

In order to compare teachers across the participating universities on their intercultural competence, One-Way ANOVA was conducted. One-way ANOVA is used in statistical analysis to compare the means of three or more unrelated given groups on an independent variable and Post Hoc Multiple Comparisons (a Tukey test is usually used) provides details about how the means differ (Bryman & Cramer, 2009). Teacher groups served as the independent variable, and intercultural competence was the dependent variable. The result indicated that the teachers across the participating universities demonstrated similar intercultural competence. The result of One-Way ANOVA also suggested that teachers' educational degree had an impact on their intercultural competence. Those who received a Doctoral and a Master's degree demonstrated higher level of intercultural competence ( $F(2, 198) = 7.10, p < .01$ ) as well as the knowledge ( $F(2, 198) = 5.95, p < .01$ ), attitudes ( $F(2, 198) = 5.31, p < .01$ ), skills ( $F(2, 198) = 6.23, p$

< .01), and awareness ( $F(2, 198) = 4.94, p < .01$ ) dimensions than teachers with a Bachelor's degree.

### **Teachers' Beliefs about Cultural Teaching**

Teachers' beliefs about cultural teaching were assessed in terms of their perceptions of the objectives of EFL teaching and their understanding of specific objectives, aspects and issues about cultural teaching.

#### ***EFL Teaching Objectives***

Nine objectives for EFL teaching were listed which reflected the teaching objectives outlined in China's national *College English Curriculum Requirements* (for non-English major students in all universities and colleges) (China Ministry of Education, 2007), and some key objectives required in the *Outline of English Teaching for English Major Programs at Higher Institutions* (China Ministry of Education, 2000). Participants were asked to indicate the degree to which they believed the objectives were important on a 4-point scale from 1 (*Not Important*) to 4 (*Very Important*). Among the nine objectives, four of them were indicators for linguistic dimension of EFL teaching objectives, and four were for cultural dimension. Participants' responses are presented below in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

*Teachers' beliefs about the objectives of EFL education*

Objectives of EFL teaching	Not important %	Somewhat important %	Important %	Very important %
<b><i>Linguistic dimension</i></b>				
Foster students' interest in English language learning.	1.5	4.0	18.4	76.1
Help students to acquire listening and speaking skills.	1.5	6.5	35.8	56.2
Help students to acquire reading and writing skills.	2.0	8.9	48.3	40.8
Foster students' self-learning ability for English language learning.	3.0	3.0	18.4	75.6
<b><i>Cultural dimension</i></b>				
Promote students' understanding of English cultures.	3.5	6.5	40.2	49.8
Help students to develop an ability to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds.	3.0	7.0	35.8	54.2
Promote students' interest in English cultures.	3.5	6.0	43.2	47.3
Promote students' understanding of Chinese culture.	4.5	18.9	40.3	36.3
<b><i>Other objective</i></b>				
Help students to pass College English Test Band 4 (CET 4) (only for teachers who taught College English courses, $n=127$ )	11.0	33.1	41.7	14.2

Three most important objectives perceived by the participating teachers all reflected the linguistic dimension of EFL teaching. For instance, the majority of teachers believed

that it was very important to “Foster students’ interest in” and “self-learning ability for” English language learning (76.1% & 75.6%, respectively). The next important objective identified by the teachers was to help students to acquire listening and speaking skills with 56.2% reporting it *Very Important*.

Though the objectives for cultural dimension of EFL teaching were also considered important by most participating teachers, they were deemed secondary to the linguistic dimension. In terms of specific objectives, teachers rated the overarching goal of helping students to develop an ability to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds as the most important objective (35.8% reporting it *Important* and 54.2% *Very Important*). Teachers placed more importance on teaching the target cultures than home culture. For instance, they indicated that to “promote students’ understanding of” and “their interest in English cultures” was more important than to “Promote students’ understanding of Chinese culture.” In the follow-up interviews, teachers elaborated on the relationship between language and culture and the role of culture in EFL teaching and learning, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

For teachers who taught College English courses, they were also asked to indicate the degree to which they believed the objective to “help students to pass College English Test Band 4 (CET 4)” was important in their EFL teaching. These teachers considered it as being the least important among the nine objectives with 11.0% reporting it *Not Important*, 33.1% *Somewhat Important*, 41.7% *Important*, and 14.2% *Very Important*.

No significant difference was found between teachers who taught College English and English major courses and between teachers across the participating universities in their beliefs about the objectives for EFL teaching. Demographic factors were not found to have an impact on teachers' beliefs about the objectives except that teachers who had more than 41 students in their class perceived "foster students' self-learning ability for English language learning" and "interest in English learning" and "English cultures" as being more important objectives for EFL teaching than teachers who had less than 40 students ( $t = 2.04, p < .05$ ;  $t = 2.37, p < .05$ ; and  $t = 2.58, p < .05$ , respectively). It is not surprising that teachers who taught large classes felt the urge to promote students' interest in and self-learning ability for language and culture learning, as they may not be able to provide them with as much individual attention as teachers with smaller classes could. So, to some extent, it depends on students' autonomy in order to achieve productive language and cultural learning.

Pearson's correlation was conducted in order to examine the relationship between teachers' beliefs about the cultural dimension of EFL teaching objectives and their intercultural competence. Pearson's correlation is used in statistical analysis to measure the strength of linear dependence between two variables (Bryman & Cramer, 2009). Teachers' intercultural competence was found to be positively correlated with their beliefs about the importance of the cultural dimension in EFL education ( $r = .476; p < .01$ ). Teachers who are interculturally competent may perceive cultural teaching as a more important component of EFL education.

### ***Objectives for Intercultural Competence Teaching***

In order to explore how participating teachers perceive cultural teaching objectives from an intercultural perspective, eight objectives were listed which reflected the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and awareness dimension in Byram's (1997) intercultural competence model. Participants were required to indicate the degree to which they believed the objectives were important on a 4-point scale from 1 (*Not Important*) to 4 (*Very Important*). Participants' responses were presented below in Table 4.3.

Most participating teachers believed that all of the eight objectives for promoting students' intercultural competence were important. Teachers reported that the most important objective was to develop students' skills of interaction dimension, namely, to "promote the ability to conduct effective communication with English speaking people" (30.8% reporting it *Important* and 60.2% *Very Important*). The awareness and attitudes dimensions were also regarded as important cultural teaching objectives, such as to "promote awareness and understanding of different values, beliefs, and ideologies of both Chinese and English speaking people," and "develop a curious/tolerant/respectful/open attitude towards other cultures and cultural difference."

Table 4.3

*Teachers' beliefs about cultural teaching objectives*

	Not important %	Somewhat important %	Important %	Very important %
Provide information about daily life (e.g. social/political conditions) in English speaking countries.	3.0	10.9	48.8	37.3
Promote understanding of different process of individual and social interactions in English and Chinese culture.	1.0	13.4	41.8	43.8
Develop a curious/tolerant/respectful/open attitude towards other cultures and cultural difference.	2.0	8.4	42.3	47.3
Promote the ability to acquire new cultural knowledge from documents/events from English cultures.	2.5	14.9	49.8	32.8
Promote the ability to conduct effective communication with English speaking people.	0	9.0	30.8	60.2
Promote the ability to understand and critically interpret documents/events from English speaking culture.	2.0	19.4	49.7	28.9
Promote awareness and understanding of different values, beliefs, and ideologies of both Chinese and English speaking people.	3.0	6.5	37.8	52.7
Foster students' respect for world cultural diversity.	3.0	10.4	43.8	42.8

Comparatively speaking, the three least important objectives were believed to be the following: “provide information about daily life (e.g. social/political conditions) in

English speaking countries,” “promote the ability to acquire new cultural knowledge from documents/events from English cultures,” and “the ability to understand and critically interpret documents/events from English speaking culture.” These objectives reflected the knowledge, skills of discovery, interpreting, and relating dimension of intercultural competence teaching. It is interesting to note that most aspects of the skills dimension of intercultural competence were deemed to be less important.

No difference was found between teachers across the participating universities in their beliefs about cultural teaching objectives. Teachers who taught English major courses perceived the attitudes, knowledge, and awareness dimension of intercultural competence teaching as being more important than the College English teachers did. For instance, the result of a *t* test indicated that they gave higher score on the following objectives: “develop a curious/tolerant/respectful/open attitude towards other cultures and cultural difference” ( $t = 2.10, p < .05$ ), “promote understanding of different process of individual and social interactions in English and Chinese culture” ( $t = 2.64, p < .01$ ), and “promote awareness and understanding of different values, beliefs, and ideologies of both Chinese and English speaking people” ( $t = 2.65, p < .01$ ).

In order to explore what factors had an impact on how participating teachers perceived the objectives for intercultural competence teaching, the eight individual objectives were clustered into one variable to reflect their beliefs. The score of the eight objectives were added up and averaged to form an overall score for each participant. How important teachers perceived objectives for intercultural competence teaching was highly



correlated with their beliefs about cultural teaching in EFL education ( $r = .756, p < .01$ ).

Teachers who believed that cultural teaching was an important dimension of EFL education were more likely to give higher scores to the objectives for intercultural competence teaching. A moderate correlation was found between teachers' intercultural competence and their beliefs about cultural teaching objectives ( $r = .512, p < .01$ ).

Teachers who demonstrated stronger intercultural competence tended to perceive cultural teaching objectives from a more intercultural perspective.

No difference was found between teachers across the participating universities in their beliefs about the objectives for intercultural competence teaching. Teachers who taught College English and English major courses also demonstrated similar beliefs. The result of One-Way ANOVA suggested that teachers' highest degree had an impact on how they perceive objectives for intercultural competence teaching ( $F(2, 198) = 3.31, p < .05$ ). Teachers who had a Master's and a Doctoral degree were found to consider the objectives for intercultural competence teaching as being more important than those with a Bachelor's degree did ( $M=3.30$  and  $3.07$ , respectively).

### ***Attitudes toward Cultural Teaching***

Teachers were asked to indicate their attitudes toward six statements about cultural teaching on a 4-point Likert scale from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 4 (*Strongly Agree*) (Table 4.4). In order to simplify data report, the results were also presented in terms of the percentage of *Disagree* (including *Strongly Disagree* and *Somewhat Disagree*) and *Agree* (including *Strongly Agree* and *Somewhat Agree*).

Table 4.4

*Teachers' attitudes toward cultural teaching*

	Disagree		Agree	
	Strongly Disagree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Somewhat Agree %	Strongly Agree %
Based on your experience, English language and its culture can be taught in an integrated way.	12.0		88.0	
	3.0	9.0	35.8	52.2
Poor language skill is the major cause of misunderstandings in communication between Chinese and people from other countries.	36.8		63.2	
	10.0	26.8	41.3	21.9
English teaching should touch upon both English and Chinese culture in order to help students to mediate between the two cultures.	10.5		89.5	
	1.0	9.5	31.8	57.7
English teachers should generally present a positive image of English culture and society.	21.4		78.6	
	5.5	15.9	48.3	30.3
I would like to teach about English cultures in my class.	4.5		95.5	
	1.0	3.5	34.8	60.7
Besides English cultures, English teachers should also touch upon cultures of other countries.	13.9		86.1	
	3.0	10.9	44.3	41.8

Teachers were positive toward the integrated teaching of English language and the cultures of English speaking countries in EFL teaching. Most teachers (88%) reported that they *agree* that “English language and its culture can be taught in an integrated way.” Teachers’ attitude toward the integrated teaching of language and culture was positively correlated with their beliefs about objectives for intercultural competence teaching ( $r =$

.479,  $p < .01$ ). Teachers who perceived the objectives for intercultural competence teaching as being more important may agree more with the idea that English language and its culture can be taught in an integrated way. The result of One-Way ANOVA showed that teachers' educational degree was also found to have an impact on their attitudes toward the integrated teaching of language and culture ( $F(2, 198) = 3.76, p < .05$ ). Teachers who had a Master's degree more agreed than those with a Bachelor's degree with the idea that language and culture can be taught in an integrated way ( $M=3.44$  and  $3.00$ , respectively).

More than half of the participating teachers (62.3%) believed that poor language skill was the major cause of misunderstandings in communication between Chinese and people from other countries. Language proficiency alone was considered by these teachers to have the major role in achieving effective intercultural communications. How teachers came to this understanding will be discussed more in-depth in the follow-up qualitative data in Chapter V.

Though the promotion of students' understanding of Chinese culture was considered less important as compared to other dimensions of EFL teaching, the majority of teachers (89.5%) agreed that both English and Chinese culture need to be addressed in order to help students to mediate between the two in intercultural communications (57.7% reporting *Strongly Agree* and 31.8% *Somewhat Agree*). The results suggested that most teachers believed that the teaching of Chinese culture in EFL education was to facilitate the mediation between target and home culture, rather than for the understanding of

Chinese culture itself. Teachers who perceived the objectives for intercultural competence teaching as being more important may more agree that “English teaching should touch upon both English and Chinese culture in order to help students to mediate between the two cultures” ( $r = .472, p < .01$ ).

It is worth noting that the majority of the participating teachers (78.6%) agreed that EFL teachers should generally present a positive image of English culture and society, instead of an objective and realistic image. The result of a  $t$  test showed that teachers who had been teaching EFL for more than seven years more agreed with the idea of presenting a positive image of the target cultures than those with less years of teaching experience ( $t = 2.80, p < .01$ ). In the follow-up interviews, teachers discussed about this issue in details.

Teachers indicated their support for cultural teaching as reflected in their response to the statement: “I would like to teach about English cultures in my class.” The majority of them (95.5%) were supportive of cultural teaching. Among them, 60.7% were strong supporters (reporting *Strongly Agree*). Positive correlations were found between teachers’ response to this statement and their attitudes toward some aspect of cultural teaching. For instance, teachers who considered the objectives for intercultural competence teaching as being important may be stronger supporters for teaching the target cultures ( $r = .452, p < .01$ ).

Most teachers (86.1%) believed that besides English cultures, EFL teachers should also touch upon cultures of other countries. Among them, 42.8% were firm supporters (reporting *Strongly Agree*). Teachers’ support for the teaching of non-English cultures

was moderately correlated with how important they perceived cultural dimension in EFL teaching ( $r = .511, p < .01$ ) and the objectives for intercultural competence teaching ( $r = .572, p < .01$ ). Teachers who scored high for the importance of cultural teaching in EFL education and the objectives for intercultural competence teaching tended to support the integration of cultures of non-English speaking countries in their teaching. The result of Pearson correlation also indicated that teachers who believed that English teaching should touch upon both English and Chinese culture in order to help students to mediate between the two cultures also tended to support the inclusion of non-English cultures ( $r = .488, p < .01$ ). The result of One-Way ANOVA suggested that teachers' educational degree also had an impact on their attitudes toward the integration of non-English cultures in EFL teaching ( $F(2, 198) = 3.47, p < .05$ ). Teachers who had a Master's degree more agreed than those with a Bachelor's degree ( $M=3.31$  and  $2.87$ , respectively).

### **Teachers' Cultural Teaching Practices**

The participating teachers' cultural teaching practices were explored by identifying two dimensions of cultural teaching, namely, *what* to teach and *how* to teach. The two dimensions were reflected through the frequency of culture related topics that teachers touched upon in their language teaching, the frequency of intercultural competence teaching they applied, and the frequency of instructional activities regarding cultural teaching that were incorporated in the classroom settings. Teachers were required to indicate the frequencies on a 4-point scale from 1 (*Never*) to 4 (*Always*). To simplify the reporting of descriptive data, the 4-point scale was reduced to 2-point, that is, *Never* and

*Sometimes* were combined to *Not Frequently*, and *Frequently* and *Always* combined into *Frequently*. Data on the 4-point scale were also presented in the tables below to give more detailed information about the spread of the scores.

### ***What to Teach***

***Topics related to English cultures.*** Seventeen topics related to English speaking countries were listed and teachers were asked to indicate how frequently they touched upon the topics in their class. The findings suggested that topics related to English cultures were not an important component in participating teachers' EFL classes. As presented in Table 4.5, more than half of the teachers indicated that they did not frequently address 9 out of the 17 topics. Among them, teachers addressed topics related to the arts (77.6% reporting it *Not Frequently*), political system(s) (73.6% *Not Frequently*), and different ethnic groups (73.6% *Not Frequently*) least.

The remaining 8 topics were addressed relatively more often with more than half of the teachers mentioning them *Frequently* (Table 4.6). The topics included conventions of communication, customs, educational systems, history, literature, movies, people's values and beliefs, and cultural taboos. Among these eight topics, the most frequently addressed topics were customs (75.1% reporting *Frequently*), conventions of communication (70.1% *Frequently*), and movies (67.2% *Frequently*).

Table 4.5

*Topics that were not frequently addressed*

	Not Frequently		Frequently	
	Never %	Sometimes %	Frequently %	Always %
The Arts	77.6		22.4	
	10.9	66.7	20.4	2.0
Living conditions	54.2		45.8	
	4.5	49.7	30.9	14.9
Different ethnic groups	73.6		26.4	
	11.9	61.7	20.9	5.5
Different social groups	63.7		36.3	
	7.5	56.2	26.3	10.0
Financial conditions	70.1		29.9	
	8.5	61.6	20.9	9.0
Non-verbal behaviours	59.2		40.8	
	3.5	55.7	28.9	11.9
Political system(s)	73.6		26.4	
	12.9	60.7	19.9	6.5
Religious beliefs	63.7		36.3	
	8.5	55.2	26.3	10.0
Technological development	70.6		29.4	
	12.9	57.7	23.9	5.5

Table 4.6

*Topics that were frequently addressed*

	Not Frequently		Frequently	
	Never %	Sometimes %	Frequently %	Always %
Conventions of communication	29.9		70.1	
	0	29.9	45.7	24.4
Customs	24.9		75.1	
	2.5	22.4	45.7	29.4
Educational systems	40.3		59.7	
	3.5	36.8	46.3	13.4
History	38.8		61.2	
	1.5	37.3	40.3	20.9
Literature	41.3		58.7	
	3.0	38.3	36.3	22.4
Movies	32.8		67.2	
	3.0	29.8	42.3	24.9
People's values and beliefs	33.8		66.2	
	2.0	31.8	45.8	20.4
Cultural taboos	43.3		56.7	
	4.5	38.8	37.8	18.9

In order to explore the possible relationships between the frequency of touching upon topics related to English cultures and other variables regarding teachers' intercultural competence and their beliefs about cultural teaching, the 17 topics were clustered into one variable to assess the frequency of touching upon topics related to English cultures. The score of the 17 topics were added up and averaged to form an overall score for each participant.



How frequently teachers addressed topics related to English cultures was positively correlated with how important they perceived the objectives for intercultural competence teaching ( $r = .459, p < .01$ ). The result suggested that teachers who rated the objectives as being more important might touch upon the topics more often. The frequency of addressing these topics was also correlated with teachers' intercultural competence ( $r = .462, p < .01$ ) and the knowledge ( $r = .501, p < .01$ ) and awareness ( $r = .468, p < .01$ ) dimension of intercultural competence. Teachers who demonstrated stronger intercultural competence, particularly those who had more intercultural knowledge and awareness, might touch upon these topics more frequently. Comparatively speaking, a teacher's cultural knowledge had more impact on how often he or she addressed the topics related to English cultures.

The results of a  $t$  test suggested that teachers who indicated that they would like to teach about English cultures in their class actually touched upon topics related to English cultures more frequently than those who were negative toward it ( $t = 3.24, p < .01$ ).

***Topics related to Chinese culture.*** Seven topics related to Chinese culture were listed and teachers were asked to indicate how frequently they touched upon the topics in their class (Table 4.7). The findings suggested that topics related to Chinese culture were not often addressed in participating teachers' EFL classes. More than half of the teachers did not frequently address 4 out of the 7 topics. The four topics included religious beliefs (76.6% reporting *Not Frequently*), political system(s) (76.1% *Not Frequently*), different social groups (67.7% *Not Frequently*), and different ethnic groups (67.7% *Not*

*Frequently*). Teachers indicated that they touched upon the remaining three topics relatively more often. The topics were people’s values and beliefs with 64.2% reporting *Frequently*, which was followed by customs and conventions of communication (55.7%).

Table 4.7

*Frequency of touching upon topics related to Chinese culture*

	Not Frequently		Frequently	
	Never %	Sometimes %	Frequently %	Always %
Conventions of communication	44.3		55.7	
	2.5	41.8	41.3	14.4
Customs	37.8		62.2	
	2.5	35.3	44.8	17.4
Different ethnic groups	67.7		32.3	
	19.4	48.3	28.3	4.0
Different social groups	67.7		32.3	
	12.9	54.8	26.8	5.5
People’s values and beliefs	35.8		64.2	
	4.0	31.8	49.8	14.4
Political system(s)	76.1		23.9	
	18.4	57.7	17.9	6.0
Religious beliefs	76.6		23.4	
	15.9	60.7	17.9	5.5

The seven topics were clustered into one variable to reflect the frequency of topics related to Chinese culture. The scores of the seven topics were added up and averaged to form an overall score for each participant. There was a moderate correlation between the frequency of addressing topics related to English cultures and those related to Chinese

culture ( $r = .689, p < .01$ ). Those who often addressed topics related to English cultures tended to address topics related to Chinese culture more often.

A  $t$  test was conducted to compare the frequency of addressing cultural topics between teachers who held different opinions toward cultural teaching. The results suggested, for instance, the teachers who agreed that English language and its culture could be taught in an integrated way addressed topics related to both English and Chinese cultures more frequently than those who did not agree ( $t = 4.34, p < .01$ ;  $t = 2.15, p < .05$ , respectively). Moreover, teachers who agreed that English teaching should address both English and Chinese culture, in order to help students to mediate between the two cultures, addressed the cultural topics more often than those who did not agree ( $t = 2.93, p < .01$ ;  $t = 2.37, p < .05$ , respectively).

No significant difference was found between teachers who taught College English and English major courses, and between teachers across the participating universities in the frequency of addressing topics related to Chinese and English cultures. Demographic variables were not found to have any meaningful impact on them either.

***Intercultural competence teaching.*** Teachers were asked to indicate how often they applied 11 teaching activities which reflected the five dimensions of intercultural competence proposed in Byram's (1997) model (Table 4.8). Among them, teaching activities indicated in item 1, 4, and 10 were to promote students' knowledge dimension, activities in item 3 and 11 were to enhance their intercultural attitudes, activities in item 2

and 7 were to develop skills of discovery and interaction, item 5 and 9 were for the skills of interpreting and relating, and item 6 and 8 for intercultural awareness.

Table 4.8

*Frequency of applying intercultural competence teaching*

	Not Frequently %		Frequently %	
	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
<b><i>Knowledge</i></b>				
1. I ask students to discuss the way in which Chinese people and Chinese culture is perceived by English speaking people.	63.7		36.3	
	10.4	53.3	25.4	10.9
4. I ask students to explore different perspectives Chinese and English speaking people may have on a particular event/phenomena.	45.8		54.2	
	5.5	40.3	40.8	13.4
10. Besides cultures of English speaking countries, I also touch upon cultures of other countries.	67.2		32.8	
	10.4	56.8	20.4	12.4
<b><i>Skills of discovery and interaction</i></b>				
2. I ask students to explore connotations and implications implied in documents/events from English cultures.	60.7		39.3	
	11.4	49.3	27.9	11.4
7. I ask students to use their cultural knowledge and skills to explain documents/events from English cultures.	56.7		43.3	
	9.5	47.2	33.3	10.0
<b><i>Attitudes</i></b>				
3. I ask students to share what they find fascinating or strange about English culture.	49.3		50.7	
	5.5	43.8	30.8	19.9
11. I encourage students to questions their own values, beliefs, and perspectives which are perceived differently by people from other cultures.	51.7		48.3	
	11.9	39.8	36.9	11.4

<i>Skills of interpreting and relating</i>				
5. I ask students to explore areas of misunderstandings in communications between Chinese and English speaking people and explain the causes.	45.8		54.2	
	6.0	39.8	36.3	17.9
9. I ask students to discuss the origins of stereotypes that Chinese people have for English cultures.	58.2		41.8	
	12.4	45.8	31.8	10.0
<i>Awareness</i>				
6. I ask students to discuss how their own values and beliefs influence the way they perceive other cultures.	53.7		46.3	
	10.4	43.3	32.4	13.9
8. I ask students to explore values, beliefs, and ideological perspectives implied in events/documents from English cultures.	51.7		48.3	
	9.0	42.7	34.9	13.4

The findings suggested that intercultural competence teaching was not regularly conducted in participating teachers' EFL classes. Among the 11 teaching activities, only three of them were applied frequently by more than half of the participating teachers: 50.7% of the teachers reported that they frequently asked their students to share what they found fascinating or strange about English cultures; 54.2% asked their students to explore different perspectives that Chinese and English speaking people may have on a particular event/phenomenon, and to explore areas of misunderstandings in communications between the two people and explain the causes. These three activities helped students to promote some aspects of the attitudes, knowledge, and skills of interpreting and relating dimension of intercultural competence.

Most participating teachers did not apply the remaining eight teaching activities frequently, which reflected some aspects of all the dimensions of intercultural competence teaching. For instance, activities that were aimed to promote the skills of discovery and interaction were not conducted frequently: 60.7% of the teachers indicated that they did not often ask students to explore connotations and implications implied in documents/events from English cultures and 56.7% did not often ask students to use their cultural knowledge and skills to explain documents/events from English cultures.

It is worth noting that though 86.1% of the participating teachers believed that besides English cultures, EFL teachers should also touch upon cultures of other countries, only 32.8% of them indicated that in their teaching practice they addressed non-English cultures frequently. In the follow-up interviews, the participating teachers explained the practical constraints for not including more issues relating to non-English cultures, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

It is also interesting to note that though Chinese and English speaking people and their cultures were compared and discussed frequently by more than half of the participating teachers, they were mainly approached from the Chinese cultural perspective. Only 36.3% of the teachers reported that they asked their students to discuss the way in which Chinese people and Chinese culture is perceived by English speaking people, and more than half of the teachers did not often engage students to discuss how their own values and beliefs influence the way they perceive other cultures nor question

their own values, beliefs, and perspectives which are perceived differently by people from other cultures.

The 11 items were clustered into one variable to measure the frequency of applying intercultural competence teaching. The scores of the 11 items were added up and averaged to form a composite score for each participant. There was a moderate correlation between the frequency of conducting intercultural competence teaching and the frequency of addressing topics related to English cultures ( $r = .696, p < .01$ ) and Chinese culture ( $r = .631, p < .01$ ). Teachers who often touched upon topics related to English and Chinese cultures tended to apply intercultural competence teaching more often. A positive correlation was found between how frequently teachers engaged in intercultural competence teaching and how they perceived cultural teaching in EFL education ( $r = .435, p < .01$ ) and the objectives for intercultural competence teaching ( $r = .419, p < .01$ ). Compared with teachers' beliefs about cultural teaching, their intercultural competence ( $r = .513, p < .01$ ), especially the knowledge ( $r = .559, p < .01$ ) and awareness ( $r = .521, p < .01$ ) dimension had more impact on how frequently they applied intercultural competence teaching. Teachers who demonstrated stronger intercultural competence, and those who had more intercultural knowledge and awareness tended to conduct intercultural competence teaching more frequently.

The results of a *t* test showed that teachers' attitudes toward some aspects of cultural teaching had an impact on their intercultural competence teaching. For instance, the teachers who agreed that English language and its culture could be taught in an integrated

way applied more intercultural competence teaching than those who did not agree ( $t = 2.77, p < .01$ ). Further, those teachers who perceived cultural teaching from a global perspective, namely, those who agreed that English teachers should also touch upon cultures of other countries reported more intercultural competence teaching ( $t = 5.97, p < .01$ ).

No significant difference was found between teachers who taught College English and English major courses, and between teachers across the participating universities in the frequency of applying intercultural competence teaching. The result also suggested that demographic variables did not have any impact on teachers' intercultural competence teaching.

### ***How to Teach***

Teachers indicated how frequently they applied eight instructional activities in their cultural teaching (Table 4.9). The findings indicated that four of the eight activities were applied frequently by more than half of the participating teachers. This again suggested that cultural teaching might not be an integral component of their EFL teaching.

The most frequently applied instructional activity was "I divide students into pairs or small groups to discuss a topic" (64.2% reporting it frequently), which was followed by "I tell students what they should know about a topic", and "I use technology to illustrate a cultural topic (e.g., videos, CD-ROMs, PowerPoint, and the Internet, etc.)." The results indicated that the most often applied instructional practices tended to include both teacher-centered and student-centered teaching. Students were provided with the



Table 4.9

*Frequency of instructional activities regarding cultural teaching*

Instructional activities	Not Frequently %		Frequently %	
	Never %	Sometimes %	Frequently %	Always %
1. I ask students to address a particular cultural topic.	65.2		34.8	
	7.0	58.2	20.4	14.4
2. I tell students what they should know about a topic.	42.3		57.7	
	2.5	39.8	37.8	19.9
3. I divide students into pairs or small groups to discuss a topic.	35.8		64.2	
	4.5	31.3	38.3	25.9
4. I ask students to participate in role-play situations in which people from English speaking countries communicate.	51.2		48.8	
	11.9	39.3	31.4	17.4
5. In written assignments, I ask students to discuss a particular cultural perspective or event.	52.7		47.3	
	12.9	39.8	36.5	10.4
6. I use technology to illustrate a cultural topic (e.g., videos, CD-ROMs, PowerPoint, and the Internet. . .)	42.3		57.7	
	7.0	35.3	37.3	20.4
7. I have students debate a controversial cultural issue.	56.2		43.8	
	11.4	44.8	32.9	10.9
8. I ask students to compare Chinese and English culture regarding a particular topic.	44.8		55.2	
	5.5	39.3	39.8	15.4

opportunity to explore cultural topics through pairs or small group discussions. At the same time the traditional way of lecturing and the technology mediated illustration were still popular in the participating teachers' cultural teaching practices.

The results also suggested that a variety of student-centered activities was not as often applied in teachers' classes, such as students' presentations, role-play, and debates. In the participating teachers' classes, cultural teaching and learning experience mostly occurred in the form of oral communication; and cultural exploration through other ways was absent to some extent, such as in writing.

The eight activities were clustered into one variable to measure the frequency of applying instructional activities. The score of the eight activities were added up and averaged to form a composite score for each participant. Teachers who taught College English and English major courses, and those across the five universities reported similar frequency of applying cultural teaching activities in their teaching.

How frequently teachers conducted cultural teaching activities was positively correlated with how important they perceive cultural teaching in EFL education ( $r = .455$ ;  $p < .05$ ). Teachers who considered cultural teaching to be an important component of EFL education might apply more cultural teaching activities in their class. There was a high correlation between the frequency of teachers' applying cultural teaching activities and that of touching upon cultural topics ( $r = .797$ ;  $p < .01$ ). How frequently teachers addressed cultural topics was consistent with how often they applied cultural teaching activities.

Positive correlations were also found between how frequently teachers applied cultural teaching activities and their intercultural competence ( $r = .507$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the knowledge ( $r = .541$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and awareness ( $r = .491$ ,  $p < .01$ ) dimension of intercultural

competence. Teachers who demonstrated stronger intercultural competence, especially those who had more intercultural knowledge and awareness tended to conduct the cultural teaching activities more frequently.

### **Summary**

The participating teachers demonstrated average intercultural competence. Among the four dimensions of intercultural competence measured in the modified AIC, the teachers had highest level for attitudes and lowest level for knowledge. Teachers who taught English major courses showed higher intercultural competence than those who taught College English courses. Those who had overseas experience showed higher level of the knowledge dimension of intercultural competence as compared to those who had not been abroad.

In terms of the objectives for EFL teaching, the participating teachers believed that linguistic dimension was more important than cultural dimension. Most teachers believed that language proficiency had a major role in achieving effective intercultural communications. Promoting students' understanding of Chinese culture was considered one of the least important objectives in EFL teaching. In terms of specific cultural teaching objectives, the perceived most important objectives reflected the awareness, attitudes, and skills of discovery and interaction dimension of cultural teaching.

The results indicated that teachers were positive toward the integration of English language and its cultures. Most teachers agreed with the inclusion of both English and Chinese cultures in their teaching in order to help students to mediate between the two in

communications. The majority of the teachers were supportive of teaching English cultures in their class and believed that cultures of other countries should be touched upon as well. It is interesting to note that, instead of presenting an objective and realistic image of the culture and society of English speaking countries, most participating teachers believed that they should present a positive image of them.

The results suggested that cultural teaching practice was not an important component or a regular focus in most participating teachers' classes, which was consistently reflected by the low frequency of touching upon cultural topics, applying intercultural competence teaching, and applying instructional activities. Teachers engaged students in exploring cultural topics and issues through pair or small group discussions. At the same time the traditional way of lecturing and the technology integrated illustration still dominated the participating teachers' cultural teaching practices.

Teachers' educational degree had an impact on their intercultural competence and beliefs about cultural teaching. Teachers who had a Master's or a doctoral degree were found to have a higher intercultural competence and considered cultural teaching objectives as being more important than those with a Bachelor's degree. No significant difference was found between teachers across the participating universities in their intercultural competence, beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching. This is partly due to the fact that many of the participating teachers across the five universities graduated from the English departments in two of the universities in Harbin. Their shared

EFL learning experience may contribute to their similar intercultural competence, beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching.

Teachers' intercultural competence was found to be positively correlated with their beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching in EFL education. The knowledge and awareness dimension of intercultural competence were found to have more impact on teachers' beliefs and practices than other dimensions. Teachers' beliefs about cultural teaching also had an impact on their teaching practices. For instance, teachers who agreed that English teaching should touch upon both English and Chinese cultures, and those who believed that English language and culture can be taught in an integrated way conducted more cultural teaching practice than those who did not believe so.

## CHAPTER V

### QUALITATIVE RESULTS

Based on the quantitative data analysis, I generated key questions to ask the participants and asked them to use specific examples or tell stories as a means of responding in greater detail to the questions I had asked in the questionnaire. The follow-up interviews were structured in such a way that discussion revolved around specific topics that emerged in the survey data. Data generated in the follow-up interviews were interpreted and analysed within the three-dimensional space (the *temporal*, *personal-social*, and *place*) of narrative thinking framework (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Xu & Connelly, 2009) and with relation to the quantitative findings from the survey data. This allowed me to understand not only why teachers give various numerical ratings found in the quantitative data, but also how they came to such beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching. The combination of the quantitative and qualitative data results in heightened validity. The main themes that emerged from the qualitative data are as follows: teachers' beliefs about cultural teaching, their cultural teaching practices, the integration of cultural teaching, and their personal and professional development and training.

The eight interviewed teachers in this study came from three of the five participating universities (Table 5.1). Pseudonyms were used to identify the teachers. Four teachers were from University A: Mr. Gao, Ms. Li, and Ms. Pan taught in the English department and Mr. Chen taught in the College English department. Mr. Chen

taught a continuing EFL course titled Intercultural Communication which is required of all third year non-English major students at his university. Mr. Chen has been teaching this course for a few years. Though it is not a regular EFL class, Mr. Chen's teaching practice gives some ideas about how to incorporate intercultural teaching into EFL education. Three of the participating teachers came from University C: Mr. Wu in the English department and Ms. Bai and Ms. Ma in the College English department. Ms. Ding taught in both departments at university D.

Three of the teachers had overseas experience: Mr. Gao had been to the United States of America four times, the longest stay was one year as a visiting scholar while the other times were short visits. Ms. Li had been living in the United States for five years with both studying and working experience. Ms. Ma had been to the United Kingdom as a visiting scholar and stayed there for three months. Among the eight participants, Ms. Bai, Ms. Ma, Ms. Li, and Mr. Gao were full professors, and the others were lecturers.

Table 5.1

*Interviewed teachers and their university*

University	Interviewees teaching College English courses	Interviewees teaching English major courses
A	Mr. Chen	Mr. Gao, Ms. Li, & Ms. Pan
C	Ms. Bai and Ms. Ma	Mr. Wu
D	Ms. Ding	

## **Beliefs about Culture, Communication, and Cultural Teaching**

During the interviews, I engaged in in-depth discussions with individual teachers. I invited them to share their lived stories of intercultural experience. For instance, Ms. Li told me a story that happened when she studied in a Master of Education program in the United States. A member of the administration staff, who worked in the university International Student Office, once told Ms. Li that a Chinese student was rude to her and commanded her to do things. She was very upset about it. Ms. Li knew the student was not a rude person, so she went to talk to him about this. The student was very confused and had no idea about what had happened. He told Ms. Li that he had said something like: “I want you to help me with this,” but it was impossible that he had been rude to the lady or demanded her to do anything. Ms. Li explained to me that the student wanted to say: “我想要你帮我个忙” (*wo xiang yao ni bang ge mang*) meaning *I hope you help me with this*, which is considered being polite in Chinese culture. However, when he translated into English he used the word *want*, as *want* means 想要 (*xiang yao*) in Chinese which includes the meaning of *hope*. He was not aware of the different cultural values and their meaning behind the English words he used. Ms. Li reflected that it was due to the student’s limited English proficiency - he had to focus on translating what he wanted to say in Chinese into English during intercultural communications. Ms. Li believed that the major obstacle and cause of misunderstanding during intercultural communication for Chinese students was a lack of language proficiency and personal experience in intercultural encounters. She stated that language proficiency was crucial for



understanding the meaning created and negotiated in communication especially at the early stage of intercultural communications. This echoes and helps to explain the commonly shared view in the survey data that poor language skill is the major cause of misunderstandings during intercultural communication.

Ms. Ding shared a story of two of her colleagues who came back from the United Kingdom with different impressions of British people. One colleague is a cheerful person but sometimes insensitive to the feelings of others. He said that British people were polite, but their cold politeness made him feel uncomfortable. He even said that he regretted that he had gone there. However, the other colleague, who is a gentleman and always keeps others at a comfortable distance, felt very comfortable around British people. Ms. Ding believed that her colleagues' interpretation of the British culture was individually framed: they judge British people according to their own personal character and the contacts they had had with certain people.

Mr. Gao used his lived stories during his stay in the United States as a visiting scholar to reveal how he found differences between Chinese and American cultures. When he was sick and wanted to make a doctor's appointment, he was told that the appointment would be in 20 days. He made a joke with the receptionist by asking her: "What if I die before I see the doctor?" The nurse told him that he could go to the emergency. He found this very different, as in China people can see a doctor right away if they go to the hospital. He concluded that the American medical system was well developed, but it may be inconvenient in some ways. Mr. Gao also shared with me

another story about an appointment. His American professor wanted to take him out for dinner and the date was in half a year. The professor told him to mark his calendar with the date and time. Mr. Gao wondered if the professor would actually remember it and he was very surprised when he did come and pick him up for dinner at the exact time of that day. Mr. Gao reflected on the cultural difference between Chinese and American culture in terms of people's ways of thinking and behaviour, such as their perceptions of time and regulations.

Mr. Gao's stories made me reflect on my own intercultural experience in Canada. In the introductory chapter of this dissertation I shared my lived story of the communication I had with my Canadian friends regarding inviting my parents to live with my family for six months in Canada. My friends had difficulty understanding my behaviour according to their Canadian values. In Canadian culture, there is a high desire for independence and having the close physical connection again with their parents may imply that they are needy, not mature adults, and lack independence. Children are rebelling against the authority and position of the parents and prefer not always having the guiding hands from the parents. In most cases, when they come back to live with their parents again, it's because of financial need. During the conversation with my friends, I too was confused with their attitudes toward the issue. Later I realized that it was because I tended to perceive their values from my Chinese culture perspective. In China, living in a *family of three or four generations* 三代同堂/四世同堂 has been popular and appreciated throughout history. It is partly due to the fact that China used to be a farming society and

family members were economically dependent: old people lived with their grown-up children and they provided each other with mutual support. It is also partly due to the special family happiness people enjoy while living with their parents, children, or grandchildren. In Chinese culture, old people have been identified as having a hierarchy status that worth respect - they are wise and more knowledgeable due to their life experience. Young people are encouraged to take their seniors' elderly advice. In my intercultural communication with my Canadian friends, the different values and understanding of parent-child relationship were approached in our own social and cultural frames by my friends and me.

In the interviews with the participating teachers, the process of sharing their intercultural experiences raised the topic that people's values, thoughts, and behaviours are culturally embedded and individually framed. People are not always aware of their beliefs, mindsets, and behaviours which have been shaped by their individual cultural experience. In the interviews, teachers perceived cultural differences not as being right or wrong, superior or inferior, but as being different.

The narrative framework adopted in this research allowed me to engage in conversational interviews with the participating teachers as a means of listening to their voices. It also allowed me to understand the teachers' perceptions, understandings, and teaching practices without intervention and evaluation by me. In this way teachers were able to participate in and think through this research to understand the role of language and culture as a means of building intercultural understanding.

### ***Cultural Dimension in EFL Teaching***

In the interviews, I invited the teachers to discuss the significance of cultural teaching in EFL education. All teachers indicated that cultural teaching was important and necessary in EFL teaching, but it appeared that most of them believed that cultural teaching was to support and facilitate language learning. For instance, Ms. Pan, who is in her early thirties and has been teaching English major courses (such as Listening and Extensive Reading) for about ten years, explained the following:

For instance, most of the articles in my reading class are written by native English speakers. It would be difficult for students to understand them if you do not introduce the cultural background in which they exist . . . of course, it cannot be too much, because it is not a course of culture. A little bit of introduction would arouse their interest and make them feel that they should have some knowledge about the country. It is only a start for them and helps to develop their interest in culture for studies in senior grades. Like in the case of reading, they would feel that they read faster with some knowledge about the cultural background. It is the same for listening. All the listening materials are from articles written by native English speakers. So I would introduce to students when culture is involved. . . Culture is helpful for English learning, you see, reading and listening all involve [culture], so do Basic English courses. It is helpful in English listening, speaking, reading, and writing, so you need to understand it. (Interview with Pan, September 26, 2010)

Cultural teaching is exclusively perceived by the teachers as subordinate to language teaching. They believed that enhanced knowledge about the target cultures helped to develop students' understanding of and interest in the target language and support and contribute to their language learning. As Ms. Bai said: "Some cultural teaching makes the language class more interesting and not as dry, and students are more interested." This helps to explain the quantitative finding, that teachers believe that cultural teaching is important but not as important as language proficiency.

Mr. Chen has been a College English teacher for about ten years and has also been teaching a course titled Intercultural Communication in the past few years. He believed that English proficiency was correlated with and a prerequisite for cultural learning, particularly for his Intercultural Communication class. He stated the following:

I think the biggest issue is that there is a gap between some students' language proficiency and the required level of proficiency for this course . . . it makes it difficult for them to learn, since the textbook cannot be too easy . . . . Another reason is that teachers teach the course exclusively in English, which makes it difficult for students who do not meet the required level of language proficiency to catch up in class.

The development of language proficiency was given the priority in the course and the maximization of language use is perceived as being important. They believed that only the students who were proficient English learners should be exposed to extensive and more in-depth cultural learning. Language and culture were perceived as separate and

cultural teaching as an add-on to language teaching. Consequently, some teachers argued that the amount of cultural teaching involved in EFL classes should depend on students' English proficiency and their overall academic performance which reflects their cognitive skills and acquisition ability.

### ***Cultural Teaching Objectives***

I was puzzled when the survey data revealed that the majority of teachers perceived cultural teaching objectives from a truly intercultural perspective but their teaching practice did not really reflect such beliefs. During the interviews, I tried to understand what kind of cultural teaching objectives teachers personally set for their EFL classes, namely, what they wanted to achieve through their cultural teaching. It appeared that teachers demonstrated a somewhat different set of beliefs and core assumptions regarding cultural teaching objectives. Very few teachers defined their teaching objective from a multi-faceted intercultural perspective, though most of them mentioned, to varying degrees, some aspects of intercultural competence teaching. Teachers' cultural teaching objectives are grouped and discussed by the following themes: the knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills dimension of intercultural competence, home culture, and students' growth as a whole person.

***Knowledge dimension.*** The most mentioned cultural teaching objective is to foster students' knowledge about and understanding of the target cultures. For instance, Mr. Chen pointed out the two objectives in this regard and explained why they were important:

First, cultural teaching is to promote students' understanding of differences between China and the West. . . . Second, is to let them know why British and American people talk like that. For instance, foreigners used to claim that they did not understand the business letters which were written in English by Chinese and wondered why they gave so much background information before getting to the main point which was usually presented at the very end. The British people expected to find the most important ideas first. . . . This is due to different patterns of organizing and presenting ideas. (Interview with Chen, September 29, 2010)

Ms. Ding has been a friend of mine since I started my undergraduate program in 1997, so I know her well. She has been an EFL teacher since 2001. She has always been a loving and caring teacher, which was also reflected in her interview. She talked about what she wanted to achieve in her cultural teaching. She began with the knowledge dimension:

I think the primary goal for me is to pass on what I know about the cultures to them, since most of them do not know, especially the kids [students] from rural areas. So that they could, first of all, develop an understanding of these [cultures]. (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010)

Cultural teaching is viewed as promoting the acquisition of a body of knowledge, especially about the target cultures. Its purpose is to provide general cultural background relating to the text, people's values and beliefs, and to develop an understanding of social interaction among people in the target cultures.

*Attitudes dimension.* Besides the knowledge dimension, Ms. Ding, together with other teachers, also discussed their cultural teaching objectives in terms of affecting students' attitudes. Ms. Ding has been the organizer and director of a student Shakespearean Drama Club at her university in the past few years. She and her team participated twice in the annual Shakespearean Drama Competition in Hong Kong. In the interview, she talked about her experience abroad. Though Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997, going to Hong Kong is still traditionally perceived as going abroad by many Mainland Chinese people, partly due to its international and intercultural contexts which are quite different from most inland cities in China. Ms. Ding said she had her eyes opened despite her brief stay in Hong Kong. Therefore, she wanted to stimulate her students' interest and curiosity and encourage them to go abroad and explore the target cultures and the unfamiliar in person. Specifically, she said:

Of course, what I want most is that they could go further, for instance, they may go on and do some research about it; or I could arouse their interest for future exploration, so that they would like to actually go there and explore the culture in person. This would be ideal, though I am not sure if they could go that far. I hope that I could at least arouse their interest for now and let them know more about these cultural topics. . . I believe that they would become more open-minded when they have a broader outlook. (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010)

Similarly, Mr. Chen said that in his Intercultural Communication class he wanted to promote students' interest for cultures through the process of learning, which would



become an internal motivation for further exploring the cultures in the future beyond their language classes.

*Awareness dimension.* Following the discussion about knowledge and attitudes that she wanted to bring to her students through cultural teaching, Ms. Ding further stated that she also aimed to provide students with the opportunity to broaden their perspective and consequently their minds. Mr. Chen echoed that cultural teaching should be a way to promote open-mindedness and an international outlook and perspective. It was hoped that students would gradually develop a critical mind with open-minded thinking and therefore, encourage divergent and international perspectives.

In the interview, Mr. Wu shared with me his teaching and research experience as an EFL teacher. He has been teaching at a university for ten years. He used to teach at the College English department in the first few years of his teaching career, and later he was transferred to the English department due to his expertise in Western literature. He said he did not develop critical thinking until he started doing research, as he found that he cannot merely follow others' ideas in academic writing. Instead he needed to be critical and have alternative perspectives. He explained further: "here is a simple example: it cannot be true that what Chinese say is all wrong [in terms of research], while foreigners are always right. It is impossible. It should not be like that even though you are learning their language" (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010). His personal experience of developing his own critical thinking leads to and helps to explain his statement, that students should develop critical thinking through cultural learning:

I want my students, first of all, not to readily believe the texts. It is not that everything written is correct. This is the easiest yet the most difficult thing to do. Not many students could reach this level. For instance, very few are able to think critically. (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010)

After reflecting on her five years of intercultural experience in the United States, Ms. Li argued that it was important for students to learn cultural knowledge, yet it was more important to promote their sensitivity and awareness to cultural difference. She elaborated her point in the following:

When I teach, I may consciously remind the students: “It does not mean that you have to know all the knowledge. I’m only demonstrating through these examples that cultural difference is everywhere, and you need to be sensitive. You cannot know everything. Of course, the more you know the better it is.” . . . the most important thing is not how much [knowledge] I teach, but to help to develop their awareness. Then they verify the knowledge and enhance their awareness in their ongoing intercultural experience. (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010)

My personal intercultural experience allows me to understand and echo Ms. Li’s point. I too come to realize that cultural knowledge is too broad to be adequately learned or taught and what matters most in conducting effective intercultural communication is actually how an individual identifies the cultural difference in a given situation and conducts appropriate behaviours accordingly. The latter relates to the skills dimension of intercultural competence.

*Skills dimension.* A few teachers mentioned the objective of cultural teaching from the skills dimension though not in a specific way. Teachers indicated that cultural teaching should help to develop students' intercultural communication skills and appropriate behaviours, as indicated by Mr. Wu: "They should know what they need to pay attention to in communication with foreigners. Issues like this. Especially for English major students, I think, in their mind they should have a clear idea or standard" (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010).

It appears that the skills dimension has not become a commonly recognized objective for the participating teachers' teaching. Though not preferred, this is understandable. As I mentioned in the introductory chapter, in the city where I received my secondary and post-secondary EFL education and also where the participating universities are located, English is mainly learned and practiced in class and at home. We had very little opportunities to be involved in authentic intercultural communication and this situation has not changed much in the past few years. It is therefore not surprising that teachers do not feel the urge to help students to acquire skills to conduct intercultural communications.

*Home culture.* Most of the teachers who participated in the survey, believed that to promote students' understanding of home culture was one of the least important objectives in their EFL teaching. In the interviews, in response to their objectives for cultural teaching, very few teachers brought up the teaching of Chinese culture. Their beliefs about and understanding of it were mainly reflected through their teaching practice.

For instance, Ms. Pan said that she would not include Chinese culture in her class if there was no reason to do so. She only touched upon it when Chinese holidays and festivals were coming, or when it was addressed in the textbook, which was seldom.

Based on my experience of EFL learning and teaching at one of the participating universities, it was commonly shared that EFL learning mainly involves learning the language and the culture of the countries where English is used as a native language. It appears that this view is still popular among many teachers. I used to hold the same belief when I taught EFL there. It is my years of intercultural experience in the Canadian context that helped me to realize that I also need to be aware of my own culturally conditioned values, beliefs, and perceptions as it applies to my English in order to have effective intercultural communication. Therefore, it may be hard for teachers to reflect on the significance of teaching native culture if they do not have extensive intercultural experience.

However, I was very impressed when one of the teachers, Mr. Wu, placed heavy emphasis on the inclusion of teaching home culture in EFL classes. Mr. Wu suggested that teachers should take every possible opportunity to teach Chinese culture, which was largely lacking in EFL education as well as in general education in China. In his view, Chinese culture provides us with the cultural frame through which we could understand and compare foreign cultures, which is a prerequisite for learning and relating to the target cultures. He mentioned three themes for the significance of teaching and learning Chinese culture. Firstly, he expressed the need for the introduction and transmission of

Chinese culture to the outside world. He indicated that it was now China's turn to export its culture, in order to "maintain its global position" (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010).

Secondly, Mr. Wu believed that teaching Chinese culture, especially the traditional culture, helped to promote students' Chinese cultural identity, which was largely missing among the young generation of students. Mr. Wu shared with me a story to illustrate his point. He was once invited to be a judge of an English Speech Competition. He noticed that one of the students who participated in the competition behaved totally like a westerner: he was imitating westerners' gestures, behaviours, and even the smile. The student did not get a high score even though his oral English was good. The judges could not accept the western cultural identity the student adopted. According to Mr. Wu, students often try to imitate westerners in some aspects. He believed that it was sad that the student lost his Chinese cultural identity. He stated the following:

Though he has the choice to pick his cultural identity, I could not accept his foreign cultural identity. I will not treat him as a foreigner no matter how his behaviours were westernized. He is Chinese giving a speech in China . . . It may be very confusing if you cannot figure out what cultural identity you should live with. . . In most cases, you are a Chinese person who speaks a foreign language . . . it will not work if the Chinese cultural identity is missing. It is actually sad if you do not know who you are. (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010)

Thirdly, Mr. Wu indicated that the learning of Chinese culture, such as history and philosophy, was important for teachers to reinforce appropriate societal values in order for students to set up values, standards (such as standard of right or wrong), and worldviews, which would provide them with criteria when making decisions. He stated:

Chinese students prefer to have a standard or criterion, such as values and worldview, in order to evaluate things. . . The younger generation lacks the typical conceptualization Chinese people have toward the world . . . They learn values and ideas from western people, or the stars on TV. . . Only with Chinese cultural roots, such as Chinese values and worldviews; they would feel comfortable and supportive and would not panic in dealing with specific issues. (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010)

During the interview, Mr. Wu showed great interest in the humanities, such as literature, history, and philosophy. Particularly, he is interested in Chinese traditional philosophy and reads extensively about it, which helps me to understand his appreciation of teaching Chinese culture in EFL teaching.

*Students' growth as a whole person.* While discussing what objectives they set for their cultural teaching, Mr. Wu and Mr. Gao brought up an interesting and insightful point, namely, the objective for students' growth as a whole person. They expressed their concerns about issues relating to morality and psychology as it applied to current university students. According to Mr. Wu, students lack moral standards which serve as guidelines for making moral decisions and he believed that cultural teaching can be a

good way to help to develop moral standards, through the teaching of Chinese culture as discussed earlier.

Mr. Gao has been teaching English major courses for over twenty years and has been the Associate Dean of the School of Foreign language Studies in the past few years. He indicated that his administrative experience, which dealt with student issues, made him realize that educators, including EFL teachers, should not limit themselves to just teaching from the textbooks but should also perceive cultivating people as the overarching educational goal. Mr. Gao added that he was not able to see this when he was young, for it was age and administrative experience that brought him to such understanding. In terms of cultural teaching objectives, Mr. Gao stated the following:

First, I want to enhance my students' cultural knowledge. Then, to develop the kids' maturity in humanity perspective, such as to establish equality between people. . . It is also to advocate pacifism, the idea of pacifists' as found in Vonnegut's work which I have been doing research with. Further, in terms of the relationship between individuals. . . Individual difference is becoming bigger and personality stronger. . . People are having more and more varied psychological issues. . . So through the teaching of culture, I am advocating the idea of understanding, respecting, and caring for others. I think this may be what an educator should do, which goes beyond the textbook. (Interview with Gao, September 28, 2010)

The findings in the interviews are consistent with the survey data in that the objectives that teachers mainly discussed are those that were believed to be most

important by the majority of teachers who participated in the survey. However, some teaching objectives that were also considered important in the survey data were not among the teaching objectives teachers set for their EFL classes. It appears that what they agree to be important objectives are not necessarily what they want to achieve in their teaching, as Mr. Chen put it: “This is what teachers want to realize through their teaching, so it depends on individual teachers” (Interview with Chen, September 29, 2010). Further discussion about this issue will be conducted in the Discussion chapter.

### **Cultural Teaching Practices**

During the interviews, I encouraged the teachers to use specific examples to describe their cultural teaching practice, which allowed me to reach a more comprehensive understanding of *what* and *how* cultural teaching takes place in their EFL classes.

#### ***What to teach***

***Knowledge dimension.*** The most frequently described cultural teaching practice was associated with the knowledge dimension, in which the factual cultural knowledge was addressed the most. For instance, Ms. Ma included the following cultural topics in her teaching:

Conventions and courtesy, things involved in some aspects of courtesy, such as the different behaviours Chinese and western people have while receiving gifts; form of address, such as the mistake of ‘teacher Wang’ and ‘teacher Zhang.’ Some lessons involve weddings, such as the difference in Chinese and western weddings.



Sometimes we also touch upon things like cultural taboos in western societies.

(Interview with Ma, September 30, 2010)

The topics teachers mentioned most in the interviews were more or less the same as in the survey data. According to the teachers, what culture to teach is mainly dependent on what is presented in the textbooks and they usually would not go beyond the textbook contents. Ms. Bai gave the following examples:

Everything about culture that is involved in the textbook, such as history, and a lot about customs and traditions. . . . Many aspects of life, for instance, western diet traditions and hobbies . . . . For instance, War of Independence and the Civil War in the United States. Regarding Civil War, you would talk about the time, cause, and its characteristics etc. Who was the leader? What was the goal? What was the end result? The whole process needs to be introduced, for instance, the liberation of black people, racial discrimination issues; many things are involved. (Interview with Bai, September 28, 2010)

When body language is involved in the listening material, Ms. Bai would also introduce to her students the difference in body language between some major countries. She said: “It’s just a general introduction. . . For instance, how French people express agreement through figure language, and how American people do. Things like that. It’s just a general introduction” (Interview with Bai, September 28, 2010). Ms. Bai believed that cultural teaching in an EFL class did not need to be in-depth. She discussed more in the following statement:

Just to introduce them [students] to a cultural topic, perspective or phenomenon.

And you cannot make it in-depth, just the basic introduction for them. . .

Sometimes, I would make it more in-depth if they are interested. But most of the time, it is just a general introduction. (Interview with Bai, September 28, 2010)

It is probably because of her interest and extensive reading in areas such as history and cultural studies that Ms. Ding was one of the teachers who go beyond the boundaries of the textbook. She introduced cultural topics and issues from a social, cultural, and historical perspective. For instance, when she taught the lesson about Charlie Chaplin, she went into considerable depth.

I would briefly talk about the Silent Movies period, including the Roaring Twenties though it is not mentioned in the textbook. What kind of a society is it? What impact did the industrialized American society have on people's life and the civilization? (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010).

Ms. Ding also used authentic material to demonstrate to her students how events that happened in China are perceived by other countries, which was different from the perspective of Chinese people. In one of her classes, she showed the students a video of the opening ceremony of 2008 Beijing Olympic Games shot by a mainstream media in the United States. Before the opening ceremony, the anchors mentioned things such as Wenchuan earthquake and made some unflattering remarks about China, which Ms. Ding believed inappropriate for a happy and global event like the Olympic Games. She suggested to the students: "This was broadcasted by the U.S. media; it is either that they

do not know about the status quo in China, or they mentioned these on purpose for some reasons . . . you got to learn to see this critically. This is after all how they see us, and you should know what we are really like” (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010). Ms. Ding indicated that decisions on what cultural aspects to teach mostly depended on teachers’ expertise and personal preference.

*Attitudes dimension.* Some participating teachers indicated that they provide their students with the opportunity to see familiar and unfamiliar phenomena and issues in the target cultures and helped them to develop open-minded attitudes and an interest in and curiosity for the target cultures, and culture in general. For instance, Mr. Gao, whose research interest is American literature and also supervises graduate students in areas of literature, shared his experience of teaching English major students in an Intensive Reading class on Martin Luther King’s *Where do we go from here?* The text involved racial discrimination issues in the United States. Mr. Gao has visited the United States four times and in his class he sometimes illustrated cultural issues through his lived experience. He once told his students what he saw on a Greyhound bus: when a black man asked a white woman if he could take the seat beside her, she told him it was already taken. However, the seat remained vacant through the remainder of the trip. Mr. Gao asked the students to express their opinions about how they look at classifying people according to skin colour. He went on and advised them that people should not treat some people as worthy and others as unworthy based on their colour.

Mr. Gao once talked about his personal experience of visiting Castro Street in San Francisco and encouraged his students to respect people with different sexual orientations:

I would tell them to respect those who have different sex orientations. I told them that I advocate for heterosexuality and everyone should try to be heterosexual. This is my sex orientation. But other people might be different. You need to learn to respect their choice though it is different from yours. I told them that I went to San Francisco and visited Castro Street which is well known as a homosexual community. One colour is missing on the rainbow flag and it is purple, right? Homosexual people believe that they lack a kind of chromosome, so they become homosexual instead of heterosexual. (Interview with Gao, September 28, 2010)

While Mr. Gao advised his students to respect people with different sexual orientations, he also unintentionally passed onto the students his own bias toward homosexual people. For instance, his personal belief that it was by choice that they become homosexual and it was a matter of making an effort to be heterosexual.

Mr. Gao also shared with his students that he saw two men totally naked walking on Castro Street. He talked about how people from different cultures looked at their behaviour. He described how some Americans reacted to it as a result of their perspective and also the reaction of Chinese tourists:

They [the two naked men] walked down Castro Street. It seemed that they were going to a party or something. Many Americans shook their head while seeing this.

They showed through their eyes that they thought it was weird and unbelievable. Of course, for our tourist group, we thought it was truly crazy. I think in terms of cultural education, students need to develop tolerance in order to truly understand culture. Culture is diversified. Through my personal experience, I was able to tell them things they have not experienced in order for them to better understand.

(Interview with Gao, September 28, 2010)

Mr. Gao provided his students with the opportunity to experience intercultural encounters through his lived stories in order for them to develop the tolerance, respect, and understanding one needs to understand people from other cultures and the unfamiliar world around them. Besides making a judgment of the behaviours using Chinese norms, he also informed students how the behaviours were examined from the perspective of the target culture, though it appeared that he sometimes expresses his personal judgement implicitly through sharing his lived experience.

Mr. Chen has never been to another country and has little personal intercultural experience to share with his students, but he was able to find his own way to engage them in exploring and reflecting on cultural issues. Mr. Chen described his cultural teaching practice in his Intercultural Communication class. He once showed students a video clip from the movie *Gua Sha*, in which Gua Sha (a traditional Chinese medical treatment to take away fever by scratching one's back) was perceived to be abusive in the United States. During the discussion, Mr. Chen's students reflected on the important role culture played in successful intercultural communication. He offered the following specifics:

They came to realize that cultural learning is important. Of course, language is important as the carrier of culture, but language alone is not enough. Language learning alone does not guarantee effective communication. Only by knowing about the culture of your interlocutor can one achieve effective communication. . . . In students' discussion, they also wondered why people from the West do not know about things as simple as Gua Sha - not even people like a judge or lawyer, who are supposed to be knowledgeable. They reflected on the cultural education in the United States and China, and wondered why we know so much about their culture and they know so little about us. They had such reflections. (Interview with Chen, September 29, 2010)

Mr. Chen said that the students were amazed to find that the American people do not know as much about Chinese culture as they thought they would. Teaching practice like this helped to promote students' knowledge about and understanding of the target culture and their willingness to question and revise their existing knowledge and understanding about it through reflection.

*Awareness dimension.* Ms. Li and Mr. Chen made an effort to promote students' awareness and analytical ability to understand different values, beliefs, and ideological perspectives of English and Chinese cultures. In Ms. Li's class, she often discussed the cultural meaning and value behind vocabulary. She shared a story with me about how she came to understand the cultural meaning associated with the word *breakfast* through her intercultural experience in the United States. In the second day of her arrival in the

country in 1996, she went to a restaurant for breakfast. She ordered a drink from the breakfast menu, but it was served cold. She did not drink it because she did not want anything cold for breakfast (breakfast is always warm or hot in China). She was trying to think of something hot to order, because she was not feeling well and wanted to have a hot drink. Then she realized that she could have milk since people always drank hot milk in China. However, it turned out the milk was also served cold. She asked the waiter to warm it up and expected to receive steaming hot milk. However, the waiter brought back the milk which was at room temperature. She left the restaurant without eating much that morning. As time went by, she came to understand the different cultural meaning attached to the words: “So only coffee is hot. You don’t need to say *hot* coffee, because coffee is hot. But you got to say you want *hot* milk, otherwise it is cold” (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010).

After she came back to teach in China, she pointed out to her students that they should be aware of and pay attention to the social and cultural meaning and value behind vocabulary in their translation and communication. For instance, she talked about the term *working class* in her class. In western countries, *working class* usually includes those who are employed in lower tier jobs which are associated with limited skills and education, and lower incomes. The term is rarely used in a commendatory way. In China, however, *working class* is approached from a different perspective. It is believed that working class are the creator of the wealth of a society and they deserve the most respect. The term has been used in a commendatory sense and people belonging to working class

are considered as having many merits, such as being industrious and hardworking. Ms. Li mentioned to her students how the different cultural meaning attached to the term could affect effective communication between Chinese and people from the United States of America. She said:

Even though this term may not be usually regarded as being rich in terms of cultural meaning, it may have different cultural connotations for Chinese and Americans due to their different social and political systems in the past and at the present. So it should be understood within specific cultural contexts . . . When you communicate in English and want to use the term in a commendatory sense, you may want to elaborate; otherwise the Americans would feel strange and not be able to follow you - they do not understand the virtues that are associated with the *working class* in China. (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010)

Ms. Li's lived experience and her example of how the cultural meaning attached to words may influence intercultural communication helped me to understand why she and other teachers place great emphasis on the development of students' awareness to understand different values, beliefs, and ideological perspectives associated with Chinese and western cultures. For instance, Mr. Chen also encouraged his students to explore and identify the different forms of address in Chinese and western cultures and the implicit values and perspectives behind them. He gave a few examples of what was discussed in class:



For instance, family relation and form of address; we would call *brother* and *sister*, right? Another example: if we go abroad and want to ask for directions from an old lady, how would you address her? Some students would say *grandma* and I told them that it is absolutely not right. For example, in your mother's company, her supervisor is the manager, how would you address him? Would you call him *manager*, *Mr.* or *Sir*? When you talk to the policeman, would you address him *Sir* or *uncle policeman*? Why Chinese would like to use relation to address people? It actually has its history: in the Chinese clan system, addressing others according to family relation can shorten the distance between family members. (Interview with Chen, September 29, 2010)

As Mr. Chen suggested, the form of address was different in different cultures. For instance, in Chinese culture, *grandma* is a term that is normally used for children to address elderly females, and *grandpa* for elderly males. It is a way to bring them into the family in order to show respect, as grandparents are identified as having this hierarchy status that worth respect in China. In English cultures, however, it is not common to refer to elderly people as *grandma* or *grandpa* if they are not the biological grandparents. Calling someone *grandma* or *grandpa* may make them feel old.

Similarly, Ms. Ding told her students how animals were perceived differently in Chinese and western cultures. Specifically she said:

For instance, I would talk about animals. A simple example: the meaning of some animals in the West conflicts to its counterpart in China. For instance, the meaning

of dragon is different in Chinese and western cultures. Our dragon is a representation of auspicious power while most western dragons are evil. Our dragon is water-breathing and theirs is fire-breathing with wings. So when you praise western people, Chinese would say that you are good looking, like a dragon or tiger. This would not be considered appropriate as they represent the devil. I would touch upon things like this. (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010)

***Skills dimension.*** In the interview with Mr. Chen, he told me about an interesting lesson he once had in his Intercultural Communication class for non-English major students. The class involved a scenario of a Chinese husband acting as a translator between his Chinese speaking mother and American English speaking wife. He asked the students to play the husband's role and translate the dialogue (provided by Mr. Chen) between his mother and wife. Most students did direct translation word by word, for instance: the wife addressed the mother by 张太太 (*Zhang tai tai*, meaning *Mrs. Zhang*) and the mother told the wife that *she should eat more, and should not try to lose any more weight*. Later Mr. Chen showed them how the husband translated quite differently. In his translation, his wife called his mother 妈妈 (*ma ma*, meaning *mom*) and his mother told his wife that *she wishes her to become more healthy and beautiful*. Mr. Chen told the students that, though the husband did not quite truthfully follow the original dialogue, he was a good intercultural communicator as his translation makes both the mother and wife feel comfortable without causing any conflict.

The husband demonstrated high intercultural competence and served as a mediator between the two cultures. For instance, when his wife called his mother *Ms. Zhang*, he understood that she was showing her respect by calling her title and last name – she was not assuming that she could call her by first name yet until she was given permission to do so. He translated *Ms. Zhang* into *mom* which is the appropriate and respectful way to address the mother-in-law in Chinese culture. When his mother suggested his wife eat more and not lose weight, he knew that it was her Chinese way to show care and love, and wish the daughter-in-law be healthy; and that such discussion would not occur in English cultures because of issues related to self esteem and personal choices - individual has a life style which is considered a personal thing and not other's business. Therefore, he translated it into what might make his wife more comfortable with.

In the survey data, participating teachers indicated that to promote students' skills of intercultural interaction was one of the most important objectives in EFL teaching. However, it was not reflected in their teaching practice. It may be because they only perceive it as an abstract overarching goal and not a specific objective that they could achieve. Very few teachers were like Mr. Chen who was able to provide students with the opportunity to engage in actual intercultural communications, which helped them to deal with cultural difference and develop communication skills in intercultural settings.

Mr. Wu described how he engaged his students in exploring, understanding, and acquiring new cultural knowledge. He usually included an introduction of the author and social and cultural background of the literature found in the Extensive Reading textbook.

He was not able to elaborate to the degree he would like to due to the limited class time and therefore asked students to do additional research after class. He once asked students to explore the Great Depression in the United States which was the social background of the novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. Mr. Wu was always able to find cultural themes in the textbook and provided his students with opportunities to discover and establish an understanding of the target culture. In one of the classes, he asked students to explore the image white people of the time had of American Indians.

For instance, another piece was *The Ransom of Red Chief* by O. Henry. It involves some tiny details. For instance, American boys played Indians in their games. What kind of an image did the Indians have in the mind of American white people? Of course, the focus of the story is not on this, but I may guide them to explore the issue after class if they are interested and willing to do some research about it.

(Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010)

In another class exercise, Mr. Wu encouraged students to compare the social issues in the United States during the 1980s with those of present-day China and discussed whether the solutions proposed in the United States were applicable in China. Students gave various opinions relating to Mr. Wu's questions - some said *yes* and some said *no*. He described students' responses toward one of the issues - solving traffic problems with respect to the social context in China:

It was proposed in the United States that one solution was to cancel the speed limit, no speed limit. Chinese students said that this of course will not work in China.

Then, the question is why? Students believed that, first, cancelation of the speed limit will not work due to the large population in China; second, driving skills are not good enough. Traffic accidents will increase without a set speed limit. So this is the surface issues they mentioned. (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010)

Mr. Wu engaged students in cultural learning experience that allowed them to identify and interpret cultural perspectives of the target cultures in the textbook, and establish relationships between the target and home cultures. Similarly, Mr. Gao also provided his students with such learning activities. In one of his classes, the textbook has an excerpt from American Chinese writer Amy Tan's novel *The Joy Luck Club*, in which the Chinese immigrant mom and American grown up daughter have many conflicting values which were due to their different cultural backgrounds and perspectives. Mr. Gao asked the students to talk about their parents' expectation for them as compared to the Chinese immigrant mothers' in the novel.

Teachers' cultural teaching practice was discussed in terms of the four dimensions of intercultural competence. However, this by no means suggests that students develop the four dimensions separately. Actually, the teaching of the four dimensions is often interwoven and students may develop their intercultural competence multi-dimensionally through exploring and interpreting one cultural issue and comparing it to Chinese culture.

The survey data suggest that teachers who teach College English and English major courses have similar cultural teaching practice regarding how frequently they address cultural topics and apply intercultural competence teaching. In the interviews I found that

though they may touch upon similar topics, they approached them from different perspectives and engaged in different levels, dimensions, and degrees of intercultural competence teaching. Teachers who taught College English courses, such as Ms. Ma and Ms. Bai tended to focus more on the factual knowledge dimension, while teachers who taught English major courses, such as Mr. Gao and Mr. Wu, were able to approach cultural teaching from more in-depth intercultural perspectives. Mr. Chen, who was a College English teacher, was an exception due to the fact that he also taught the Intercultural Communication course and all the cultural teaching experience he described took place in that class.

***Home culture.*** Teachers' cultural teaching practice as presented above suggests that most teachers did not often include Chinese culture in their EFL classes, which supported the results found in survey data and was also consistent with how they perceived the inclusion of Chinese culture discussed earlier. Ms. Pan explained that she only touched upon it when Chinese holidays and festivals were coming, or when it was explicitly addressed in the textbook. Most of the articles in the textbook were about foreign countries and written by native English speakers, consequently, more foreign cultures were involved. Similarly, Ms. Ding said it was an English class which should involve, most of the time, foreign cultures. She further pointed out that within the limited class time available for cultural teaching, she would like to teach more about western culture in order to enrich her students' knowledge. This is also what they expect. Ms. Ding stated the following:

I try to use the time left [after language teaching] to enrich the cultural knowledge of my students. They would like to know more about what it is like in the foreign world. So you got to talk more about western cultural background under such conditions . . . and the background introduction of the texts is also about western cultures. (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010)

Ms. Pan expressed her concern over the inclusion of Chinese culture. She felt that it was difficult to add Chinese culture unless it was explicitly mentioned in the textbook and students could actually see the connection. Otherwise, students would complain that her teaching was not relevant to the text. However, Mr. Wu held a different opinion. He believed that it was doable if teachers truly wanted to include Chinese culture in their EFL classes. He took his class as an example to illustrate how he manages to insert Chinese culture, especially Chinese philosophy, into his EFL classes.

Actually I think we lack the teaching of Chinese culture. Let's take a simplest example: sometimes teachers got to tell jokes when they lose students' interest in class. But if you talk about some Chinese philosophy that the students do not know about, or some traditional culture, they would be very interested. For instance, I once told them the story of 管宁割席 [*Guan Ning ge xi*, meaning: One should watch the company he or she keeps, as one takes the behaviour of one's company], while we were talking about friendship. This is a common idiom. If it were in the past, kids should have known about it after reading *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. It is about being cautious while choosing friends. But now it is all new to them, they

have not heard about it and are very interested. So I think these things are doable if one really wants to do it. (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010)

*Non-English cultures.* When teachers talked about their cultural teaching practice, it appeared that the cultural topics in their teaching were mostly associated with a few major English speaking countries. So I asked them if their EFL classes involve the culture of non-English speaking countries, most teachers indicated that their teaching did not include much about non-English cultures and neither did the textbook they used. In the textbooks, priority was given to the culture of the United States and the United Kingdom, and other cultures were rarely mentioned. As Mr. Wu suggested, this was due to the dominant status the two countries have in the world. He also observed that students only have knowledge about the United States and the United Kingdom as a result of teaching to the test and following the textbook.

Ms. Bai, Ms. Ding, and Mr. Chen mentioned that they have addressed different meanings of body language in different cultures. Mr. Gao gave an example of how he once touched upon the non-standard English used by speakers whose first language is not English, such as people in India.

Ms. Ding believed that it all depended on the teachers' personal preference as to what and to what degree culture was taught. She described how she managed to include some non-English cultures in her English class. For instance, she told her students some Greek and Roman myths and the modern idioms that were derived from them, and she introduced the process of creating a mummy in ancient Egypt and the historical and



cultural background associated with this particular process. This did not surprise me as Ms. Ding has, since I first met her at university, always demonstrated great interest in and a broad body of knowledge about various cultures.

Mr. Chen told me in the interview that he has taught different courses related to Business English and has benefited a lot from teaching the courses. For instance, in his Intercultural Communication class, he actually used the cases in his Business English class to demonstrate cultural issues in different countries. He told me he once introduced an intercultural communication scenario involving Americans selling golf balls in Japan. The balls were packaged in a white box in groups of four and did not sell well. Mr. Chen asked the students to discuss the reason why Japanese would not like to buy the balls. Students suggested that it must have to do with the fact that the balls were packaged in group of four. Mr. Chen told them one reason for the lack of sales could be that white in Japanese culture represents death and the number four was considered unlucky due to its similar pronunciation with the word *death* in Japanese.

***Stereotypes & Cultural Image.*** When I was a student learning EFL in China, I had always believed that the western world was the most exciting and delightful place to go and learn due to the exclusively positive information and image I got from my EFL class and the public medium. The survey and interview data both revealed that this situation has not changed much. In the survey, the majority of teachers agreed that English teachers should generally present a positive image of English culture and society and this was echoed by some teachers in the interviews.

According to most participating teachers, it is due to the fact that the textbooks rarely address the negative side of western cultures, as Ms. Ma stated: “These aspects are rarely mentioned in the textbook. Sometimes the high crime rate is addressed, but most of the time, it is the good side, the side that we can learn from” (Interview with Ma, September 30, 2010). Ms. Ding indicated that teachers usually did not address the negative side of the target culture deliberately. According to her, it was because teachers did not know much about the issues themselves. This is reasonable given the fact that Chinese public media tend to present a mere positive image of western cultures, which helps to construct not only students’ but also teachers’ knowledge about the cultures. Ms. Ding stated that she occasionally touched upon some negative issues, such as racial discrimination, physical mutilation (Africa), and slavery (South America).

According to the teachers’ observations, most students are not able to critically think and evaluate western cultures and consequently lack critical thinking in cultural learning. Some tend to admire and even worship western cultures without reflection, as Ms. Bai described: “Many students have the dream of going abroad . . . Many students say that they look forward to going abroad” (Interview with Bai, September 28, 2010). Mr. Chen believed that the reason that most students idealized or had a stereotypical impression of western cultures had to do with the cultural teaching they have received. According to him, teachers should be responsible and address the negative aspect of a culture. He also stated that some people, such as teachers who returned from a short visit

abroad, tended to speak of the positive aspects of foreign cultures only, which did not reflect a full picture of the society.

Ms. Ding elaborated on this issue by saying that most teachers communicated to students their own personal impressions and experience of the foreign cultures most often from a positive perspective, which reinforces the students' affection toward western cultures. She shared the following story:

I remembered that when I was studying in my Master program, or maybe my Undergraduate program. Anyways, a teacher once said that a friend of hers who had visited Denmark described the excellent welfare system there. Back then, all my impression about Denmark was that it was the hometown of the little mermaid, and I knew about Hans Christian Andersen, but it is so far away. Is Denmark a good place? It must be, because my teacher told me so. So, most of the favourable attitude is transmitted from the teacher. (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010)

Ms. Ding believed that teachers had considerable influence on students due to the fact that foreign cultures were far away and teachers were often the primary source of knowledge for students. Teachers also have the most attitudinal impact on students.

Adding to the point, Ms. Li stated: "I think it is important to note that when you teach intercultural communication, you should never talk to students with the tone like this: look at the Americans! That is how they do it (she was using an admiring tone). You got to say: this is how they do it and this is how we do it (she was saying with a neutral tone). There is only difference" (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010).

Few other teachers such as Mr. Gao, Mr. Wu, and Ms. Pan indicated that in their teaching they discussed both positive and negative aspects of foreign cultures and presented foreign social and cultural contexts to students in an objective manner. For instance, Mr. Gao, who had been to the United States four times, said: “I would introduce the negative side that I saw in the United States, the other side of the coin. I would like to present it to them in an objective way, neither to smear them nor to beautify them” (Interview with Gao, September 28, 2010). Ms. Pan believed that what one should teach about the target culture, the positive or negative side, should not be influenced by the present relationship the target country has with China. She indicated that in her class, both positive and negative aspects of a culture are discussed in an objective and open manner.

It is worth noting that the media in China generally present a positive image of the western countries and their cultures, particularly, the United States of America and the United Kingdom. On the contrary, my lived experience with American media is that they tend to report only the bad news or the negative information about other countries, China included. It is believed to be the nature for news media to report on a regular basis negative issues relating to China due to the fact that China is a major competitor to the country and China’s success would be at the expense of the Americans. Therefore negative issues relating to China in news reporting are more powerful in terms of public interest and fascination. Instead of a realistic image and an objective attitude, Chinese and American media pass onto the bias and stereotypes about the other culture to its people, which may influence the intercultural communication between Chinese and Americans.

Ms. Bai indicated that there was little point in attempting to change students' stereotypical opinions through EFL teaching. She believed that little could be achieved in changing students' perspectives due to limited class time. She noted that, it was not the in-class time that has the greatest impact on students' acquisition of cultural knowledge, but rather their after-class engagement with the target culture (e.g., through the Internet and mass media), which was often longer than the EFL class time. This external influence has the potential to greatly influence their thoughts and values.

However, Mr. Wu expressed a different opinion. He believed that students' biased attitudes toward western cultures could be changed and students would become more critical toward the target culture if a variety of issues were addressed in class. He had seen changes happen as a result of addressing cultural issues. He gave the following example:

One of the lessons I taught in my Extensive Reading class is about the experience of a poor Russian immigrant taxi driver in the United States who had a car accident. The other driver in the accident was an Italian who seemed to be rich and looked like a gang member. The Russian required an apology from the Italian but the Italian refused to apologize even after the police's mediation. In the end, the taxi driver left the police office and justice was not being done. . . . Some students said that they had believed that everything was great in the United States, but if they immigrated to the United States and they could be the taxi driver. . . . Here is another example: we once talked about censorship in the United States, some

pornography terms appeared in the textbook. . . . Of course the words are neutral, neither in a complimentary nor derogatory sense. But students had not known about the words before and therefore were surprised to find that there was also a dirty part of the American culture. (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010)

It appears that in most teachers' EFL class, Chinese culture is usually dealt with when they need to compare some cultural issues or perspectives between Chinese and western cultures, as reflected in Mr. Chen's words: "Cultural teaching usually involves comparing what China is like and what the United States is like." They spoke of *they* vs. *we* referring to Chinese and foreign cultures. Mr. Wu recognized this issue and stated the following:

Cultural teaching is at the stage of general introduction. . . . Much of the information is from the textbook and about history. So it is easy to give an impression that foreign people are all like that, or people from a country are all like that. The current situation is that, Chinese and foreign people are all discussed and taught as a group, a crowd, and a people. It is hard to approach the cultures at the individual level, as people in each country can be categorized according to class, age, gender, and so on. I think very few teachers can reach that level. (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010)

Mr. Chen showed his concern for the overgeneralization and stereotyping of cultural issues. He felt that teachers were not able to go beyond this limitation due to their limited

knowledge about the diversity within a culture. In another interview, Ms. Li echoed this idea and further commented:

I think this is inevitable as you do not know how not to stereotype. For instance, when you introduce how British people do it, you can not say William does it this way and John that way. You will never finish the topic this way. . . . Plus, you do not know if John really does it that way. So it is inevitable. The only thing you can do is to introduce the stereotype first, and then tell them that it is only the general case and will vary according to individuals. But the thing is, you have to know about it - how different they are . . . . So it all depends on your awareness. You need to have a broad mindset.

### ***How to teach***

During the interview with Ms. Li, I asked her in what way she usually carried out her cultural teaching. She shared with me the story of her teaching practice when she first came back to teach in China and discussed how it was influenced by her lived experience in the United States. When she was studying in her Master of Education program in the country, she enjoyed and benefited from her professors' student-centered teaching (e.g., discussions and presentations). When she first came back to teach in China, she tried to follow her American professors' instructional style by asking students to do group presentations. She soon found that this did not work with her Chinese students. Though the students worked very hard to prepare for the presentation as homework, they only focused on their own presentation in class. Prior to their presentation in class, they were

still busy preparing their own, while ignoring others' presentation; After they presented, they were too relaxed to be actively involved as listeners while others presented and participated very little in the discussions. Ms. Li concluded that only ten minutes of the class time in which the students were presenting had something to do with them, and the other forty minutes were a waste of time. She went on to say that even those ten minutes were not as effective as she had hoped since the presentation had been prepared and they were only presenting it in class. Later on Ms. Li asked her students to have small group discussions. She found that she had to be actively patrolling in the classroom. Otherwise students would quickly go off topic or not discuss in English - they would either socialize or discuss in Chinese. Ms. Li observed that in group discussions some students did not talk at all and some talked too much. So the students did not have equal opportunities. Therefore, she began to engage students in pair discussion which would give them equal opportunity to talk, but she also found problems with it - students usually did not have a lot to talk about after a couple of sentences. As a result, teacher-centred lecturing dominates her present pedagogy. She compared the Chinese students' participation with that of her American class and concluded that: "Chinese students are just not used to discussion." As for the reason, she believed: "I think it has to do with the training they received since they were young, and this cannot be changed at the university level" (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010).

Ms. Li's lived experience of teaching and learning through student-centered pedagogies helps me to understand the findings revealed in both the survey and



interviews: the most frequently applied instructional activities are the traditional way of lecturing and pair or small group discussion, and other forms of student-centered teaching are only employed occasionally.

***Teacher-centered teaching.*** During the conversations with the teachers, it appeared that they often *introduce, tell, or inform* students about cultural knowledge as well as their own understanding and interpretation of cultural issues, and students are most of the time “quiet listeners” (Interview with Ma, September 30, 2010). Teacher-centered teaching tends to dominate the interviewed teachers’ cultural teaching practice. Ms. Ding described how she introduced western culture to her students: “One of the texts is about a girl telling the story of her wedding. So I tell them things about western weddings. Sometimes I would introduce them to some etiquettes and traditions at banquets” (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010).

Cultural teaching appears to be transmission of knowledge, rather than giving students direct or vicarious experience, as Ms. Ma suggested: “Cultural teaching is limited to a general introduction” (Interview with Ma, September 30, 2010). This is reasonable due to the fact that most EFL teachers do not have direct lived experience in foreign countries; and therefore culture is often perceived as knowledge rather than behaviours, communications, and ways of interpreting experience. This has an impact on why and the degree to which teachers choose to involve students in the teacher-centred cultural learning.

*Student-centered teaching.* While reporting their cultural teaching practice, all teachers mentioned that they engaged students in some form of discussion, such as pair and small group discussion. Discussion periods are all preceded by teacher's explaining or demonstrating the topics and issues to be addressed. For instance, in one of Ms. Ding's class regarding crime, the textbook was about a story which took place in the United States about two people who were robbed at night on their way home. They gave away whatever they had with them since the robbers had guns in their hands. Ms. Ding informed the students that citizens in the United States are allowed to have guns. She then asked the students to discuss what they would do if the same situation happened to them in China where guns are more likely to be replaced with knives or other weapons. In the discussion, students indicated that they would act in the similar way as their American counterparts and give their money to the assailant. They discussed some fundamental values and issues associated with life and concluded that life was more important than money.

In Mr. Chen's classroom cultural teaching practices which were presented in above sections, he was able to engage students in more student-centered activities, such as translating and pair and small group discussions. Mr. Wu's Extensive Reading class is also a good example of engaging students in varied student-centered learning experiences. Mr. Wu introduced how his Extensive Reading class was different from other teachers', where reading was done prior to class and the primary activities in class involved student discussion of their understanding of the text which was often related to cultural issues,

thus focusing on understanding not just reading. Two students were assigned to host the discussion in each class. They first gave a presentation about a topic or theme that emerged from the textbook and then raised questions for the class to discuss. The host students' questions were, most of the time, concerning the development of the story. Mr. Wu often guided them to find more in-depth cultural topics and themes for presentation and helped them to pose more insightful questions. For instance, he recalled: "when the textbook involves American Indians, then what is the image of Indians in American history? I would suggest that they present on this topic" (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010).

Mr. Wu also shared with me an interesting exercise the students did in his reading class. The lesson involved different proximal perspectives and interpretations that Americans and Europeans have. The text included a picture showing German and American offices. The doors and windows were open in American offices, but were closed in German offices. Mr. Wu asked students to draw a picture of a Chinese office setting in order to compare it with the physical spaces in other cultures. He described his students' drawing as follows:

The result was interesting. The door to Chinese people's office is closed, but the window is open. The drawing has been the same from different students in the past few years. I asked them why they drew like this. The students told me that the door is closed to keep others away, and the open window is to observe the outside.

(Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010)

In Mr. Chen's and Mr. Wu's classes, students were not just passive receivers of cultural knowledge, but were engaged in exploring cultural issues and perspectives themselves. They both mentioned that they took into consideration students' cognitive skills and acquisition ability while deciding how, and the degree to which their cultural teaching practice was carried out. They tended to differentiate their teaching practice accordingly. For Mr. Chen, he would provide more student-centered cultural learning activities if the class of students were academically strong and possess higher level cognitive skills and more cultural knowledge. For those students who did not have a strong academic background and high English proficiency, he would engage them in more teacher-centered learning and allow them to answer questions in Chinese. In Mr. Wu's Extensive Reading class, students who he perceived to be intellectually more capable would receive more culture related research work. For instance, two host students once presented their report about Australian immigrants. Mr. Wu loaned them a book on American history and suggested that they extend their report to include issues about American immigrants. For the majority of the students, he would "simply point out cultural issues and topics emerged in the textbook, and leave it to the students whether they would like to go further and do research about it" (Interview with Wu, September 29, 2010).

Almost all teachers mentioned that they could not engage students in more in-depth cultural discussion due to limited class time. Ms. Bai, Ms. Ma, and Mr. Chen also expressed their concern over students' limited English proficiency which prevented them

from discussing more complicated cultural topics and issues, as Mr. Chen said: “The discussion has to be cut short or called off due to a lack of English proficiency, as students cannot further the discussion in English. This is after all an English class.” The priority of language teaching and learning in EFL education finds its reflection in the efforts to achieve maximization of English use in class and in the use teachers make of cultural input - the discussion of cultural topics and issues is frequently treated only as opportunities for oral English practice. For instance, in Ms. Ma’s College English class, when she observed that students have difficulty in speaking spontaneously in discussion, she told them the discussion topics in advance and asked them to come to class prepared. In many cases, students would write down what they want to say in class and then deliver the speech in class discussion. Regarding this issue, Ms. Ma believed that this was the only way they were able to practice their oral English. The discussion periods did not provide students with the opportunity to construct knowledge and promote cultural awareness and understanding through in-depth discussion about cultural topics and issues raised in the class.

### **Integration of Cultural Teaching**

#### ***Proportion of Cultural Teaching***

Ms. Ma is in her mid forties and has been teaching College English courses for 23 years. During the interview she stated that her EFL class was similar to the traditional Intensive Reading class and mainly involved learning vocabulary, analyzing sentences, and explaining grammar. Cultural teaching was not regularly included in her class. This

was not just in her class, as Ms. Bai pointed out: “Many college English teachers are still following the traditional way of English teaching in their classes” (Interview with Bai, September 28, 2010). Ms. Bai, who has been teaching College English courses for almost 30 years, did not support such teaching. She believed that nowadays students already had a solid foundation of vocabulary and grammar from high school and therefore, university EFL teaching should go beyond the basics and focus on the training of their English literary skills. Ms. Bai, as well as Ms. Pan and Ms. Li, identified a wide range of skills they engage students in during class time (e.g., reading skills - such as skimming, speed reading, critical reading, analysis, lexical inferencing, and summary and deduction; speaking skills - such as the ability to correctly or fluently express ideas using learned English grammar and words, and sentences).

Language learning still dominates EFL instruction both in terms of time spent and content learned, though the focus has been changing from teaching the language as a mere linguistic code to the training of literacy skills, but in both cases cultural teaching is not emphasized. Teachers indicated that the amount of time they usually allocate to cultural teaching ranges from five to slightly more than ten minutes per class period, which lasts between 40 to 50 minutes. This is consistent with the findings in survey data which suggest that cultural teaching practices, including both cultural topics and instructional activities, were not frequently addressed or applied in teachers’ language classes.

Teachers expressed different opinions toward how much time they should spend in cultural teaching. On the one hand, Ms. Pan, who spent around five minutes in each of her class periods, believed that this was a sufficient amount of time for cultural teaching. She argued: “The inclusion of cultural teaching should aim to serve the teaching of our Extensive Reading class, for which the acquisition of culture is not a primary objective” and she further explained how she came to this understanding through her initial teaching experience:

When I first started teaching, I actually did not know how to teach. I felt that the text was related to a cultural issue. It was interesting and I liked it. So I talked about and elaborated on it. Later the students told me, in a polite and implicit manner, that it was a reading course and they preferred to learn how to read faster. Then I suddenly realized that I might be way off topic. Since then, I am uncomfortable talking about culture. I would not go further after a couple of sentences. But in another class, the students gave different feedback and said in the same implicit and polite way: ‘Ms. Pan, what was it like in the United States? You only mentioned a little bit, but we would like to know more about it.’ Then I was wondering if I was not talking enough about it. I constantly adjust the proportion of cultural teaching. It is not easy to decide how much culture to teach in a course. But first of all, it must be relevant; then, how much to teach. It is not appropriate to teach either too much or too little. (Interview with Pan, September 26, 2010)

On the other hand, most teachers, such as Ms. Ding, Ms. Li, and Mr. Chen, claimed that they would like to carry out more cultural teaching. However, some practical constraints made it difficult for them to do so.

### ***Constraints in Cultural Integration***

The main constraints teachers talked about for the integration of cultural teaching into EFL classes are as follows: limited class time, students' interest and motivation, the test oriented system, curriculum requirements, a lack of cultural issues in the textbooks, and teachers' lack of cultural knowledge. In most cases, these constraints co-exist to various degrees and impact teachers' decision on when and to what degree cultural teaching is carried out.

***Limited class time.*** Almost all participating teachers mentioned to me that limited class time was the major obstacle which restricted them from including the teaching of culture as an important component in their English classes. The curriculum coverage, which focused on linguistic dimension and/or language skills, occupies most of their class period. Ms. Ding spoke of the limited time that she had and the amount of material she needed to cover:

I teach twice a week for one class of students, two class periods teach time. I get to finish my course syllabus, including the texts, the exercise, and oral practice. As for the remaining time, like now, we are preparing for Winter CET 4 for second year students, so I get to squeeze some time to talk about CET 4 exercises. Not much time is left. (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010)



*Students' expectation to pass English tests.* There is the pressure on teachers to meet students' expectation to pass English tests and this overtakes many of the cultural learning opportunities that could have been provided to students. As Ms. Ding said, besides curriculum coverage, teachers also needed to prepare students for CET4. CET4 is the abbreviation for China's national College English Test Band 4. It has been serving as one of the requirements for a Bachelor's degree nation-wide since 1986. From 2006, some universities have cancelled this requirement. Now most Chinese universities, including the five participating universities, do not require students to pass CET4 to get a Bachelor's degree. However, it is still regarded as an important goal of university EFL teaching and learning for students to pass CET4 and many students strive for College English Test Band 6 (CET6). This is due to the fact that English ability is an important requirement on the job market and CET4 and 6 are recognized as the authoritative and the most popular criteria to assess students' English proficiency. Sometimes teachers are evaluated by the university based on their students' passing rate of CET4.

Mr. Wu used to teach College English courses for a few years before he transferred to teach in the English department. He observed that most non-English major students and about half of English major students took a utilitarian perspective to the learning of English. They learned English as a tool and only cared about what was needed to pass tests, particularly CET4, CET6, and Entrance Examinations for Masters' studies. Similarly Mr. Chen pointed out that students generally had a heavy work load with respect to language learning and their drive to pass language tests surpassed their

motivation for cultural learning. They expected their EFL teachers to teach to the test and help them to pass the test. As he stated: “The problem with Chinese students is that they always want the class to be related to the tests.” Hence teachers spent most of their class time on the linguistic dimension of language teaching, which was the major focus of language tests. Though most College English teachers indicated in the survey that to help students to pass CET 4 was not as important as the cultural dimension of EFL teaching, in reality they perceived and responded to students’ need to pass the test, and hence focus on the linguistic dimension only. The perceived importance of successfully passing language tests, though sometimes not explicitly expressed, acts as an obstacle to cultural teaching.

*Students’ linguistic perspective of language learning.* Mr. Chen told me that students perceived EFL learning from the traditional linguistic perspective and “they always want to learn some new sentences and listen to something in English; and only that is considered an English class” (Interview with Chen, September 29, 2010).

Consequently students expect teachers to focus on linguistic teaching which would make them feel that they have learned something. Similarly, Ms. Ma described her students in the following way:

For students, they may not remember the cultural background knowledge you talk about. They forget about it after listening and feel that they have learned nothing.

As for the traditional way of teaching the language, they think that the teachers teach words and terms which they can learn and remember. They feel that they learn more through that way of teaching. So this is a big misunderstanding. They could

learn the words and terms on their own, but not for cultural knowledge which they will have to do some research in order to learn. But still, when a teacher teaches culture, some students consider it as being irrelevant. (Interview with Ma, September 30, 2010).

Students are not motivated to be involved in cultural learning activities and often consider cultural teaching as irrelevant or “off topic” (Interview with Chen, September 29, 2010). Classes that address cultural teaching in a significant way may pose a threat to students with respect to their attitudes, understanding, and prior beliefs about EFL teaching. Often they do not see the connection between language acquisition and culture. Both Ms. Pan and Ms. Li told me about their experience of being confronted by students who spoke unfavourably about the substantial amount of time they devoted to cultural teaching and consequently forced them to adjust their teaching. Ms. Li further explained:

If I come across a cultural issue that I know about, I would try to give it to them.

But normally I would not extend it, because I am still a bit afraid that students may say that the teacher talks too much that is not useful. . . . For instance, you need to come across a lesson that involves world view if you want to discuss it. You can not talk about world view to the students who have just learned 26 letters, or have just started to read something simple. They cannot see the connection between them, no matter what. So when you talk about it, you may inspire them, but students still think that the teacher is not doing his or her business – he or she does not teach the

textbook. Bluntly speaking, students would say that the teacher does not teach the textbook. (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010)

***Lack of support from the EFL curriculum/syllabus.*** The interview with Ms. Ma was conducted in the office which she shared with other teachers. When we started the interview, only the two of us were in the office. Toward the end, a few teachers came and went. When I asked her about the constraints for cultural teaching, she said the following in a very low voice, so that other teachers would not hear:

We had to follow a very rigid schedule which is prescribed in the faculty level College English course syllabus. If someone is going to do class observation in my class, it would be problematic if I am teaching the fourth unit when I am supposed to be teaching the fifth unit, according to the syllabus. It is very dogmatic.

(Interview with Ma, September 30, 2010)

Ms. Ma felt that they lacked the freedom in arranging a flexible EFL teaching practice due to the fixed content of the course syllabus which made less time available for the integration of cultural teaching. When I asked her if there were any outlines for cultural teaching in the syllabus, she replied: “No. The course syllabus is only about language teaching, and then things such as the assigning of written homework. Culture is not included” (Interview with Ma, September 30, 2010).

According to Ms. Ding, the national curriculum does not help her with the cultural teaching either. It only focuses on language learning and it is all up to individual teachers when it comes to whether, when, what, and how cultural teaching is involved in their

classes, which makes it potentially difficult for teachers to integrate cultural teaching into their EFL teaching.

***Lack of cultural themes in textbook.*** Besides the set curriculum, teachers, especially College English teachers, also mentioned that a lack of cultural issues and related topics in the textbook made it difficult for teachers to integrate cultural teaching. In China, the College English department chooses the textbook for all EFL classes across the university. Usually the textbook includes a series of four books (levels), one book per semester. Teachers are required to cover all the units in the textbook during the semester. Though they may have supplementary teaching materials, they have to follow the textbook that is chosen by the department.

Almost all teachers indicated explicitly that cultural teaching practice had to be connected with and based on the subject content and pedagogical guidelines of the textbook. However, as Ms. Ding pointed out, the textbooks did not provide a foundation for cultural teaching which the teachers can extend and elaborate on. She said that many of her colleagues agreed that the topics and themes in the textbook were limiting and did not relate directly to the lives of students. Ms. Ding believed that teachers needed to start with cultural topics and issues presented in the textbook as a starting point and made an effort to go beyond limitations of the textbook. She argued: “I cannot just talk about something for no reason. The textbook does not provide you with the starting point.” She gave more details in the following statement:

The textbook actually covers many topics, but teachers feel that overall the topics selected are not the common ones, plus, it does not interest students. For instance, the text I was teaching from the other day is about the tendency for women to lack iron if they do exercise. I really do not feel that much could be said about this topic. The whole text is about lack of iron and females – females lack iron if they do a lot of exercise and they are not aware of the symptoms. A couple of sentences could summarize it. The text is not very meaningful or interesting. Even the teacher is not interested in it while teaching. (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010)

***Teachers' lack of cultural knowledge.*** The survey data suggest that, among the four dimensions of intercultural competence, teachers' cultural knowledge has the most impact on their cultural teaching practices. The interview data suggest that teachers such as Ms. Ding and Mr. Wu, who demonstrated extensive cultural knowledge, appeared to carry out more adequate cultural teaching from an intercultural perspective; however, some teachers suggested that a lack of cultural knowledge impacted the integration of cultural teaching into their EFL classes.

Ms. Li has been serving as the Associate Dean of the School of Foreign Language Studies for a few years and her job dealt with faculty's teaching and research. She pointed out that most Chinese EFL teachers did not have overseas living experience and their primary source of cultural knowledge was gained from reading books. Therefore, even though it was ideal for teachers to make use of various resources to prepare for cultural teaching, they often did not have time to do so – they did not have time to do a lot of

reading which was necessary to enrich their cultural knowledge. Ms. Li gave the following explanation:

You just got to read, read a lot of stuff. But I think that actually one issue in China now is that teachers at all levels are required to do academic research. The research you do does not usually involve broad knowledge that you could teach students. For instance, it takes you a few months to write a paper. I would be able to read a lot of articles using this amount of time and gain substantial cultural knowledge . . . .

However, many teachers put research before learning to advance their knowledge of cultural teaching. Their research experience may promote in-depth knowledge in some areas, but not rich enough to prepare them to engage in cultural teaching.

Language teaching requires breadth of cultural knowledge. (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010)

Ms. Li went on and explained that cultural teaching was challenging in two ways.

First, it was difficult for teachers who did not have overseas experience or those who lacked breadth of knowledge about the target cultures to integrate cultural teaching into language teaching, as “they are not sensitive enough to find out cultural themes and issues emerging in the textbook and make connections between culture and the language”

(Interview with Li, September 28, 2010). Ms. Ding echoed this idea and said that as far as she was concerned, some EFL teachers, who did not have solid knowledge in the arts and humanities because of their science background in high school, had little to do with cultural teaching.

Second, Ms. Li suggested that the biggest challenge for teachers who would like to engage in cultural teaching was the traditional idea held by students that teachers should be superior to students in all aspects. They expected their teachers to be highly knowledgeable in terms of subject matter and ready to give an answer when being asked. It is unlikely that this can be achieved due to the fact that both teachers and students have equal access to information of the target cultures. For teachers who do not have overseas experience, they gain cultural knowledge through the same avenues as their students, such as books, the Internet, and mass media. Ms. Li pointed out that teachers did not always know the values behind cultural issues and they sometimes were afraid of being asked by students about what they did not know about, as it may cause their embarrassment in front of students. Teachers often avoid topics that they had little knowledge of, which often meant not addressing topics relating to culture. Teachers, especially junior teachers, do not like to take the risk of embarrassment in front of their students in order to address cultural issues and values that could have been ignored without causing any problem. Ms. Li indicated that even she would do the same sometimes. Regarding this predicament, she had the following to say:

I think students need to develop an open perspective toward teaching. Teaching should be a reciprocal learning process between the teacher and students through discussion. If a student happens to be an expert on an issue and the teacher does not know much about it, the student can play the role of the teacher without a biased



thought like “you see, the teacher knows nothing. The teacher is no better than me” (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010).

When I suggested that teachers who lacked cultural knowledge might still provide students with cultural learning opportunities by engaging them in cultural exploration, Ms. Li expressed a different opinion and stated the following:

To develop their spirit of exploration, I do not deny that. But if the teacher demonstrates poor cultural knowledge, it is not easy to promote a spirit of exploration despite the good will. Students would feel that they do not need to listen to you if they find that you are not knowledgeable and only tell them to explore this and that by themselves. So they would not follow you. On the contrary, if you have broad knowledge and tell them that this is far from enough, students would believe in you and have the desire to explore more. So I think the teacher’s knowledge has to be broad enough in order to be qualified to guide students in cultural exploration, otherwise, they would not follow your guide. (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010)

### **Personal and Professional Development and Teacher Training**

In the above discussions, I presented some of the participating teachers’ lived stories of cultural teaching and learning and intercultural experience within the three-dimensional narrative space, namely, the *temporal*, *personal-social*, and *place*. In the interviews, I also invited participants to share their lived experience of personal and professional development with respect to the cultural dimension of EFL teaching. Their

stories look backward to their past experience of cultural teaching and learning as students and teachers in both China and overseas contexts through personal and social interactions, which reflect the development of their current beliefs about and understanding of the teaching and learning of language, culture, and communication; and look forward to their desired teacher training and development needs.

### ***Overseas Experience and Reflection***

Three of the interviewed teachers have overseas experience in an English speaking country. They shared their intercultural experiences and talked about how their perceptions about and practices of EFL teaching, cultural teaching in particular, has changed over time. Mr. Gao said that overseas experience gives language teachers first hand knowledge about the target cultures which may not be achieved through reading books. For instance, he talked about his experience of seeing his family doctor and specialist in the United States and reflected on their public health system. He also talked about how this experience helped him in his teaching.

For their medical system, they are responsible for patients; and they are well regulated. As a language teacher who teaches English, you may learn something through such experience. You are able to learn what you cannot learn from reading books and tell students when you come back. For instance, after I came back I taught the lesson *The Tragedy of Old Age in the America* regarding health insurance issues of old people in the United States. With such experience in the United States, it is easier for me to help students to understand the American medical system and

its welfare. . . I think it may provide you with first hand knowledge, which is superior to just reading books. (Interview with Gao, September 28, 2010)

Ms. Ma had been to the United Kingdom as a visiting scholar and stayed there for three months. She said that her intercultural experience in an English speaking country allowed her to develop a better understanding of the target culture as a result of her lived experience. Before she went to the United Kingdom, she learned from her English learning experience in China that British people are all ladies and gentlemen who tend to be conservative, traditional, and not readily willing to communicate. However, she had different impressions toward British people as a result of her personal experience. She told a story about how a black taxi driver helped her and her friends to find China town. They asked the taxi driver for the direction to China town. He spent quite sometime explaining how they could get there, but they still did not quite get it. So he asked them to get into his car and drove them there, free of charge. During her stay in the United Kingdom, she was impressed when she found that in her actual intercultural interactions with the British people they were very outgoing and willing to communicate and offer help. She was also surprised how she stereotyped these people and expressed her willingness to correct her biased view of British culture. In her present EFL teaching, she attempts to communicate to her students her newly found knowledge of British culture.

Ms. Li, who lived in the United States for five years, told of an intercultural experience her Masters' supervisor, Mr. Liu, had. Mr. Liu's story happened before Ms. Li went to the United States. When Mr. Liu was in the United States, an American friend of

his took him out to a performance. At the ticket office, Mr. Liu insisted on paying for the tickets. At first, his friend said: “I take you out, so of course I’m the one to pay.” Mr. Liu said: “no, no, I’ll pay for it.” In the end, the friend was confused and eventually let him pay. Mr. Liu was confused too. When he came back to China and told Ms. Li about this, he said: “You see I was just being polite. He took me to the performance, but I got to pay for the tickets!” Ms. Li went on to state the following:

What makes it interesting is that Mr. Liu is one of the earliest researchers in China who initiated intercultural communication research. . . . I was joking with him saying that he should have known better about what is being courteous and what he should have done in a situation like this. (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010)

Before her own intercultural experience, her supervisor’s story made Ms. Li reflect on teaching and researching about intercultural communication. She believed that it was difficult for teachers to promote students’ successful intercultural communication merely through teaching, as every situation was different and it was hard to judge and make decisions in real situations. She also believed that there was disconnect between theoretical knowledge about how to conduct appropriate intercultural communication and the complexity of real intercultural situations.

Ms. Li then shared some stories of her own intercultural experience and described the development of her understanding of intercultural communication and cultural teaching through reflection upon her five years experience of living in the United States. She began with the anxiety she had in her initial contacts with the American people when

she started her Masters' program in this country. When her American peers invited her to a party, they said to her: "Come if you like." She was not sure if she should go; this did not sound like a welcome invitation when she translated it into Chinese and understood it from a Chinese perspective. In Chinese culture, this invitation would sound more like they were just being polite and did not really want her to go to the party. Ms. Li was anxious in making sense of the underlying meaning behind the words and guessing if she was really welcomed. It was difficult for her to make a decision. She reflected on this experience by stating the following:

Though my research involved intercultural communication and I knew the cultural tradition behind it, that is, they do not want to force you to go and give you a choice. But I still understood it from a Chinese perspective, which seemed that they did not really want you [me] to go... (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010)

At that time, she believed that in terms of culture and communication, knowing about cultural traditions and issues from a theoretical perspective may not be consistent with one's behaviours in the situation one actually encountered. The reason was, as she stated: "because we lack personal experience [of such situations] . . . you [we] only know about it theoretically, so you [we] can not decide when it actually happens" (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010), and only understand it from the home culture perspective.

However, as time went by and she had more intercultural interactions with the American people, she came to realize that cultural knowledge brought intercultural awareness, which played a significant role in discovering and learning new cultural

knowledge and intercultural skills in order to promote effective intercultural communications. She believed that though one may not always know how to react in specific intercultural communication, he or she was at least aware of the cultural difference, which was necessary to develop intercultural communication skills. She talked about her experience of acquiring cultural knowledge in new intercultural encounters:

Once you have this knowledge [of cultural difference], you actually become more sensitive. You know there is a difference. As for a specific situation, I can be frank and ask about it if I do not know what I am expected to do. I would show my identity and indicate my ideas and then ask them about it. I think this is important. . . . Foreigners are actually very friendly, and they may extend a little bit if you ask about one thing. They would tell you when you should do it like this and when you should do it like that. (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010)

Ms. Li concluded: “five years is not a very long period of time, but long enough for me to make reflections on some issues.” It is through such reflections on her intercultural experiences which happened in cross-cultural places and connected her past, present, and future, that Ms. Li came to perceive cultural teaching as a means to get students to think about and reflect on their own thoughts, values, and behaviours. Ms. Li was the only teacher participated in the follow-up interviews who had received a degree (Master of Education) from abroad. As compared with some other teachers, she demonstrated a more in-depth understanding of the relationship between language, culture, and

communication. She also made frequent reflection on her teaching and employed inquiry based teaching and learning practice.

### ***Teaching and Reflection***

Apart from what teachers can learn from their overseas experience, professional development is also seen as important to their day-to-day lived experience of teaching and learning. Ms. Ding talked about how she benefited from her teaching experience and enriched her cultural teaching by updating a file of cultural teaching resources. She kept a list of all cultural topics, themes, issues, and perspectives relating to her EFL class. For instance, for some classes it was about the cultural background of the text. After teaching, she kept adding new information to the list, which was usually brought up through interactions with students. She explained more in the following:

I actually gain something from each class, including the repeated teaching of College English classes during a day. For instance, I may finish my planned teaching in the first class. When I teach it for the second time, students may come out with a question, or we may have some interactions; then I may extend and talk about something that I recently knew which is not on my list yet, to extend the topics. Then I come to know that I could add this to my list, which is an enrichment and improvement to the knowledge. But this has to do with the interaction with students in class and their reaction and feedback. During teaching, it rarely happens that an idea suddenly comes into my mind by itself. (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010)

When there were reoccurring cultural topics and issues during her teaching, Ms. Ding would try to explore aspects of the topics that are different yet relevant to the textbook. Regarding this, she said: “It is to make an effort to address what has not been covered well enough” (Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010).

### *Self-learning*

Ms. Ding, Mr. Chen, and Mr. Wu demonstrated broad knowledge and in-depth understanding about Chinese and/or western cultures during the interviews and through my personal contact with them. They contributed it to on-going professional development through self-learning. For instance, Mr. Wu likes subjects such as literature, history, and philosophy, and has read a lot about these fields. In his research experience, he found that instead of following others’ [usually the foreign researchers’] ideas, he needed to develop his own ideas toward various issues, including cultural issues. His efforts with respect to reading, deep thinking and reflection are the key in the development of his cultural competence which helps him to gain an in-depth understanding of culture and cultural teaching. Similarly, Mr. Chen indicated that he made an effort to advance his knowledge about the differences between Chinese and western cultures by watching English movies and television programs, and also by reading books on intercultural communication.

As Ms. Li suggested, though it is relatively easy for teachers to have an in-depth understanding of some particular cultural aspects due to their personal or research interest and experience; very few teachers could be knowledgeable about a wide range of cultural topics and issues required for sufficient cultural teaching. Ms. Ding believed that it was a



commitment and a long process which required accumulation of knowledge about and understanding of humanities.

It would be easy for you to teach if you are interested in it and have a solid knowledge base. Otherwise, I think the cultural knowledge you have would be used up quickly. If you only have knowledge in a few aspects, you may easily exhaust them in a semester, as we talk and discuss a lot about culture in our oral class.

(Interview with Ding, September 16, 2010)

According to Ms. Ding, for people like her whose interest revolves around cultures and research about it, it is not difficult to learn cultural knowledge and carry out cultural teaching. However, for teachers who are not interested in cultural studies and do not have a knowledge base for cultural teaching, it may be difficult for them to prepare for the class and learn all the information, which may be regarded as an extra task.

### ***Interaction and Collaboration between Teachers***

Teachers' professional development is also seen through the communication and collaboration between colleagues. For instance, Ms. Pan and her colleagues communicate in a number of informal settings, such as during lunch (some teachers get together for lunch), after faculty meetings, during class breaks, and through email and phone. For those who teach different sections of the same course, they share their teaching experience and communicate about various aspects of teaching, such as teaching activities, pedagogy, and student feedback.

Besides casual communication among colleagues, Mr. Chen and his colleagues, who teach different sections of the same course Intercultural Communication, also prepare the course as a group. Mr. Chen stated that three teachers lead the course preparation for each particular chapter. These three teachers were responsible for suggesting teaching ideas and finding appropriate teaching materials, such as texts and video clips, and they would then share their findings with other colleagues. Other teachers can supplement with more teaching ideas or materials if they have them. It not only saved much preparation time this way but also greatly enriched their teaching, as Mr. Chen said: “One head does not work well, it makes it much better when a few heads work together” (Interview with Chen, September 29, 2010). Besides the Chinese EFL teachers, a foreign teacher who worked in the same department sometimes lead and participated in the group preparation and provided valuable alternative perspectives.

Mr. Chen gave some insightful ideas about cultural teaching and reported meaningful teaching practices. As one of the directors of the College English department, he had the opportunity to work closely with the Dean, Associate Deans and some senior teachers in the faculty. He believed that his understanding of culture and cultural teaching was the result of working and interacting with more experienced teachers. In the following, he explained how such experience helped him:

Some senior teachers stand at a higher position. They are older with more experience and knowledge, especially our Dean, Professor Lin who has various experiences. . . . So we just follow their ideas. Their ideas have a subtle influence on

us gradually. We learned from them, their points of view. The points of view I talked about just now are actually theirs, their initial ideas. They told us what it was and we felt that they were right and this is what we should do. (Interview with Chen, September 29, 2010)

Teachers achieved their personal and professional development regarding cultural teaching through different avenues and in their own unique ways. They demonstrated motivation and appreciation for self-improvement in professional development which will be facilitated through appropriate teacher training.

### ***Teacher Training***

Participating teachers mentioned teacher training programs and professional development opportunities that they received. Ms. Ding said that her university provided funding for four EFL teachers annually to go to an overseas university as a visiting scholar for six months. Ms. Bai talked about the teacher training program hosted by *Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press* in Beijing every summer which aims to introduce the New Oriental English textbook which is published by them. The textbook is for non-English major students and is used by many universities nation wide. They allow each university to send a certain number of EFL teachers to attend the training, free of charge. According to Ms. Bai, the training focuses on EFL teaching pedagogies and the linguistics dimension of language teaching. It may involve some cultural content, but very little.

At some universities, teacher training is also provided at the faculty level. For instance, Ms. Pan who works in the English department at University A has the opportunity to observe her colleagues' classes. Teachers in the department are required to take observation notes and communicate with the teaching teacher after class. It depends on a teacher's personal preference to pick which course and whose class to observe, and the course may or may not involve cultural content. In the College English department at the same university where Mr. Chen teaches, some senior teachers or those young teachers who won the department wide Quality Teaching Award are invited to present a demonstration lesson for peer observation. Mr. Chen described how this is carried out:

After the class observation, a discussion is usually conducted. The classes that won the Quality Teaching Award are also burned on discs which are distributed to teachers within the department. So in this way, the department provides a channel for senior and more skilled teachers to present and share their teaching. Some teachers go to national conferences on intercultural communication. Our department also invites specialists to give talks related to culture. Last year, we invited our foreign teacher, who came from the U.K., to give a few series of talks related to culture.

Ms. Li expressed her concern over current foreign language teacher training and professional development. She believed that teachers should constantly enrich their knowledge. However, this can not be achieved through only personal research on Chinese and foreign cultures, or reflection on some limited aspects of culture. She took Chinese

culture as an example and said that it was impossible for individual teachers to do research on all aspects of Chinese culture. She stated: “Language teachers, such as English, German, and French teachers should be provided with a program, in which they receive systematic training.” She took Chinese culture as an example and suggested that those who did research about Chinese culture should offer language teachers a course which provided a simple framework of Chinese cultural traditions. Ms. Li believed that when such teacher training was provided, foreign language teachers could greatly enrich their cultural knowledge in a short period of time. She went on to state the following:

It is easy for them to offer such course to foreign language teachers, right? For language teachers, it is more effective this way than reading books for three to five years by themselves. . . . Foreign language teachers may have an in-depth knowledge about a certain field due to the research experience. But does everyone need that in-depth knowledge? It does not need to be that in-depth. . . . For teacher training, people who do research about Chinese culture should come and teach us. On top of this, we could do peer discussion like what we ask students to do. This way, we may learn so much knowledge within a few years, or a few months, even half a month. . . . So I believe that teacher training in terms of intercultural communication teaching should be proposed and treated as a discipline, as culture is so broad. (Interview with Li, September 28, 2010)

Ms. Li came to this suggestion by reflecting on her lived experience of such “training.” Technically, it is not training but a course she audited as a teacher. When she

first came back to teach in China after five years of living in the United States, she and a colleague of hers went to audit a course on Chinese and western culture offered by a professor from the History department. The course was conducted in Chinese and was very informative. For instance, the professor used very simple language to address the cultural values behind Greek and Roman myths; and compared these with Chinese values to find similarities and differences. Ms. Li said that she had read the same story many times but had never been able to see the values behind it, let alone having it compared with Chinese values. Ms. Li believed that if such a professor could provide an intensive training for foreign language teachers for even half a month, it would be better than having them read books on their own for a few years.

In teachers' lived stories of personal and professional development, they play within the three-dimensional narrative space – time shifts from their initial years of teaching to their current teaching and from the time they were abroad to the present days; place shifts from one classroom to another; from China to the United Kingdom, the United States, and Hong Kong; and their personal and social interweave in and out of classrooms.

### **Summary**

The findings were generally consistent between the survey and interview data. The findings in the interviews indicated that most teachers considered cultural teaching as being important in EFL education, which was believed to be necessary to support and facilitate language learning. Teachers' perceived cultural teaching objectives not only

reflect some aspects of the knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills dimensions of intercultural competence teaching but also go beyond to include students' growth as a whole person.

Though cultural teaching was believed to be important, it was not yet an important component or a regular focus in participating teachers' EFL classes. Teachers indicated that limited class time, students' interest and motivation, the test oriented system, curriculum requirements, a lack of cultural issues in the textbooks, and teachers' lack of cultural knowledge, were the main constraints for the integration of cultural teaching into EFL classes.

Comparatively speaking, knowledge dimension was touched upon most frequently in participating teachers' EFL teaching, which may partly explain why the traditional teacher-centered approach, in the form of lecturing, was still often found in cultural teaching. Pair and small group discussion was also frequently employed. However, teachers indicated that some practical constraints held them from applying other forms of student-centered teaching.

Teachers achieved their personal and professional development through self-learning, interaction and collaboration between teachers, and reflections on their cultural teaching and overseas experience. Teachers also shared their experience of participating in teacher trainings at the faculty and national level, and expressed their needs, expectations, and suggestions for teacher training.

## **CHAPTER VI**

### **DISCUSSION**

This study used both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the extent to which Chinese university EFL teachers' beliefs about and practice of cultural teaching reflect an intercultural perspective, and how teachers' intercultural competence and beliefs about cultural teaching has an impact on their teaching practice. I used to be an EFL teacher at a Chinese university, so with both outsider perspective as a researcher and insider perspective as a former EFL teacher, I will discuss the insights gained from this study about cultural teaching at Chinese universities by analyzing themes that emerged from both quantitative and qualitative data.

#### **Beliefs about Cultural Teaching**

Though almost all teachers believed that cultural teaching is important in EFL education, most of them defined its objective mainly from a linguistic perspective. They considered linguistic dimension as the key objective and major component in EFL teaching at both the conceptual and practical level, which is congruent with the findings in previous studies in both Chinese and other EFL contexts (Castro, Sercu & Mendez Garcia, 2004; Sercu, 2006; Byram & Risager, 1999; Zhou 2005). Language proficiency was believed to be a prerequisite for cultural teaching and learning and a factor for determining the degree to which cultural integration is possible. While some teachers perceived culture as an integral component which is embedded in EFL teaching; others considered it as being adjunct to and an add-on for language teaching. Cultural teaching



was often valued to the extent that it supports and facilitates language learning, which confirms findings from previous studies (Byram & Esarte-Sarries, 1991).

### ***Cultural Teaching Objectives***

Teachers demonstrated both commonalities and variations in their beliefs about cultural teaching objectives. Their perceived cultural teaching objectives reflect various aspects of an intercultural perspective toward cultural teaching. The most commonly shared objective is to promote the acquisition of a body of cultural knowledge. Some teachers stressed the objective of developing students' curious, tolerant, respectful, and open attitudes toward the target cultures. Some mentioned the need to foster students' ability to understand and interpret target cultures and cultural difference between home and target culture. Others recognized students' needs to have an understanding of the target people's culturally determined values and behaviours, which has been generally regarded as an essential objective for intercultural language teaching (Byram, 1997; Knutson, 2006). What some participants failed to perceive is that cultural teaching also needs to inform students that the notion of culturally conditioned values and behaviours also apply to their home cultural identity. The primary goal of language and cultural learning is "not to understand foreign culture, but to understand our own" (Hall, 1973, p.53). Students need to be aware of their culturally constructed self, that is, to develop their social and cultural self-awareness (Byram, 1997; Knutson, 2006). As Knutson (2006) suggests:

the understanding of self as culturally determined is closely associated with the humanistic values L2 *education* is designed to promote, and it is a valuable asset for lifelong learning as well. Individuals may eventually forget particulars of their knowledge about a culture (and the particulars change in any case) but keep in mind more general notions about approaches to culture learning, categories of cultural behaviour, or the nature of language culture relationships. (p.599)

An important objective of intercultural competence teaching is to help students to develop “insider views of the second/foreign culture” and “outsider views of the home culture” (Knutson, 2006, p.600), that is, to see both target and home culture from an informed understanding, thus developing an intercultural understanding and awareness (Byram, 1997; Fantini, 2000, 2006). Besides those shared views, one of the interviewed teachers, Mr. Wu also pointed out that an important purpose of cultural teaching in EFL education is to nurture students’ minds for critical and open-minded thinking and enhance divergent and international perspectives of thinking.

Though most teachers perceive promoting students’ understanding of target cultures as a primary objective for cultural teaching, Mr. Wu argued that it should not be done in such a way that students lose their Chinese cultural identity. He believes that the teaching of Chinese culture should be given priority over the target cultures, as knowing Chinese culture provides students with a cultural framework which is a prerequisite for learning and relating to the target cultures. According to Mr. Wu, knowing about Chinese culture also helps students to develop and maintain their Chinese cultural identity;

reinforce appropriate worldview and social values and standards; and introduce Chinese culture to the outside world. He believes that Chinese EFL learners should be Chinese who communicate in English instead of Chinese with an English native speaker's identity who copy their ways of being and thinking. The consequence of this, as told in the story by Mr. Wu, is that some Chinese students behave like westerners. As Kramsch (2003) put it "our purpose in teaching culture through language is not to make our students into little French or little Germans, but in making them understand why the speakers of two different languages act and react the way they do" (p.32). Mr. Wu argued that university students are still at the age when they are developing their values, beliefs, world views, and cultural identity and need to be carefully guided through the process. In the present day Chinese society, which is greatly influenced by westernization, EFL learners, as the cultural messengers in intercultural communication should not only learn about and understand target cultures, but also become well informed about Chinese culture, as they are the window through which people in the outside world come to know China and Chinese culture (Miao & Fan, 2006; Zhou, Xu & Bayley, 2010).

Another interviewed teacher, Mr. Gao, viewed cultural teaching objective from the perspective of student's growth as a whole person. He argued that teachers should perceive cultivating people as the overarching educational goal. This idea can be traced back to Confucius who was one of the first to proposed the idea of 博学于文，约之以礼 (*bo xue yu wen, yue zhi yi li*) (Confucian Analects) in education, meaning "The superior man, extensively studying all learning, and keeping himself under the restraint of the

rules of propriety, may thus likewise not overstep what is right” (Legge, 1966, p. 76). It is implied that teachers should not only impart a broad body of knowledge to students, but also educate them to abide by the social and moral values and regulations. In modern China, this educational philosophy is also reflected in the term 教书育人 (*jiao shu yu ren*). 教书 (*jiao shu*) means to impart knowledge, 育人 (*yu ren*) means to educate and cultivate people. 教书育人 (*jiao shu yu ren*) has been traditionally regarded as an essential goal of education and it is required in *the Teachers Law of the People’s Republic of China* (1993) as the duty of teachers at all levels. However, with the booming economy of China since the mid 1990s, the social educational context is gradually commercialized. Education is becoming a business and the goal of education in terms of 育人 (*yu ren*, meaning to educate and cultivate people) is not mentioned as frequently as it used to be in both social and educational contexts. In fact, only two of the interviewed teachers, Mr. Gao and Mr. Wu, spoke of it. They also observed that students in the modern Chinese society lack social values, moral standards, and worldviews which serve as guidelines for making moral decisions and suggested that EFL classes can be an ideal place for teachers to cultivate students and prepare them for life through learning and reflecting on cultural values, beliefs, and worldviews of both the target and home cultures.

Many insights have developed in multicultural societies such as Canada, where issues related to linguistic and cultural diversities are central in educational discussions, and can help us to understand cultural teaching objectives in Chinese EFL education. Xu and Connelly (2010) argue that minorities “need to be viewed as rich intellectual

resources for the reconstruction and enrichment” of the mainstream culture (p. 254). This idea also applies to the cultural teaching and learning practice in Chinese EFL settings.

Besides teaching the target cultures, which is viewed by most of the participating teachers as the primary objective in their cultural teaching, teachers also need to view cultural teaching and learning as a process of reflecting on, reconstructing, and enriching Chinese culture. EFL learners should be treated not only as people who are in need of learning foreign cultures, but also as people who contribute to the world culture diversity by introducing Chinese culture through intercultural communications (Miao & Fan, 2006). In multicultural educational settings, “there has been increasing awareness of cultural *diversity* over the idea of cultural *differences* in school and elsewhere” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 259). The same understanding needs to be developed in second and foreign language learning contexts as well. Similar to the multicultural Canadian context discussed by Xu and Connelly, Chinese society has also been undergoing cultural reshaping and reconstructing in the globalizing society through intercultural communications with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, instead of reinforce the “we” vs. “they” binary division in comparing Chinese and the target cultures, foreign language educators need to perceive EFL teaching and learning as an opportunity of 育人 (*yu ren*, meaning to educate and cultivate people) to prepare students for life long learning for “extended and expanded mutual we-ness in dialogues across civilizations in hopes of building a multidimensional bridge that connects different

ways of knowing and being and, hence, harmoniously brings together ethnically, socially, culturally, and linguistically diverse people” (Xu & Connelly, 2010, p. 263).

### **Cultural Teaching Practices**

In this section I will discuss cultural topics addressed and instructional activities applied in participating teachers’ EFL classes and issues that emerged in their teaching practice.

#### ***What to Teach***

Though most of the participating teachers recognized the importance of cultural teaching, both cultural teaching in the broad sense and intercultural competence teaching have not yet become an important component or a regular focus in their EFL teaching. This resembles many European foreign language educational contexts (Larzen-Ostermark, 2008; Sercu, 2006; Sercu et al., 2005; Sercu, Mendez Garcia & Castro Prieto, 2005). It is worth noting that given the limited class time for cultural teaching, some of the teachers do make an effort to provide students with the opportunity to develop, to varying degrees, their intercultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and skills, which reflect an intercultural perspective of cultural teaching (Byram, 1997).

However, these cultural teaching practices are not shared by all teachers to the same extent. For instance, most of teachers, especially teachers who teach College English courses, focus on the knowledge dimension of cultural teaching, that is, they transmit to their students some superficial and introductory cultural knowledge. This is understandable, given the fact that most Chinese EFL teachers do not have the experience

of going to the target culture, they lack training in cultural study, and their own experience of cultural learning is from their teachers, books, and other media resources. It is difficult for them to have an in-depth and comprehensive understanding of the target cultures. In such cases, introducing simple and superficial cultural knowledge seems to be an easy option.

This is not just a problem in the Chinese context. The systematic representation of cultural issues from an intercultural perspective has been largely missing in European foreign language classes as well and cultural teaching has been treated as to enlarge students' cultural knowledge (Aleksandrowicz-Pedich, Draghicescu, Issaiass & Sabec 2003; Sercu, 2006). Language teachers only scratch the surface level of cultural teaching, which multicultural educators deride as the Four Fs: food, fashion, festivals, and folklore (Banks, 2002) and many English textbooks for French learners often include such “vital but superficial” contents (Fries, n.d., p. 4). Such cultural knowledge is “not usually the elements of culture that learners typically experience difficulty with” (Liddicoat, 2008, p.278). As suggested by Ms. Li, some teachers feel that their insufficient understanding of cultural knowledge hinders them from conducting more cultural teaching, as they are not able to identify and analyze cultural issues found in the teaching materials and thus miss the teachable moment in class.

The findings suggest that some teachers provide their students with the opportunity to see familiar and unfamiliar cultural phenomena and issues, and help them to develop curious and open-minded attitudes toward the target cultures and culture in general.

However, many teachers' cultural teaching practice tends to be monocultural: they mainly focus on developing students' understanding of why people of the English cultures speak, think, and behave the way they do. Monoculturalism holds the notion that cultural teaching is to promote language learners' ability to understand and use the target language in appropriate ways perceived by native language speakers (Phillipson, 1992; Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Consequently, students' voices and their native cultural identity are marginalized (Kumaravadivelu, 2003), which may have contributed to the fact that Chinese university EFL learners were found to have limited knowledge and understanding of their native culture (Han, 2002; Shi & Wang, 2001). It is worth noting that some teachers, for instance Mr. Wu, were able to recognize the need to incorporate the teaching of home culture and realize it in his EFL teaching. Teachers may help students to perceive themselves as culturally determined and individually framed, appreciate Chinese culture, and thus construct their Chinese cultural identity. As suggested by Larzen-Ostermark (2008), the teaching of culture should be seen as "a reciprocal, dialogic process where the student's own culture and the foreign culture(s) are taken into consideration" (p.540).

In the Introduction chapter of the dissertation, I recalled the difficulty, confusion, and frustration I experienced in my lived intercultural communications and reflected that my language learning experience has not prepared me in terms of how to deal with and reflect on the cultural differences that emerged during intercultural communications. In the inquiry process of this study, through the lived stories of participating teachers'



cultural teaching and learning experience, I came to understand that in my former EFL class and the participating teachers' classes, more attention should be given to developing students' intercultural skills (including discovery, interaction, interpreting, and relating). Enhanced intercultural knowledge, attitudes, awareness, and understanding of cultural values underlying behaviours help students to detect cultural differences, but they do not guarantee effective interactions. One needs to identify, interpret, and cope with the cultural differences and act and react appropriately in intercultural contexts. As Ms. Li's lived intercultural experience reveals, it is through constant experience of intercultural interactions that one is able to learn to deal with cultural differences without causing anxiety and frustration, and eventually able to function in intercultural encounters. Students need to experience various intercultural contexts in order to internalize skills of intercultural communication.

Mr. Gao's and Mr. Chen's classes are good examples of providing students with such opportunities. With his personal intercultural experience, Mr. Gao is able to engage the students in experiencing intercultural encounters through his lived stories. Though Mr. Chen does not have such experience, he also finds a way to provide students with authentic intercultural contexts, such as playing an English movie clip and translating an intercultural communication dialogue. They also provide students with the opportunity to promote their awareness and analytical ability to identify, explain, and relate the ideological perspectives involved in home and the target cultures.

### *Cultural Image & Stereotype*

A finding of this study indicated that participating teachers mostly touch upon the positive side of western countries only and present to students a positive image of their cultures. Some cultural issues are oversimplified this way, which may consequently lead to stereotypes and reinforce students' blind admiration and even worship of western cultures. This is partly due to the ideological impact of colonial discourse of English (Matsuda, 2002), which reveals the importance of critical thinking and critical language awareness (CLA) in EFL education. In recent years, the need for critical thinking and CLA has also been increasingly addressed in first and second/foreign language education (Chiu, 2009; Fairclough, 1992, 1999; Labercane, Griffith & Feuerverger, 1998; Wallace, 1999). According to Paul (2003) and Lipman (1995), critical thinking is the "critical examination of a statement by examining its assumptions, the accuracy of supportive evidence and the logical reasoning advanced in reaching conclusions, with sensitivity to situated contexts" (Chiu, 2009, p.43). CLA refers to how people are aware of the ideologies hidden in the discourse of a language, namely, "an awareness of how discourse figures within social practices . . . an awareness of how discourses can work ideologically in social relations of power, and so forth" (Fairclough, 1999, p.74). An increased level of CLA helps students to develop critical thinking toward possible ideologies implied in the teaching of English language and its cultures, and to diminish the ideological impact of colonialism and neo-colonialism. Critical pedagogies have been proposed and discussed in various educational disciplines. In language education, it places emphasis on the

potential of using the context of teaching a foreign language and its cultures for “promoting critical reflection about social issues” (Ohara, 2006, p. 402), which needs more attention from Chinese EFL teachers and researchers.

The cultural image presented in EFL classes and students’ stereotypes about western cultures is also partly due to the fact that in past decades, a goal of EFL education in China was to learn of the advanced science and technology from western countries in order to help develop its own (Miao & Fan, 2006). As a result, everything from the western countries was considered as being better, superior, more advanced, and highly attractive, including the culture. Most Chinese people tended to perceive western cultures as being superior and more advanced as well, and teachers were expected to address only the positive side of these countries. This idea is still seen among some of the participating teachers, as reflected in Ms. Ma’s statement: “We usually address the good side of western cultures, the side that we can learn from” (Interview with Ma, September 30, 2010). Consequently, most students believe that “foreign cultures are better” (Interview with Ma, September 30, 2010) and they do not recognize and appreciate the value of Chinese culture. However, it is worth noting that some teachers have started to realize that in intercultural communication, cultures are not superior or inferior to one another but only different, and they recognize the need to present an objective and realistic image of western cultures in their EFL classes, such as in the case of Ms. Ding, Mr. Chen, and Mr. Wu. Chinese EFL teachers together with the mainstream media need to change the

biased perceptions and help Chinese students to recover and reconstruct their own identity through intercultural competence teaching.

Students' stereotypes may also be a result of their homogeneous perspective toward the "we" vs. "they" binary division relating to Chinese and the target cultures. Teachers tend to project an image of the target people and their culture as a homogeneous group with the statements such as *the British do it that way, the Americans do it that way, and the Chinese do it this way*. In the interviews, Ms. Li expressed her concerns for the overgeneralization and stereotyping of cultural issues. However, she indicated that most of the time teachers are not able to overcome it – that is all that they can handle due to their limited cultural knowledge about the variations within a culture.

It is suggested that teachers could start with their home culture and remind students of the existence of variations among members of Chinese culture. Special attention could be given to the differences between age, gender, social, ethical, and regional groups as subcultures within Chinese culture (Knuston, 2006). Teachers could encourage students to reflect on their impressions and expectations about cultural beliefs, behaviours, and issues in their home and the target cultures, and prepare them to suspend and modify their stereotypes or disbeliefs if the reality does not meet their expectations (Byram, 1997; Fries, n.d.).

### ***English as a Lingua Franca***

The participating teachers indicated that their cultural teaching mainly focused on the culture of the United States and the United Kingdom. This is partly due to the fact that

the textbooks are dominated by these cultures and cultural information from other countries is usually not included; and partly because, for teachers who had overseas experience, their intercultural experience is usually associated with these two countries which seems to limit their view about and practice of cultural teaching. The dominance of American and British culture in the language classroom may implicitly contribute to the internalization of “a view of the world created through colonial discourses of English” (Matsuda, 2002, p. 436) and the reinforcement of linguistic and cultural imperialism and hegemony (Phillipson, 2008). The expression of *English as a lingua franca* (ELF) is “a way of referring to communication in English between speakers with different first languages” (Seidlhofer, 2005, p. 339). Chinese students are learning English not only to communicate with people from English speaking countries, but rather with people all over the world with diverse language and cultural backgrounds. An international and intercultural view of English as a global means of communication help teachers to broaden their understanding of EFL education, and cultural teaching and learning in particular. Based on empirical research, Baker (2009) proposes that “rather than a focus on knowledge of specific cultures, what is needed is the ability to interpret, negotiate, mediate, and be creative in their use and interpretation of English and its cultural references” (p.585), which reflect some aspects of the skills dimension of Byram’s (1997) intercultural competence model. An understanding and appreciation of world cultural diversity would help to develop students’ intercultural understanding, interpreting, and

mediating in order to promote successful intercultural communication with both native and non-native English speakers worldwide.

### ***Instructional Pedagogy***

Most of the time, the participating teachers follow the traditional teacher-centered approach of cultural teaching, namely introducing or telling cultural knowledge to their students. Some teachers provide an explanation as to why people from the target cultures speak, think, and behave in certain ways, in which cultural values and perspectives become a body of knowledge for students to understand and learn.

In intercultural competence teaching it is proposed that students should be provided with the opportunity to develop their cultural understanding through “a process of noticing, reflecting on and interpreting aspects of culture presented through language. The role of the teacher is . . . to provide culturally rich language experiences and to guide students’ learning through their questioning practices” (Liddicoat, 2008, p. 284). Student-centered teaching pedagogies are therefore more appropriate for the purpose of developing students’ intercultural competence. In this study, most participating teachers provide their students with student-centered learning activities in their cultural teaching, mainly in the form of pair and/or small group discussion over cultural topics. Discussion can be an effective way to integrate culture into language classroom if it provides students with the opportunity to dig deep to explore cultural issues by themselves, critically examine their own culturally conditioned self, and reflect and internalize intercultural understanding. The development of both linguistic skills (e.g. listening and speaking) and

cultural competence can be achieved through discussion over various cultural issues. However, some teachers indicated, implicitly, that the discussion of cultural issues in their classes is more for language practice than for cultural exploration, as Ms. Ma put it “to reinforce students’ listening and speaking skills” (Interview with Ma, September 30, 2010). Sometimes teachers cut short the discussion because they observe that students do not effectively engage themselves in discussing in English - it is when students have difficulty in expressing complicated ideas in English and may only continue the discussion in Chinese. Consequently, in some classes, students are asked to prepare a speech about a topic prior to class so that they can present it in English in class. This is partly because, as Castro, Sercu, and Mendez Garcia (2004) suggests, “deep in their hearts, they believed that teaching the language is more important than teaching intercultural competence” (p.102).

Almost all interviewed teachers mentioned that lack of time is the major constraint to the inclusion of cultural teaching into their EFL classrooms. Though many teachers believe that language and culture can be taught in an integrated way, in their teaching practice, language and culture are not treated as being “inseparably intertwined” (Bush, 2007, p. 730), but rather as “separate areas of teaching and learning” (Liddicoat, 2008, p. 277). Language is, in most participating teachers’ classes, approached as a linguistic system which is taught and learnt by decoding. The inclusion of cultural dimension is viewed as an add-on to EFL teaching which requires extra time, rather than an aspect of communication that has to be integrated into language teaching as a way of using existing

time differently. Language is a social practice which needs to be presented in its cultural context in which its meaning is constructed (Kramsch, 1993). Effective integration of intercultural competence teaching into EFL classroom should be “integral to the interactions that already and inevitably take place in the classroom and beyond” (Liddicoat, 2008, p. 282), and in all aspects of language learning (e.g. vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating).

Participating teachers in this study are able to take into consideration students’ cognitive development, their needs, areas of interest, and expectations for language and cultural learning in the planning and carrying out of cultural teaching. Some teachers end up with differentiated teaching approaches, while most others reduce the amount of cultural teaching. Students’ traditional view toward EFL teaching and learning makes it challenging for teachers to conduct cultural teaching in their desired way.

### **Impact of Beliefs & Intercultural Competence on Teaching Practice**

#### ***Beliefs***

Teachers’ beliefs about cultural teaching were found to have an impact on their teaching practice, which supports the view that what teachers believe helps to shape their instructional behaviours (Errington, 2001, 2004; Johnson, 1992; Pajares, 1992). Though almost all teachers declared that cultural teaching is important in EFL education, they did so for various reasons. The fact that teachers perceive the importance of cultural teaching tends to be congruent with their teaching practice. Teachers who hold the view that cultural teaching is meaningful and necessary for its own sake tend to support students’



acquisition of intercultural competence more than those who believe that cultural teaching is to support and facilitate language learning, in terms of both cultural issues addressed and teaching activities applied.

Teachers indicated the objectives for cultural teaching in both survey and interviews. The findings suggest that what is more consistent with their teaching practice is not how important they perceive the ideal objectives proposed for intercultural competence teaching as reflected in the quantitative data, but rather their personally articulated objectives, namely, their objectives-in-practice. There is general congruence between teachers' belief about their objective-in-practice for cultural teaching and teaching practice. This finding supports the argument that teaching practice is carried out according to teachers' personal curriculum which is shaped by their teacher knowledge (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Xu & Connelly, 2009). In this sense, teachers are more of a *curriculum planner* than an implementer (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988) and what matters in their personal curriculum is what is meant by cultural teaching to them personally and what it means to engage in effective and comfortable instructions within their classroom context. For instance, for Ms. Bai and Ms. Ma, who believe the purpose of cultural teaching is to help students to gain a body of cultural knowledge, their teaching practice mainly involves the transmission of knowledge in teacher-centered approaches. For Mr. Chen, Mr. Gao, and Mr. Wu, who believe that cultural teaching is to promote intercultural attitudes, awareness, and skills, they provide students with more opportunities to explore and examine cultural issues and experience varied intercultural contexts.

Teachers' beliefs about and understanding of the educational context, particularly students' participation in learning were also found to have an impact on their teaching practice. The notion of 'culture of learning' has been proposed to describe a framework of the attitudes, perceptions, expectations, values, beliefs, experiences, and behaviours that characterize teaching and learning in a society (Hu, 2002; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006). EFL students in this study were reported and approached as being uncritical and not willing to express their opinions or pose questions; and quiet, respectful of, and obedient to teachers who are expected to be knowledgeable in both subject matter and teaching pedagogies, which reflect the traditionally stereotyped Chinese culture of learning in literature (Atkinson, 1997; Ballard & Clanchy, 1991; Carson, 1992, Connor, 1996; Fox, 1994; Flowerdew & Miller, 1995). Some of these characteristics were identified by the participating teachers as constraints in their attempts to integrate culture into EFL teaching or to employ student-centered teaching approaches. The mismatch between perceived students' culture of learning and teachers' beliefs and desired teaching is the underlying cause that runs through many of the perceived constraints that teachers discussed.

However, in recent years, researchers began to look into the learning behaviours of Chinese students by examining the cultural tradition from Confucian heritage and framed the Chinese culture of learning using alternative perspectives. Modeling, memorization, and reciting of texts, which has been associated with Chinese culture of learning, is considered the preliminary stage in the process of active, deep and reflective thinking and

independent interpretation in order to achieve internalized understanding and the practice of learned knowledge. Following this line of thought, Chinese learners are actually found to be active and reflective thinkers, open-minded, and possessing a spirit of inquiry (Biggs, 1996; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Watkins & Biggs, 2001). Chinese students' needs and expectations for cultural teaching regarding content and pedagogies are partly due to how their mind operates and perceives with respect to thinking and learning. These characteristics are valuable and necessary for the acquisition of intercultural competence, though they may be identified and reflected in different learning behaviours as compared to their western peers (Cheng, 2002; Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Lee, 1996; Shi, 2006; Watkins & Biggs, 2001).

In this study, some of the students' learning behaviours may be a result of teachers' teaching approach. For instance, a teacher-centered approach may contribute to students' expectation that teachers need to be highly knowledgeable in terms of subject matter and ready to give an answer when being asked. Further, if teachers mainly talk about cultural issues in a teacher-centered approach, it is very likely that students have low participation in student-centered activities that are occasionally employed. Teachers' understanding, interpretation, and implementation of a student-centered approach also affect student participation.

Effective instructional pedagogies can only be planned and carried out while students' culture of learning has been respected and carefully taken into consideration (McKay, 2002). University EFL teachers need to be informed of this alternative way of

approaching Chinese culture of learning, which may help them to observe and analyze their students' participation in class and consequently help them to plan their instructional activities that match and correspond with the students' culture of learning in order to promote their reflective thinking and inquiry in cultural learning.

### ***Intercultural Competence***

Apart from teachers' beliefs about cultural teaching, their intercultural competence also has impact on their teaching practice. Teachers with high intercultural competence tend to carry out more cultural teaching and from a more intercultural perspective.

Relatively speaking, the knowledge and awareness dimension has the most impact on teachers' cultural teaching by allowing them to identify cultural issues and themes in their teaching materials and be comfortable and confident enough to conduct cultural teaching.

This supports the view that teachers' own intercultural competence is an important indicator of their intercultural competence teaching, which helps them to plan, facilitate, and participate in cultural teaching activities, such as intercultural discussions (Byram, 1997; Garrido & Alvarez, 2006; Paige et al, 1999).

An EFL class is a place where socialization is conducted through the learning and practicing of a foreign language and its culture with a strong impact of students' home language and culture. Students learn more than what is intended to be taught by their teachers. They also shape and modify their beliefs, attitudes, and understanding toward the target and home language and culture through their interactions with the teacher. This captures the notion of hidden curriculum proposed by Eisner (1979), which could be used

to describe the transmission of values, beliefs, and norms communicated explicitly or implicitly in students' schooling experience or through teaching and learning experience and social interactions (Giroux & Penna, 1983). In Chinese cultural heritage, a teacher is supposed to be a role model for students in many aspects of their academic learning, personal growth, and socialization process. That is to say - what (not) to believe, (not) to learn, and how to learn and behave. Teachers with high intercultural competence are in a better position to serve as the role model for students in terms of how to value, perceive, and appreciate home and target cultures. They are more aware of their implicitly or explicitly expressed cultural values, beliefs, and their attitudes toward cultures and cultural learning which will be picked up by students unconsciously as a consequence of a hidden curriculum. As pointed out by Mr. Wu regarding the learning of home culture, students would come to believe that Chinese culture is inferior to western cultures if the teacher does not appreciate Chinese culture; or they would take it for granted if the teacher does not take the teaching of Chinese culture seriously.

### **Teacher Knowledge within a Three-dimensional Narrative Space**

Besides exploring the teacher knowledge of participating EFL teachers', including varied beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching; the narrative approach also allows me to come to understand how these beliefs and teaching practices have come about. Their lived stories of EFL teaching and learning within the three-dimensional narrative space help me to learn about how they uncovered and reconstructed their beliefs about and practices of cultural teaching over time in their unique way through their teaching

practice, intercultural experience, and personal and professional development. Based on the argument of Schwab (1978), Xu and Stevens (2005) state that “teachers always need to deal with concrete particulars of time, place, person, and circumstance arising in concrete situations; theories of curriculum and of teaching and learning cannot alone tell us what and how to teach” (p.315).

In Ms. Li’s stories, she shared her teaching experience when she first moved back to China to teach after living five years in the United States. In her EFL class, she wanted to transfer the student-centered instructional activities that had been successful in her Master of Education class in the other country. As her life space shifted from the United States to China, so did her social identity which changed from being a graduate student to an EFL teacher. As a student, she benefited from student-centered teaching. However, when she attempted to employ it in her Chinese classroom, it turned out to be not as successful due to students’ lack of participation. Later she reduced student participation little by little as she began to realize the different social and educational context in China and the United States and the impact it has on student participation and their perception of teaching and learning in class. Similarly, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, her lived stories of intercultural experience created another three-dimensional life space in which she developed her understanding and perception of the teaching of language, culture, and intercultural competence.

In the case of Ms. Pan, she shared her stories of cultural teaching at the initial stage of her EFL teaching career, which has had an impact on her teaching in the years that

followed. She experienced different interactions with her students with place shifts in different classroom contexts. She was considered by the students in one of her Extensive Reading classes as being *off topic* while teaching culture in an extensive way.

Consequently, she decided to reduce the amount of cultural teaching in her classes.

However, she later had to add some more when she was told by students in another class that they would like to know more about some cultural issue. She had to constantly adjust her cultural teaching to meet students' needs and expectations, and is, to this present day, still sensitive to students' expectations regarding the degree culture should be taught in class. She actually considers extensive cultural teaching as being *off topic* and believes that she should focus on developing students reading skills in her Extensive Reading classes, rather than engaging them in cultural learning.

Ms. Li and Ms. Pan's shared stories, together with other participating teachers' lived experience regarding their personal and professional growth, reveal that teachers uncover, make meaning of, and reconstruct their teacher knowledge through lived experience as teachers; and their experience also shapes what they do as teachers (Xu & Stevens, 2005). Teachers' ways of knowing, that is, their narrative understanding of personal and professional experiences helps to shape and develop their beliefs about and practice of EFL teaching.

A common thread that runs through the responses of some of the interviewed participants is that they implicitly adopt inquiry-based learning and reflective practice in their teaching. For instance, in the case of Mr. Chen and Mr. Wu, they read extensively

about culture, language, communication, history, and philosophy, and they reflected on their teaching and students' learning in their class. They illustrate successful intercultural competence teaching in many aspects of their pedagogy. In Mr. Chen's Intercultural Communication class, he provides his students with the opportunity to experience various intercultural contexts through authentic cultural materials. Though it is not a regular foreign language course but rather a course targeted to promote intercultural communication, it gives some ideas about how to incorporate intercultural teaching into EFL classes. In the case of Mr. Wu, he not only recognizes the significance of teaching Chinese culture in EFL education, but also manages to integrate it into his teaching. He engages his students in exploring various cultural issues through student-centered instructional activities. Both of the teachers demonstrated an in-depth understanding of cultural issues and phenomena from an intercultural perspective and critical awareness of cultural teaching while applying instructional activities.

Mr. Chen's and Mr. Wu's practices illustrate the point that Xu and Connelly (2009) made to Chinese language teacher educators: "to begin with the teacher knowledge" and "Chinese teachers are not blank slates" (p.225). That is, teacher educators need to respect and value teacher knowledge developed in teachers' teaching and learning experience, and develop curriculum and teaching education and training program accordingly, not treating them as blank slates as if they know little about cultural teaching.

The narrative framework employed in this study made it a reflective learning process for the participating teachers. It allowed them to reflect on their lived EFL



teaching and learning experience, construct an understanding and knowledge of what cultural teaching practice they want to conduct, and reconstruct what it means to be an EFL teacher in Chinese social and cultural context. This inquiry process also provides me with the opportunity to rethink and re-evaluate my knowledge and understanding of teacher knowledge and my beliefs about conducting educational research, particularly teacher education research. When I first entered the pilot study for this research, deep in my heart, I thought I knew how Chinese university EFL teachers perceive culture and cultural teaching from a traditional point of view and how few of them could teach culture from an intercultural perspective. I believed that I had been learning in their class for many years and was one of them for a few years as well. I thought I was conducting the research to find evidence. However, I was surprised when some teachers demonstrated beliefs about and reported practice of cultural teaching from an intercultural perspective. What surprised me most was when I started collecting qualitative data for this study and conducting interviews with teachers who were actually my friends during my Bachelor or Master program (1997-2001 & 2001-2004, respectively). I thought I knew them well in terms of their traditional view toward cultural teaching and learning, as we used to sit in the same classroom for three to four years and had numerous discussions in and out of classrooms. However, I was totally surprised to how they demonstrated profound understanding toward culture and cultural teaching, and how they engaged students in intercultural competence learning.

When I reflected on my assumptions prior to the study, I realized that I was treating teachers' personal and professional knowledge as being static, rather than "ever growing" and "ever changing" (Xu & Connelly, 2009, p.225). They have gained valuable and substantial teacher knowledge regarding cultural teaching through their teaching and learning practice in the past few years, and the process is on-going. When I was conducting data analyses, I did not look for evidence for my previous assumptions; instead, I followed what my data tells me about the teachers. I approached them as if I had known nothing about them, so that my biased assumptions would not affect the findings and my interpretation about them. What my past experience as an EFL teacher did contribute to the study is that it helped me to better understand the social, cultural, and educational background of the Chinese university EFL contexts in which the study is situated from both an insider and outsider perspective. Through my reflections upon the process of the study, I have gained an understanding of what meaningful teacher education is, and what we can do as educators to help teachers to achieve intercultural competence teaching. The point is well articulated by Xu and Connelly (2009):

New knowledge and skills in a teacher education and development programme are not bricks in a knowledge edifice; they are enrichment for a flowing river of life. Everything taught enters this flow and is changed as it joins in what teachers know and do. . . foreign language teacher educators and developers . . . need to imagine themselves entering into, and working within, the life flow of their students. (p.225)

## CHAPTER VII

### IMPLICATIONS & LIMITATIONS

#### Implications

##### *Teacher Training & Professional Development*

This study sheds light on Chinese university EFL teachers' beliefs about and practices of intercultural competence teaching: these are limited in some respects and are developing in others. While it focuses on the Chinese EFL context, the insight gained is equally applicable to other second or foreign language contexts.

The findings of this study pointed to an apparent need for in-service teacher training program which particularly focuses on intercultural competence teaching. Some participating teachers indicated that current teacher training both at the university and national level has been unable to support the development of teachers' intercultural competence and their cultural teaching. Most teachers indicated that they would like to teach culture in their EFL class. Teacher training program can build on this enthusiasm and motivation and prepare teachers for intercultural competence teaching in local Chinese EFL contexts.

Participating teachers' lived stories suggest that teachers shape their teaching behaviour through their teacher knowledge, generated in their teaching and learning experience. Teacher training and professional development programs regarding intercultural competence teaching should begin with teacher knowledge in the local Chinese EFL contexts. The teacher knowledge of EFL teachers' needs to be brought

forward when new knowledge, in terms of intercultural competence teaching and related pedagogies, is introduced in teacher training and professional development programs in order to assist teachers to transform and realize this new knowledge in teaching practice (Xu & Connelly, 2009).

It is difficult for language teachers, Chinese EFL teachers included, to “acquire familiarity with, let alone expertise in, the wide range of regions and cultural topics typically included in textbook material” (Knutson, 2006, p. 596). It is also true with their home culture – it is difficult for teachers to know all the underlying values and beliefs in Chinese culture as they are often taken for granted. Though there is a need for enhanced knowledge of both Chinese and the target cultures, it is neither necessary nor feasible for teachers to achieve it through personal endeavours. Researchers who have expertise in cultural studies and intercultural communication should collaborate with EFL teacher educators to develop teacher training and professional development programs which, as Ms. Li suggested, engage teachers in intensive learning about some major cultural issues in both Chinese and target cultures in order to help them to be able to identify and interpret cultural issues emerged in teaching materials; to build their confidence to deal with challenging or unfamiliar cultural topics and issues raised by students; and to identify themselves as both teachers and learners of intercultural competence in their teaching. This ongoing professional development resonates in Confucian tradition: “Teaching and learning grow together” and is important for both in-service and pre-service teachers.

Hence, it is suggested that teacher training and professional development programs encourage and provide EFL teachers with the opportunity to reflect on their cultural teaching and learning experience, develop their own teaching theories through critical and reflective approaches; and engage them in intercultural competence learning which can lead them to reflect on the integration of cultural content and appropriate and effective instructional pedagogies into EFL classroom. Further, it is necessary to help teachers to recognize their Chinese teacher identity and the unique advantages of their role as a cultural mediator between Chinese and other cultures. It is also recommended that teacher training programs help teachers to critically evaluate how their teaching pedagogies, regarding intercultural dimension of language teaching, fit in “the sociocultural backgrounds and previous educational experiences” of their students (Dogancay-Aktuna, 2005, p. 99).

In some English speaking countries, such as Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States, more and more educational agencies are hosting teacher training programs to Chinese EFL teachers. It is recommended that, besides introducing pedagogies for intercultural language teaching, teachers should also be provided with rich, intense, and authentic intercultural experience. It will not only allow them to acquire intercultural competence but also to reflect on their intercultural teaching and learning experience, which will help develop their teacher knowledge and promote their cultural teaching.

### ***EFL Curriculum & Teaching Materials***

The fact that present EFL curriculum focuses on the linguistic dimension of language teaching and most of the time teachers are left to their own to decide when, what, how, and to what degree cultural teaching is carried out in their EFL classes, makes it a great challenge for them to engage in in-depth and systematic intercultural competence teaching. It is unrealistic to do extensive intercultural teaching due to the many constraints teachers face in their day to day reality. Teachers need a curriculum and teaching materials that support cultural teaching and assists them in cultural integration in terms of cultural content and instructional pedagogies.

Byram's (1997) framework and objectives of intercultural competence teaching can provide some general and comprehensive curriculum guidelines for various second and foreign language educational contexts, including Chinese EFL contexts. It is important that the guidelines are interpreted and teaching objectives set for individual contexts (Byram, 1997). According to Byram, the geographic and societal context, the learning context, and students' cognitive and intercultural competence development need to be taken into consideration in order to identify the objectives of intercultural competence teaching in a particular context. For instance, in terms of geographic and social context, students in small cities or towns have very limited opportunities for authentic interactions with English speakers compared to those living in major cities, and their predominant language learning takes place in a classroom setting. These features indicate that some objectives, such as skills of interaction, are not likely to be attained as easily as others,

neither will they be needed as much in such contexts (Byram, 1997). It will help teachers to develop and deliver cultural teaching if the Chinese EFL curriculum can clearly articulate cultural teaching objectives from an intercultural perspective and encourage teachers to select and teach their teaching materials according to the personal and professional needs of their learners, in order to meet the social needs in the society. The curriculum can also provide a cultural framework which outlines major cultural issues that could be addressed by teachers and instructional pedagogies that teachers could choose from. If possible, teachers can be invited to participate in the design of curriculum so that their established teaching practice can be valued and their understanding of students and the teaching contexts be incorporated. In this way, the curriculum becomes a curriculum-in-practice for teachers, instead of just being a curriculum-in-theory.

Although Bennett's (1993) the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity does not give as much pedagogical implication for intercultural competence teaching in EFL context as Byram's model does, its cognitive development of intercultural competence will help Chinese teachers to evaluate and reflect on their own and their students' development of intercultural competence. This will help them to critically evaluate how their teaching supports students' acquisition of intercultural competence.

Apart from what we can learn from the intercultural competence models and theories proposed and developed in western contexts, we should also look for effective intercultural competence teaching rooted in Chinese cultural setting. As one of the participating teachers Mr. Wu suggested, the learning of Chinese culture could provide a

cultural framework for students to learn and relate to the target cultures. The urge to integrate Chinese culture into EFL teaching, and the important role of Chinese culture in EFL teaching and learning, particularly, in students' acquisition of intercultural competence need to be given more attention and support in the curriculum.

The findings of the study suggest that teachers are heavily dependent on their textbook as to what culture to teach and to what degree. However, English textbooks published in China do not include sufficient materials or activities designed to explicitly raise learners' intercultural competence. The current textbooks mainly represent the target cultures, particularly the American and British cultures, which encourage students' understanding of the world from the western perspective and limit teachers' and students' view about the significance of learning Chinese and non-English cultures. Topics about other cultures, especially Chinese culture should be represented in textbooks. The importance of intercultural competence teaching needs to be reflected in the textbooks, which is not to deny the importance of linguistic teaching, but to find effective ways to integrate both.

### **Limitations of the Study and Suggestions for Future Research**

One of the study's limitations is related to the representation of the participants to the population. Chinese EFL teachers are not used to participate in empirical research and may feel uncomfortable with the idea of being interviewed and sharing their personal values, beliefs, and experience with a researcher. As a result, few teachers volunteered to participate in the interview. Actually five of the eight teachers who agreed to be



interviewed are my acquaintances (including both my peers and professors) from my Bachelor and Master program at one of the participating universities. I have known them for over nine years. Their participation showed personal support for this study. The trusting relationship between us, on the one hand, contributed to more reliable interview data; on the other hand, it may make the results less representative due to the fact that some of the participants have similar educational experience. The other three teachers who participated in the interview demonstrated interest and motivation for cultural teaching and learning, such as in the case of Mr. Chen, which was probably the reason why they would like to be interviewed. This may probably make a meaningful difference in their teaching practices compared to others who would not like to be interviewed. Therefore, data generated from the interviews may not be representative to all EFL teachers at the participating universities, as Ms. Ding indicated that as far as her knowledge is concerned, she is one of the few teachers in her department that are interested in and willing to engage in regular cultural teaching.

The second limitation of the study is also associated with teachers' self-reported cultural teaching practice. Cultural teaching practices were reflected through teachers' own descriptions of what they do in their classes and what the students' feedback is. The self-reported teaching practice may be filtered through their own understanding of and beliefs about cultural teaching and learning; thus may not be able to reflect the full picture of their teaching practice. Future research could explore teachers' cultural teaching

practice through classroom observations, which would provide a more reliable and detailed picture of when, what, and how cultural teaching is conducted in EFL classes.

Due to the time constraint of the interview, not all participants were able to share with me extensively their lived stories about cultural teaching and learning. The interview data is therefore not rich enough to reflect all the three dimensions of their life space in which they gain and reconstruct their teacher knowledge. This is the third limitation of the study. In the future, I plan to follow up with them and inquire into their lived experience of cultural teaching and learning in order to understand their personal and professional development in a more complex way.

The fourth limitation of this study relates to the fact that it focuses on issues of cultural teaching and learning from the teachers' perspective – students' attitudes and perceptions toward cultural learning were only approached through their teachers' point of view. A future avenue for research would be to explore the issues from students' perspective, for instance, how students perceive and articulate the needs and expectations for cultural teaching and learning, which also play a vital role in the integration of cultural dimension into EFL teaching.

This study shed light on Chinese university EFL teachers' beliefs about and practice of cultural teaching and their needs and expectations for teacher training and professional development programs. Future research could focus on how to prepare EFL teachers for intercultural competence teaching, such as the design and carrying out of teacher training and professional development program focusing on intercultural competence teaching,

and teachers' feedback in terms of how it helps them to integrate cultural teaching into their EFL classes.

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APPENDIX A

Letter of Invitation

Dear teachers:

My name is Zhou Yi, a doctoral student from the University of Windsor, Canada. I am inviting you to participate in a research project concerning university EFL teaching and teacher development. The results of this research will provide useful information for teacher training and education programs in order to better accommodate your needs and help prepare you to meet emerging challenges in your teaching. By participating in this study, you may benefit as well from reflecting on the nature and objectives of the subject matter and your teaching practice.

This research project was approved by the Faculty of Education, University of Windsor. If you would like to participate in this study, please complete the questionnaire. It would be greatly appreciated if you could return the questionnaire in the envelope to the *personal contact's* mailbox (the person's name will be provided) by (the date will be two weeks after the distribution of the questionnaire).

As a follow-up, I would also like to invite you to an interview regarding university EFL teaching and teacher development. If you would like to be interviewed please leave your contact information: if you would like to be identified on the questionnaire, please write your information at the end of the questionnaire; if not, please leave your information on the separate Contact Information Sheet and return it to the personal contact's mailbox, separate from the envelope. I will contact you soon to arrange a time for the interview that is most convenient for you.

If you have any questions or concerns about this research project, please feel free to contact me. Thank you in advance for supporting this research endeavour.

Yours sincerely,

Zhou Yi, PhD candidate  
Phone: xxxx-xxxxxxx  
E-mail: [zhou1g@uwindsor.ca](mailto:zhou1g@uwindsor.ca)

## APPENDIX B

### Questionnaire

Section 1 Background

[Please circle the answer]

**Q1.** Your gender

- (a) Female                      (b) Male

**Q2.** Your age

- (a) 20-25                      (b) 26-30                      (c) 31-35  
(d) 36-40                      (e) 41-45                      (f) 46 and over

**Q3.** Years of teaching English

- (a) 1-3                      (b) 4-6                      (c) 7-9  
(d) 10-12                      (e) 13-15                      (f) 16 and over

**Q4.** Your highest degree

- (a) Bachelor                      (b) Master                      (c) PhD

**Q5.** Please list type and name(s) of the courses you teach

[you may respond to more than one answer]

(a) College English courses

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(b) English major courses

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**Q6.** How many hours do you teach per week?

- (a) 5-10                      (b) 11-15                      (c) 16-20  
(d) 21-25                      (e) 26-30                      (f) 31 and over

**Q7.** On average, how many students do you have in each class?

- (a) 20 or less      (b) 21-30      (c) 31-40  
 (d) 41-50      (e) 51-60      (f) 61 and over

**Q8.** Have you ever been to other countries?

- (a) Yes      (b) No [if *no*, go to Q9]



If *yes*, fill out the table below:

Name of the Country	Purpose (study, visit, vocation, work)	Length of time

Section 2. Teachers' beliefs & teaching practices

**9.** To what degree do you believe the following objectives are important for EFL teaching? [circle the number]

	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
1. Foster students' interest in English language learning.	1	2	3	4
2. Help students to acquire listening and speaking skills.	1	2	3	4
3. Help students to acquire reading and writing skills.	1	2	3	4
4. Help students to pass College English Test Band 4 (CET (for teachers who teach College English courses)	1	2	3	4
5. Promote students' understanding of English cultures.	1	2	3	4
5. Help students to develop an ability to communicate with people from other cultural backgrounds.	1	2	3	4
6. Foster students' self-learning ability for English language learning.	1	2	3	4
8. Promote students' interest in English cultures.	1	2	3	4
9. Promote students' understanding of Chinese culture.	1	2	3	4

**Q10.** To what degree do you believe the following objectives are important for cultural teaching in EFL education?

	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
1. Provide information about daily life (e.g. social/political conditions) in English speaking countries.	1	2	3	4
2. Promote understanding of different process of individual and social interactions in English and Chinese culture.	1	2	3	4
3. Develop a curious/tolerant/respectful/open attitude towards other cultures and cultural difference.	1	2	3	4
4. Promote the ability to acquire new cultural knowledge from documents/events from English cultures.	1	2	3	4
5. Promote the ability to conduct effective communication with English speaking people.	1	2	3	4
6. Promote the ability to understand and critically interpret documents/events from English speaking culture.	1	2	3	4
7. Promote awareness and understanding of different values, beliefs, and ideologies of both Chinese and English speaking people.	1	2	3	4
8. Foster students' respect for world cultural diversity.	1	2	3	4

**Q11.** Circle a response that best represents your opinion.

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1. Based on your experience, English language and its culture can be taught in an integrated way.	1	2	3	4
2. Poor language skill is the major cause of misunderstandings in communication between Chinese and people from other countries.	1	2	3	4
3. English teaching should touch upon both English and Chinese culture in order to help students to mediate between the two cultures.	1	2	3	4
4. English teachers should generally present a positive image of English culture and society.	1	2	3	4
5. I would like to teach about English cultures in my class.	1	2	3	4
6. Besides English cultures, English teachers should also touch upon cultures of other countries.	1	2	3	4

**Q12.** In your teaching, how often do you touch upon the following topics as they apply to English speaking countries?

Topics	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
The Arts	1	2	3	4
Conventions of communication	1	2	3	4
Customs	1	2	3	4
Living conditions	1	2	3	4
Different ethnic groups	1	2	3	4
Different social groups	1	2	3	4
Educational systems	1	2	3	4
Financial conditions	1	2	3	4
History	1	2	3	4
Literature	1	2	3	4
Movies	1	2	3	4
Non-verbal behaviours	1	2	3	4
People's values and beliefs	1	2	3	4
Political system(s)	1	2	3	4
Religious beliefs	1	2	3	4
Cultural taboos	1	2	3	4
Technological development	1	2	3	4



**Q13.** In your teaching, how often do you touch upon the following topics as they apply to Chinese culture?

Topics	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
Conventions of communication	1	2	3	4
Customs	1	2	3	4
Different ethnic groups	1	2	3	4
Different social groups	1	2	3	4
People's values and beliefs	1	2	3	4
Political system	1	2	3	4
Religious beliefs	1	2	3	4

**Q14.** How often do you apply the following instructional activities when you address the topics in Q 13 about English cultures?

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
1. I ask students to address a particular cultural topic.	1	2	3	4
2. I tell students what they should know about a topic.	1	2	3	4
3. I divide students into pairs or small groups to discuss a topic.	1	2	3	4
4. I ask students to participate in role-play situations in which people from English speaking countries communicate.	1	2	3	4
5. In written assignments, I ask students to discuss a particular cultural perspective or event.	1	2	3	4
6. I use technology to illustrate a cultural topic (e.g., videos, CD-ROMs, PowerPoint, and the Internet, etc.).	1	2	3	4
7. I have students debate a controversial cultural issue.	1	2	3	4
8. I ask students to compare Chinese and English culture regarding a particular topic.	1	2	3	4
9. Anything else you do that is not listed above. Please specify:	1	2	3	4

**Q15.** How often do you apply the following cultural teaching practices in your teaching?

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	Always
1. I ask students to discuss the way in which Chinese people and Chinese culture is perceived by English speaking people.	1	2	3	4
2. I ask students to explore connotations and implications implied in documents/events from English cultures.	1	2	3	4
3. I ask students to share what they find fascinating or strange about English cultures.	1	2	3	4
4. I ask students to explore different perspectives Chinese and English speaking people may have on a particular event/phenomena.	1	2	3	4
5. I ask students to explore areas of misunderstandings in communications between Chinese and English speaking people and explain the causes.	1	2	3	4
6. I ask students to discuss how their own values and beliefs influence the way they perceive other cultures.	1	2	3	4
7. I ask students to use their cultural knowledge and skills to explain documents/events from English cultures.	1	2	3	4
8. I ask students to explore values, beliefs, and ideological perspectives implied in events/documents from English cultures.	1	2	3	4
9. I ask students to discuss the origins of stereotypes that Chinese people have for English cultures.	1	2	3	4
10. Besides cultures of English speaking countries, I also touch upon cultures of other countries.	1	2	3	4
11. I encourage students to questions their own values, beliefs, and perspectives which are perceived differently by people from other cultures.	1	2	3	4

Section 3: Intercultural Competence

**Q16.** Please rate your ability, knowledge, or willingness. [Please circle the answer]

(0= Not at all, 1= Very low, 1=Low, 3=Average, 4=High, 5= Very high)

1. I am familiar with the cultural norms and expectations of English culture (e.g., food, eating manner, clothing, greetings, public behaviours, etc.).	0	1	2	3	4	5
2. I can describe some important historical/social/political events that have shaped English cultures.	0	1	2	3	4	5
3. I can contrast communicative behaviours of Chinese and English speaking people in social setting (e.g., family, school, office, etc.).	0	1	2	3	4	5
4. I can describe the history of relationships between China and English speaking countries.	0	1	2	3	4	5
5. I can describe how some events in China are perceived by people from English speaking countries.	0	1	2	3	4	5
6. I am interested in knowing unfamiliar aspects of English culture (e.g., history, traditions, and people's values, etc.).	0	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am willing to understand differences between Chinese and English speaking people in their behaviours, values, and beliefs.	0	1	2	3	4	5
8. I am interested in knowing the different ways that English speaking people see a particular event in China.	0	1	2	3	4	5
9. I am willing to question my values and beliefs which are perceived differently by people from other cultures.	0	1	2	3	4	5
10. I am able to identify how some misunderstandings happen in interactions between Chinese and English speaking people.	0	1	2	3	4	5
11. While interacting with English speaking people, I adjust my behaviour, body language, and gesture according to what is considered appropriate by them.	0	1	2	3	4	5
12. I am able to find out unfamiliar cultural information I come across in oral or written communication situations.	0	1	2	3	4	5
13. Before I talk or write to English speaking people, I think about how they, with different cultural backgrounds, will feel about or react to what I am going to say or write.	0	1	2	3	4	5
14. I think I should not immediately judge people from other countries, because their behaviours might just be the result of cultural differences.	0	1	2	3	4	5
15. I can recognize when some Chinese people communicate	0	1	2	3	4	5

inappropriately to English speaking people.						
16. I am able to understand an English document in its own cultural context.	0	1	2	3	4	5
17. I demonstrate awareness of seeing myself as a "culturally conditioned" person with personal habits and preferences.	0	1	2	3	4	5
18. I am aware of the diversity in English cultures (e.g., differences in race, class, gender, and profession, etc.)	0	1	2	3	4	5
19. I demonstrate awareness of English speaking people's reactions to me which reflect their cultural values.	0	1	2	3	4	5
20. I demonstrate awareness of how my values and ethics are reflected in specific situations in my interaction with people from other countries.	0	1	2	3	4	5

Dear teachers,

Your contribution to this research project is greatly appreciated. Thank you for your participating. As a follow-up, I would like to invite you to an interview regarding university EFL teaching and teacher training. If you would like to share your ideas and opinions with me, please leave your contact information below. I will contact you soon to arrange a time for the interview that is most convenient for you.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at [zhou1g@uwindsor.ca](mailto:zhou1g@uwindsor.ca)

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this questionnaire as soon as possible.**

**Thank you!**

## **Contact Information Sheet**

If you would like to be interviewed but do not like to be identified on the questionnaire, please write your information below and return it to the personal contact's mailbox, separate from the questionnaire envelope. I will contact you soon to arrange a time for the interview that is most convenient for you.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please return this sheet as soon as possible.**

**Thank you!**

## APPENDIX C

### Interview Protocol

- Education and EFL teaching experience
- Experience of living in other countries
- Beliefs about the objective(s) of EFL teaching
- Beliefs about the objective(s) of cultural teaching in EFL education
- Cultural teaching practice regarding English Cultures
- Cultural teaching practice regarding Chinese and non-English cultures
- Cultural image presented in their EFL classes
- Concerns/challenges about cultural teaching
- Time devoted to cultural teaching
- Things that they want to know more about cultural teaching
- Experience of personal and professional development
- Experience of in-service teacher training
- Expectations for an in-service teacher training
- Opinions about textbooks regarding cultural teaching
- Knowledge about intercultural competence teaching
- Source of knowledge/information about intercultural competence



## VITA AUCTORIS

NAME	Yi Zhou
PLACE OF BIRTH	Daqing, Heilongjiang, China
YEAR OF BIRTH	1978
EDUCATION	University of Windsor, Windsor, Canada 2005-2007, M.Ed. Heilongjiang University, Harbin, China 2001-2004, M.A. Heilongjiang University, Harbin, China 1997-2001, B.A.