

# Integrating Culture and Language in the CFL Classroom: A View From the Bottom Up

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## 1. Introduction

This study describes a qualitative picture of a real world situation in a college Chinese<sup>1</sup> as a foreign language (CFL) classroom in the United States. It is an inquiry into how Chinese culture, not being specifically taught in the class under observation, is perceived by learners of the language. Students' notions about Chinese culture, of course, spring from many sources, but the present research aims to observe and interview the teacher and students as individual "filters" of culture knowledge as it springs mainly from the linguistic code. The guiding questions are: When culture is not explicitly included as a component in the CFL classroom, what impressions of culture does the experience make upon the students? What role does the target language play in introducing the target culture to learners? What role does the native-speaker teacher play? Literature on integrating culture in the CFL classroom does not specifically address these questions taken together. In a review of literature on culture learning in language education, Paige, et al. (2003) identify "a remarkable scarcity of ... studies dealing with the real world of the classroom" (186).

In the following sections, a review of literature surveys the background of the culture component in FL (foreign language) pedagogy generally and CFL specifically. A working definition of "culture" is provided. A report of the study is presented, followed by a discussion of four themes related to the definition of culture that emerge from the interview data. How these themes can inform the implementation of an integrated language and culture program (using Xing's [2006] work as an example) is discussed. The paper concludes with suggestions for how a native-speaker CFL teacher may prepare him- or herself for teaching culture with language in a foreign language classroom setting. The claim is made that, at least in the case of CFL, culture (as it shall be defined) is already abundantly present in the linguistic code, and that efforts to bring more culture into the classroom should focus on how to get more culture from the language.

## 2. The culture component in FL research literature

There has grown up a consensus view in FL teaching literature published in the past few decades that culture (variously defined) is an integral part of FL teaching and learning (e.g., Valdes 1986; Damen 1987; Byram and Morgan 1994; Lange and Paige 2003). The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL 2011), for example, includes culture as a core component in language acquisition, with each of its five recommended language goals relatable to culture.<sup>2</sup> "The current consensus", writes Janet Xing, "appears to be that it is difficult to achieve high proficiency in any language without a concomitant awareness, indeed, almost adoption, of the culture in which the language is used" (2006: 238-239).

That the interrelatedness of language and culture has become a default assumption in research and theory, however, does not mean that foreign language teachers are eager

to (or willing and able to) integrate culture and language in their classrooms. Teachers often feel that research and theory in foreign language pedagogy are irrelevant to their practice (Pica 1994, 1997), and this may be especially so when it comes to culture (Wolf and Riordan 1991). In a study by Sercu (2005), about half of an international sample of FL teachers claimed they felt that teaching culture is more or less a waste of time. Culture, in the view of demurring half of the teachers surveyed, is not something that can really be grasped outside the environment in which it is enacted. And given the amount of time so-called culture teaching would take away from (in their view) the more important aspects of language learning, it is not worth the effort.

Crucial to the discussion of teaching culture in the FL classroom is the definition of the word *culture*. What makes the word notoriously slippery is that in the broadest sense, “culture” encompasses all human activity. Culture is everything human that is in contrast to nature (Kramsch 1998: 4). Thus it is understandable that foreign language teachers may feel intimidated by the word *culture*, which is invoked to cover an overwhelming array of concepts taken from the humanities, anthropology, sociology, politics, and other social sciences. In this light, resistance to teaching culture may in fact be a resistance to a complicated-sounding label for things that do not seem entirely relevant to teaching a language. In any case, many teachers may feel that culture is “simply too challenging,” and that incorporating culture into the FL classroom “takes the learning experience far beyond the realm of comfort, experience, and interest of both teacher and the learner” (Lange and Paige 2003: x).

### 2.1. *Toward a working definition of culture for FL pedagogy*

The anthropological definition of culture distinguishes two basic interrelated aspects: A culture has visible, or explicit, patterns that correspond to invisible, implicit, underlying patterns or rules (Kroeber and Kluckhohn 1952; Hall 1959; Brooks 1968). Hofstede (1991) uses the metaphor “software of the mind” to describe the invisible aspect which underlies the visible aspect of culture. Recognizing the visible/invisible distinction is an important step toward recognizing that a foreign culture is not merely a *potpourri* of similarities and differences in the eyes of a foreign observer, but is a holistic, complex system of interrelated values and concepts; it is a “fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life...” (Spencer-Oatey and Franklin 2009: 15); a culture is a patterned whole. It is this complex systematicity, this imperceptibly patterned quality of culture that we as foreign observers recognize as a general *flavor* after a certain amount of exposure to a foreign language and culture.

Adding a further distinction to the two aspects, the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project (in Tang 2006) defines culture as encompassing products, practices, and perspectives; that is, culture is the patterned ways in which people: (1) make or use products, variously called artifacts or forms, (2) carry out practices or behavior, and (3) think, or hold meanings. Products and practices are the visible part, and perspectives are the invisible, underlying part (Moran 2001: 24).

Moving toward an operative definition of culture relevant to FL pedagogy, we can further distinguish (at least) four senses of culture<sup>3</sup> involved in language teaching which are useful for analyzing the ways in which the term *culture* is conceived. Various senses

lead to various teaching approaches. The senses are: aesthetic, sociological, pragmatic, and semantic (Adaskou et al. 1990: 3-4), described as follows.

The *aesthetic* sense of culture pertains to achievements of civilization such as art, music, and literature and the refinement of manners and formal protocol; thus it is also often called achievement culture or culture with a big C. This is in contrast to behavioral culture (little c culture), which refers to the mundane products and practices of daily life.<sup>4</sup> The *sociological* (or anthropological) sense of culture covers the vast spectrum of human activity, encompassing all the various ways of making meaning linguistically, non-linguistically (i.e., in all behavior, even to the minutiae of touch, personal space, and movement [Hall 1966, 1976, 1983]), and paralinguistically (overlapping with pragmatics). It is the sociological sense of culture that virtually all academic literature on the FL culture component has been concerned with in some degree for the past several decades (e.g., Nostrand 1956; Lewald 1963; Saville-Troike 1975; Morain 1983; Kramsch 1993; Tang 2006).

The *pragmatic* sense of culture (or “sociopragmatic”, as in Kramsch [2003]) pertains to paralinguistic rules and skills that guide language community members in appropriate use of rhetorical styles and language in interaction. In this sense, culture is manifested in implicature, speech acts, politeness, and other paralinguistic phenomena and the values that underlie them. The pragmatic sense of culture in the FL classroom is nearly coterminous with Sociolinguistics, i.e. a concern with patterns of who says what to whom in what situation (or communicative competence, as in Canale and Swain [1980]); it is “the use of language in the conduct of social life” (Hymes 1962: 13).

The *semantic* sense of culture pertains to a culture’s conceptual system which is embodied in language, its way of linguistically “carving up reality”, given that the language code is a repository of collective historical experience. In this sense, the linguistic code is seen as a direct reflection of culture, a kind of template in which are inscribed attitudes, values, and beliefs which may be seen in rhetorical patterns (Kaplan 1966), textual clusters of semantic connections such as “cultural scripts” (Wierzbicka 1994), or as ideological positions that guide the unfolding of discourse (Scollon and Scollon 1995; Pan 2000). Whereas the aesthetic, sociological, and pragmatic senses of culture are more inclusive of explicit behaviors and products, the semantic sense is more concerned with the tacit, implicit, underlying patterns of meaning upon which the rest of the culture is based. Separating these four senses is for analytical purposes only; in practice each sense is entwined with the others.

## 2.2. Approaches to integrating culture into the CFL classroom

The four senses of culture described above correspond to four approaches to integrating culture with language study. These approaches may be combined in various ways and degrees in CFL curricula, and presumably no program takes one approach entirely to the exclusion of the others. Yet the approaches can be conceived as a continuum of integrating culture and language less to more, from aesthetic (focused more on products and practices) to sociological to pragmatic to semantic (focused more on perspectives).

The aesthetic approach is to treat target culture achievements as an adjunct to language, usually in separate courses on literature, religion, etc., or as “Chinese Culture 101” courses in East Asian Languages programs. The sociological approach covers very

broad ground, and seeks to insert culture into the language classroom in the form of: cultural activities to raise awareness of cultural difference (Tomalin and Stempelski 1993), awareness of cultural values (Zhu 2008), or inclusion of cultural realia and simulations, “culture capsules” and “culture clusters” (Bonin 1982; Morain 1983). The pragmatic approach focuses on language-in-use as culture-bound acts of communication (Shih 1988; Zhang 1988; Hong 1997), often taking the form of usage explanations or “culture notes” in textbooks (e.g., Yao et al. 2005). The semantic approach manifests in “key words” studies (Wierzbicka 1997; Meyers 2000), or word studies in general, as the linguistic code reflects cultural distinctives (e.g., Hinkel 1995).

There are three basic options for treating culture in the FL classroom: culture as a stand-alone subject<sup>5</sup>, culture as inserted *ad hoc* as needed or desired, or culture as systematically integrated with the language syllabus. The trend in CFL research is to move toward the latter of the three (Walker 1989; Kubler 1997; Linnell 2001; Xing 2006); yet in practice, as the present study will examine, culture is nonetheless widely treated as a stand-alone subject and inserted more or less *ad hoc* into language lessons.

As an example of a state-of-the-art treatment of culture in CFL pedagogy, we shall take Janet Xing’s (2006) *Teaching and Learning Chinese as a Foreign Language: A Pedagogical Grammar*, as it systematically integrates all of the above described senses of culture into the CFL curriculum. Xing’s program conforms in spirit to criteria set forth by Walker and McGinnis (1995) and Kubler (1997) in their frameworks for Chinese language programs.

To help teachers of Chinese as a foreign language “identify those cultural elements necessary for language teaching and learning”, Xing proposes this criterion: Any traditions, attitudes, rituals, beliefs, behaviors that are unique to Chinese society and people and crucial to learning and understanding the Chinese language, the people and their behaviors may be considered as part of the Chinese culture content to be taught and learned by non-native students of the Chinese language (2006: 242).

As specific examples of culture content, Xing offers five categories (tradition, attitude, ritual, belief, social behavior) that cover each of the aforementioned senses of culture. The program prescribes a four-year, multilevel program and reckons stages in culture learning as analogous to stages in language learning. Cultural themes from concrete to abstract are introduced incrementally as corresponding to “key” words, sentences, and genres. Thus culture is systematically integrated with language in a graded system: elementary (key words) → intermediate (key sentences) → advanced (discourse level key genres).

In sum, there is no real debate that culture should be integrated with FL study, as language and culture are the warp and woof of one cloth (Valdes 1990; Byram and Morgan 1994). There is a rich literature available on classroom techniques for integrating language and culture (written predominantly in English for ESL/EFL and European language teachers, but largely applicable to CFL teachers as well). The field is so rich, in fact, that the notion of *culture* invokes a bewildering array of concepts that need sorting for their usefulness and relevance to FL teaching. The question that remains is: how can integrated programs (such as Xing’s) be effectively implemented given the real life constraints of teachers not specifically trained in cultural matters and students who may be encountering a new language and culture for the first time? Xing has identified a wide

range of “necessary cultural elements” for the teacher to attend, and she prescribes a plan for addressing these elements. The present study asks, what role do the learners (with the backgrounds they bring) play in culture component pedagogy? What role does the teacher play? Given the elements of a native speaker teacher, the linguistic code, and non-native learners, how and where does “culture” show itself, and what non-code information is necessary for the teacher to impart?

### 3. The study: setting and participants

The Chinese language program under observation is part of an East Asian Studies department in one of New York’s state universities offering four-year majors in Chinese (as well as Japanese and Korean). Observed were one of two sections of first year students taught by a native speaker teacher from Taiwan (female, age 30). The class had 20 students from several ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. Except for two Koreans and one Japanese, the students were enculturated in the United States (one immigrated from Colombia at age 7), and spoke Standard American English natively (two were bilingual Spanish-English). Non-Asian students were chosen for interviews under the assumption that a greater cultural gap exists between non-Asians and the target, Chinese culture. Six students were interviewed: four females and two males, aged 19 to 21, from diverse American ethnic backgrounds. Two of the six, prior to beginning CFL study, had visited China for less than one month, but did not appear to gain any linguistic insight as a result.

The teacher was trained in a master’s level Chinese teaching program at a teacher’s college in Taiwan; she had about five years of experience teaching in the US at the time of this study. Her class regimen was quite rigorous, with workbook homework assignments twice a week including vocabulary, listening, writing, and translating practice. There were two vocabulary quizzes per week and an exam once a week. Classes were tightly structured and teacher-fronted except for one small group activity included in (almost) each class session. The teacher modeled pronunciation, elicited choral response, and using a checklist systematically called on individual students to read or answer questions. The teacher made frequent use of the whiteboard and power point projections. Student questions were not encouraged, and thus infrequent (i.e., from a Western, Socratic method point of view [Scollon 1999]) -- about one or two per class hour in the first semester. As the school year progressed, students asked more questions.

The course text, *Integrated Chinese*, 2nd edition, Level 1, parts 1-2 (Yao et al. 2005) is organized in lessons on topics (Greetings, Family, Dates and Time, etc.). Each lesson is arranged: Vocabulary and texts (mostly dialogues), Grammar, Pattern Drills, Pinyin Texts, and English Texts. There are “Culture Notes” dispersed throughout the book not arranged in any systematic way, but seem placed more or less *ad hoc* as the authors see fit to include “cultural” information as ostensibly related to the language presented. For example, in the lesson “At the Library”, there appears a note after the vocabulary list: “In some libraries in China, the reader is not allowed to browse in the stacks...” (level 1, part 2, page 29). In the lesson “Asking Directions”, a “Culture Note” reads: “One conspicuous difference between Chinese and American systems of traffic signs is that there are fewer ‘Stop’ signs in the former...” (page 59). These notes were virtually unnoticed by the students, and the teacher *never* referred to them.

The period of observation was one school year, from Fall, 2009 to Spring, 2010. The researcher sat in on classes about once a week the first semester, and twice a week in the second semester. Interviews were conducted in the 10th week and 14th week of the second semester. By this time, students had covered level 1, parts 1-2, of *Integrated Chinese*, including the accompanying workbook. The class met four times each week for a total of four hours and thirty minutes of instruction.

### 3.1 *Methodology and procedures*

In the interest of qualitative full disclosure, I should insert myself, the researcher, into the narrative at this point.<sup>6</sup> I began my observations of the class under study in the first semester with an assumption and some general questions. I assumed that, no matter how culture is defined by the participants, and no matter what implicit or explicit information was transmitted by the teacher, culture teaching and learning was taking place by virtue of the presence of a foreign language under study. My questions were: How does “culture” manifest itself in the language being taught and learned? Where does the teacher think it is? Where do the students think it is? Following the qualitative methods of grounded theory (Charmaz 2006), I sought to collect “rich data” in the form of:

- a review of literature on teaching culture in the foreign language classroom (CFL in particular)
- studying the course text,
- meeting with teachers in the department, gathering information about the program as a whole
- field notes on classroom observations
- in-depth interviews with first-year students of Chinese and their teacher.

From my early observations, I developed my research questions and proceeded to plan for interviews with the teacher and students.

Interviews were conducted one-on-one in a quiet private setting. Each of the six students was interviewed for one hour on two separate occasions.<sup>7</sup> The teacher was interviewed (in English) for more than two hours on one occasion, in addition to numerous informal conversations. Interviews were videotaped and transcribed.

3.1.1. *Interviewing the students.* Interviews were semi-guided, as I aimed to let participants take the lead in defining the language and culture nexus. I explained to the students that I wanted to learn their impressions of learning Chinese and what their learning experience made them think of Chinese culture. I first gathered personal information regarding their language and culture background and probed their interest in studying Chinese. With their course text open in front of us, I pointed to each lesson (Pinyin, Writing Characters, Greetings, Family, Dates and Time, Hobbies, Visiting Friends, Making Appointments) saying (variously worded): Seeing the language is like this, what does it tell you about Chinese culture? I allowed the students to comment on what struck them as noteworthy, and I asked follow-up questions to probe further. Here are two examples:<sup>8</sup>

*Interview sample 1* (Referring to the section in the course text where character writing is introduced)

(Interviewer): Does the writing give you a general flavor of Chinese culture?

(Student M2): It seems like there has to be a lot of precision. .... It seems so precise like if you screw up one little dot or dash you just completely change the meaning of the word. ....

I: .... you mentioned precision. Does that tell you anything about Chinese culture?

M2: The culture requires diligence. Since I've been at school I've met Chinese people and I have a few Chinese friends, and it seems whatever they work at they always do, go a hundred percent in, they do it right, they don't slack off, especially [our teacher], she's very focused in her work, and she just goes and goes. She always like seems to be on target, so that's the precision or the accuracy.

*Sample 2* (Interviewer points to a picture of a family in the textbook)

I: When you look at the picture, do you notice anything different about their house?

F4: They have a lot of what we'd consider typical Chinese decorations like the lotus flowers in the background, also the calendar with the statue of Buddha, and even the tea drinking.

I: And the way they're dressed?

F4: As far as I can tell, they're pretty modernly dressed.

3.1.2. *Interviewing the teacher.* I explained to the teacher the nature of my inquiry and the questions I had been asking her students. In addition to several informal discussions, I interviewed her in a manner similar to the students, with the course text open before us as a guide. But my main question for the teacher was: At what points do you think it's necessary to teach culture as you go through this book (with *culture* understood as whatever extra-linguistic information learners might need to better understand the language)?

#### 4. Results

While student responses are richly diverse, each student interview shows a very similar anatomy, generalized as follows:

(1) An informal discussion of the student's linguistic, ethnic, socio-economic background, and orientation to Chinese language study (e.g., why they chose to study Chinese).

(2) A semi-guided discussion of the student's impressions of Chinese culture as prompted by language in the course text, which followed a similar trajectory for each of the six students:

- An implicit definition of the word *culture* revealed by students' comments
- Opinions about the difficulty of the writing system and tones
- The student's impressions that Chinese culture is "polite", "respectful" "hierarchical", "practical", etc. (these general impressions arose early and were interspersed through the interview)

- Discussion of varied personal interest related to Chinese culture and divergence from the course text after only about six lessons, about halfway through the book. Each of these points will be discussed in turn with illustrative examples from interview transcripts.

#### 4.1 *Students' background*

Table 1 lists the students' demographic particulars. Gender and social class are not variables of interest in the present study as factors that bear upon students' classroom experience.

Table 1. *Student demographics.*

Student Demographics						
student code name	"F1"	"F2"	"F3"	"M1"	"F4"	"M2"
gender	female	female	female	male	female	male
age	20	20	21	20	19	21
residence	inner-city	suburban	suburban	city	small town	small town
social class (parents' income and education)	working class	middle class	professional class	middle class	middle class	working class
home language	bilingual Spanish-English		English		English	
parents' ethnicity	immigrants from Mexico	immigrants from Colombia	immigrants from Cameroon	immigrants from Jamaica	European-American	
students' ethnicity	Hispanic-American		African-American		European-American	

"Suburban" refers to residential communities built up within commuting distance of New York City.

"Small town" refers to residential and commercial community centers in rural areas of New York State.

"Working" and "middle" classes are distinguished by hourly wages vs. contract salary. "Professional class" here refers to doctors.

4.1.1. *Age and experience as factors in learning culture.* Age seems significant, as age cohorts have socially distinct interests and characteristics, and also as students display a lack of socio-pragmatic sophistication which is born of age and experience. For example:

*Sample 3* (Referring to forms of address in greetings)

I: Here in the United States you'd address a teacher as Mr. Wang, but in Chinese literally it would be Wang teacher. What does that say about culture?

F4: I noticed it more a difference here between high school and college, like in high school you'd call them Mr. or Mrs., but here [in college] it's even better if you call the professor depending on what degree they have or



something. As far as the Chinese culture it could be just distinguishing between teachers and different professions.

I: Did you know they were called ‘professor’ before you came to college?

F4: I got used to that when I first came here.

As a college student, she is still broadening her knowledge base of appropriate forms of address in her native culture, and has recently learned titling practices for college professors versus school teachers. (She moreover is not clear on the similarities between English and Chinese in distinguishing between teacher/老师 and professor/教授.) This illustrates the point that socio-pragmatic knowledge is not static, and “native competence” is a matter of degrees according to experience.

4.1.2. *Residential environment as a factor in learning culture.* Experience, of course, is born not only of age, but of environment. Residence has a great influence students’ exposure to other cultures, as American city dwellers display more familiarity with ethnic/language diversity than small town dwellers. The following excerpts illustrate the experience of small town dwellers.

*Samples 4 and 5 (Discussing personal background)*

I: Have you had any prior experience with Chinese language or culture?

M2: Not with language or culture ....

I: What’s the ethnic make up of your high school?

M2: It’s majority white, it’s a very small community and very small minority population. My graduating class is 128, about 100 white. The rest are like a mix.

I: Did you know any Chinese people while you were growing up?

F4: Not while I was growing up. I knew a family who had adopted a child who was from China, but I don’t know if they even knew much about her background. Now that I’m in school and I’m around more people from different cultures I have a couple friends who are from China or like have Chinese backgrounds from their parents, et cetera.

I: Any foreign languages spoken where you come from?

F4: Around there it isn’t popular for people to speak a different or additional language.

In contrast, the urban dwellers seem well acquainted with a variety of ethnicities (Chinese in particular):

*Samples 6 and 7 (Discussing personal background)*

F1: I went to a school near Chinatown [in New York City] that was like eighty percent Chinese. All my friends are Chinese ....

M1: I like to shop and dress up a lot and stuff, so in New York City .... I would look at the different Asian people and thought like wow I really like the way they dress, it’s so cool .... I just always liked Chinese culture period, I even have a Chinese tattoo right here. It says success.

4.1.3. *Bilingualism and ethnicity as factors in learning culture.* Home language and parents' ethnicity seem to engender a familiarity with certain aspects of Chinese language. Bilinguals were able to draw upon their knowledge of two languages as they learned Chinese, while monolinguals encountered Chinese with a greater sense of "difference" and exoticism. First, some examples of monolinguals' orientation to Chinese:

*Samples 8 and 9* (Responding to the question, "Why did you choose to study Chinese?")

F4: With the Spanish and the French, they're both Romance languages and I wanted to take *something that was different*, so I decided with the Chinese because it had such a strong influence all over the world, especially in recent years. So I was advised by several people to take it. [Spanish and French are the most commonly taught languages in American schools. (Italics added for emphasis.)]

M2: Well, I tried to make Arabic my minor or my major, but then once that program got cancelled, like I always knew I was gonna take Arabic or Chinese, so I just went with Chinese. [Arabic and Chinese are commonly known to monolingual Americans as difficult and exotic languages.]

As for the bilinguals (who are also city dwellers and the children of immigrants), the theme of "respect" shown in formality in Chinese language resonated with their home language. (This applies to both bilingual and monolingual children of immigrants):

*Samples 10, 11, 12* (Referring to Chinese forms of introducing and greeting)

F2: I feel like to be in the Latin culture and the Chinese culture, they're very alike. .... When Americans introduce themselves, it's very informal, like 'hi how are ya', you know, 'what's up', but the Chinese people are very, very formal, and I feel like in Spanish [my home language] it's like that, too. [In English] it doesn't really matter who we're saying hi to.

F1: In Spanish, in my Mexican culture, you have to talk to someone with respect like, 'hello' 'good morning' 'good afternoon' [spoken clearly, politely], if they're older, you don't know them, they're of higher rank, you use the formal way, like *usted*. .... To me it [Chinese] seemed normal. Chinese has *ni* and *nin*, and in Spanish it's *tu* and *usted*.

F3: Whether it's with my parents' African culture or Chinese culture, I feel like it's just, respect is such a huge emphasis.

4.1.4. *Personal characteristics as factors in learning culture.* We will return to related linguistic issues in following sections. As for student characteristics and their orientation to Chinese language and culture learning, *personality* (or psychological makeup) is certainly a variable, but perhaps too complex to treat adequately in the present study. Suffice it to say that the six students displayed six unique points of view and a wide range of personal habits, attitudes, and levels of competence, which is better termed "personal

characteristics” than personality. Three examples follow: one student’s peculiar resistance to strange language customs and another student’s proclivity for devising interesting explanations for language phenomena.

*Sample 13* (To the question, “What do you find difficult about Chinese?”)

F3: .... I am used to getting pretty good grades, and when I study and I still don’t get something, I feel like *it’s the language’s fault!* [emphasis added]

*Sample 14* (Referring to the multiplicity of terms for “cousin” in Chinese)

F3: .... why can’t you just say ‘cousin’, like why can’t it be just one word, and I was like, *this is so stupid!* [emphasis added]

*Sample 15* (Referring to the Chinese use of the family name in greeting and addressing)

I: What does it say about the culture that they use the family name that way?

F4: Well just a respect, I think for other people, and to avoid calling someone the wrong name if you don’t know their first name for sure.

Finally, the dimension of personal characteristics encompasses misunderstandings, preconceptions, prejudices, and the like. These may be born of common stereotypes, but they are also distributed individually depending on one’s exposure to other ways of life. Sample 2 above (“Do you notice anything different .... about the way they’re dressed?” “As far as I can tell, they’re pretty modernly dressed”), reveals a perception that associates Chinese-ness (or foreignness) with a lack of modernity. While the six students displayed a “politically correct” non-judgmental stance (which is rigorously preached in American education) toward things Chinese, it is nonetheless to be expected that learners will have some resistance, some negative or erroneous judgments, and some biases against a new culture.

#### 4.2. Students’ implicit definitions of culture

When asked directly, “What is culture?” students appeared confronted with a difficult question. Here are two responses:

*Samples 16 and 17*

F1: Language -- race, tradition -- food, clothing. I guess the mannerisms of people, how they talk to you. Depends on the culture, it’s different -- eating, how you eat.

F4: It’s just someone’s background, traditions that their family has, relates to either their religion or their, where they, where their parents or their grandparents originally came from.

Ordinary people do not usually have an anthropological definition of culture prepared for quick recital, nor would it be particularly useful to carry such a definition in one’s head. Yet in the process of a discussion of foreign language, when asked, “What does (this language point) tell you about Chinese culture?” students revealed a conceptual schema of “culture” with two basic features: (1) they framed culture as ways of life in juxtaposition, i.e., fuzzy sets of similarities to, and differences from, their own way of

life; (2) they accounted for the differences they noticed with hypotheses in terms of general values ascribed to the culture. To illustrate:

*Sample 18* (Referring to the lesson on dates and time, the student has noted that the Chinese way of denoting months and days is different from English)

I: Seeing that months and days are written with numbers, does that say anything to you about Chinese culture?

F2: They're big on numbers. Big on practicality.

To put it schematically:

- the L2 feature *differs* from the L1 -- months and days have names in English, but they are numbers in Chinese -- and it is worthy of remark
- remarks pertain to *features attended to in the L2*: months and days are *numbers* (subtext: they are not names)
- a *hypothesis in terms of value* is generated
  - the L2 (and thus its "culture") marks something which is apparently important or worth attending to, i.e., the *numerical aspect* of denoting months and days
  - the language shows (in the student's reckoning) that the Chinese *value* practicality because they prefer to use a number system in this way.

Obvious examples of language differences triggering hypotheses of value include Chinese vs. English kinship terms. When learners discover that Chinese marks age rank as well as gender in terms for siblings, they remark that Chinese culture must value hierarchy more than American culture. A less obvious example involves the Chinese practice of omitting the possessive particle (的) when referring to a family member (e.g. 我妈, 我爸 / my mom, my dad):

*Sample 19*

M1: Whenever you put 'de' it just means possession whatever it is, and so you would think like in American you would say 'my mother' .... In Chinese .... you just say 'I mother', and the way the word is written is, there's no separation between you and the parent or you and your sister or you and your brother it goes together [gesturing how characters go together without the particle between them], so that I feel like it's just a form of intimacy.

M1's conception is: L2 differs from L1 in that L2 omits the possessive marker in a particular case. The attended L2 feature appears to be one of special closeness, such that marking possession would downgrade the intended marking of intimacy. The L2 culture, therefore, must value familial closeness.

Obvious by omission, there are myriad language differences that learners do not seem to attribute to "culture". Either the feature is ignored (as in the vast majority of cases), or a non-value hypothesis is offered. I shall call these *technical differences*. Here is an example in which a student was reluctant to ascribe a cultural value to a linguistic feature:

*Sample 20* (Referring to 一下, used to moderate or “soften” tone of voice in making a request or offering an invitation)

- M2: *Yi xia*, isn't that 'just for a while' or 'a little while'? .... I think with us [English speakers] like when you want to soften something we use a different tone like we change the voice of our language. In Chinese you actually use words to express what you're trying to say.
- I: Do you think it has any reflection on the culture? Does it mean something?
- M2: I think it's more a vagary of language because Chinese is based on tones. So if they started to soften the tones of their voice to soften something it would confuse the hell out of everybody.

There are two things going on here: first, M2 doesn't seem too clear on what the textbook calls “moderating one's tone of voice”; second, he notes the contrastive features in terms of technical difference rather than value difference. Chinese, as it goes in M2's conception, is a tonal language; thus, compared to non-tonal English, there are certain technicalities to deal with when “softening the tones of their voice”.

If pressed, a person may venture a guess as to what any given language feature may indicate about its culture. Take for example 行, which translates into English with several senses, among them “to go”, “to undertake”, “to allow or permit”. This case of polysemy may lead to the hypothesis that Chinese language is parsimonious, reflecting a cultural value of parsimony. This seems congruent with the observation that Chinese language tends to deliver short monosyllabic bursts compared to polysyllabic English words; it could connect to stereotypes about Chinese people being “quiet” or “shy”. This hypothesis, of course, is fanciful and not likely to become a pillar in one's conceptual structure -- at least, it is not likely to be explicitly articulated. Yet experience tells us that the mind is constantly in the process of trying to make meaningful connections even among random events.

The sum of these evolving mental connections made by learners of Chinese, I posit, constitutes the learner's conception of Chinese culture as it springs from the language. None of this linguistic connecting and conceiving takes place in a vacuum, of course. There are numberless non-linguistic background experiences that inform the learner's total conception. To list a few:

*Samples 21, 22, 23, 24*

- F2: [My Chinese friend] is very polite, very studious, you know, like you would imagine an Asian to be.
- M1: The only thing I pretty much heard people say was -- I never really believed it was true but -- they'd say stuff like they eat dogs and cats, that was pretty much the only thing about Chinese I knew.
- M2: I had a Chinese history class once so I always remember that, it's like everything is done for the family, I mean not for the self or like personal glory ....

F4: .... I haven't known a Chinese person for a long period of time , but when I do meet them they're always, the last person I met she was very polite .... almost *too polite*. People can say they are very friendly but they also try to be modest at the same time. [emphasis added]

A learner's total conception may be more or less widely informed, which is to say nothing of the accuracy or veracity of any of the component knowledge, but that it is an evolving whole, and each new observation is checked for coherence with existing knowledge. This vaguely-defined, evolving whole is the learners' "implicit definition of culture" (paradoxically, a vaguely-defined "definition"). This can be illustrated by the parable of the blind men and the elephant: none of the blind men can see the elephant to comprehend its entirety, but each can feel a small part of the elephant's body. From their very limited experience, the blind men state what the elephant is like. Table 2 presents a summary of the students' impressions of Chinese culture as they spring from the language itself.

Table 2. *Students' hypotheses about Chinese culture triggered by language features.*

<b>Hypotheses about Chinese Culture Triggered by Language Features</b>						
<b>language feature</b> →	writing system	您贵姓 (asking one's name)	kinship terms, titles & forms of address	dates & time	一下, 吧 (moderating tone of voice)	的 (possessive particle*)
<b>F1</b>		"very respectful", "very polite"	respectful of rank		"definitely use polite language more"	
<b>F2</b>	value history	"very respectful"	"pride in family", "filial", "hierarchical"	practical		
<b>F3</b>	"secretive", educational elitist, conformist	respectful, polite	respectful, "family oriented" "proud"			
<b>M1</b>	"so smart"	respectful, humble	"strict on roles and rules", respectful	logical		intimate family ties
<b>F4</b>		formal, respectful, "modest"	hierarchical, respectful of rank			
<b>M2</b>	diligent, "based on logic", value precision	formal, respectful, humble	"hierarchical"	"logical"		
<b>summary gloss in terms of values</b>	value learning, status, precision, conformity	value formality, politeness, humility	value family, respect, status, & hierarchy	value practicality	value politeness	value family intimacy

Except as indicated by quotation marks, students' responses are paraphrased. \*Actually, the omission of the possessive particle.

From their two-semester study of Chinese, primarily from textbook lessons covering greetings, family, dates and time, and visiting friends, students gained a composite impression of Chinese culture as valuing learning, status/hierarchy, precision/practicality/logic, conformity, formality, politeness, humility, and family/family intimacy.

Finally, a major source of the students' culture learning is the teacher herself. Although she made it clear in the interview that culture teaching is not her goal, her mere presence as a native speaker of Chinese is raw material for student observation and hypothesizing -- regardless of what she does or does not say. In the students' own words:

*Samples 25, 26, 27, 28*

- F3: [The teacher] will talk about something like when you're in grade school there [in Taiwan], you keep going until you get it.... It made me just think of, there must be this importance on education and I guess uniformity.
- M2: She's very focused in her work, and she just goes and goes. She always like seems to be on target, so that's the precision or the accuracy [in Chinese culture; see sample 1]
- I: Does your teacher give you a sense of what it would be like to study in China?
- F4: Some idea, yeah. I would guess for the most part that they're very hard working and they expect a lot out of people.... I do know that they value education a lot, even I would say, more so than a lot of people here [in the US].
- M1: I don't know if it's just [our teacher] or a lot of Chinese teachers, but she's like really strict, like I remember, I swear I was no later than 5 minutes handing in my homework and she just gave me a zero....

Students' impressions of their teacher as a representative of the culture seem quite congruent with their impressions from the language. The teacher's personal qualities or idiosyncrasies no doubt have some skewing influence on her students' perceptions of Chinese culture, especially since they had no other Chinese teachers at the time to compare her to. In the students' own words, she was well-liked and respected, and even a favorite teacher.

#### *4.3. The teacher's implicit definition of culture*

The goal of the interview with the teacher was to find out at what points she thinks it's necessary to teach culture in her first-year classes. At the outset, she admitted that Chinese language, and not culture (however it may be defined) is the focus of her class. In her words: "My goal is to show them the differences between English and Chinese, and sometimes the differences are a little bit cultural differences". By the first use of

“differences” she means primarily technical differences, as described in the previous section. Early in the interview she said, “The only differences I can think of right now are grammatical; [as for] cultural, we’ll have to discuss it out”. As the interview progressed, as we thumbed through the text, the preponderance of her comments were in reference to how she explains the various mechanics of the language -- writing, pronunciation, grammar, etc. -- to her classes. At one point, in response to my question, “Do you see any culture yet?” she said apologetically, “I don’t know how or when to implant culture aspects”. She did reveal a conception of “culture”, however, in many of her remarks. The following vignette is representative of our exchanges, as it illustrates the teacher’s unwillingness or inability to connect language to culture, and thus to entertain students’ questions about it. Here, at my prompting, she attempts to explain why the family name precedes titles in Chinese.

*Sample 29*

- I: Why do you say *Li xiansheng* and not *xiansheng Li*?  
 T: *Xiansheng, xiaojie*, you always put surname before them -- why? Hmm [pondering] -- unlike Mr. Li, we say *Li xiansheng* -- why?  
 I: Well, do you ever suggest some reason why to your students, or do you say anything?  
 T: Family names represent people? Right?  
 I: Oh?  
 T: So family names first, and then their *chengwei*.  
 I: Their title  
 T: Yeah their title -- what a poor explanation! [laughs] I don’t know -- a lot of times I don’t really make sense -- but I guess they [students] just have to suck it up!

The teacher re-framed the question in terms of a difference between English and Chinese, recognizing my “*xiansheng Li*” as the English “Mr. Li”. As for generating a hypothesis of value, however, she was not quickly forthcoming. She was stumped by the question “Why do you say it this way?” because such things are simple facts of life, and asking why seems childish. “Family names represent people?” is her explanation in the form of a question, as if to say, “It’s obvious, isn’t it?” The last line (“I guess they just have to suck it up!”) points to an attitude that colors the teacher’s thinking about students’ questions: There is a lot of language to learn, she thinks, and students’ questions about “culture” can be time consuming and annoying. This is evident in a student’s comment:

*Sample 30*

- I: Do you ever ask her why they say it this way?  
 M1: .... she’s really strict and keen on her set rules, her set ways, I mean it’s a good thing though, because we’d get really behind with everyone saying ‘I don’t understand this’, but we gotta keep moving [through the syllabus].

As for the culture notes interspersed throughout the text, the teacher said:

*Sample 31* (Interviewer pointing to the course text)



- I: So what about this culture note down here?  
 T: No, I don't bother. They'll just read it themselves.  
 I: Okay.  
 T: I didn't even pay attention until students came up to me and said, "Hey on the note number two, and they say 'ni hao ni hao ra ra' and I say, 'Oh really? Oh. I didn't even read that'."

It's evident that teaching culture is not the teacher's interest. It's also evident that she doesn't see the relevance in answering students' questions that stray from the technicalities of language. This is because the teacher herself doesn't feel confident to venture anthropological or sociological guesses, nor does she feel that such guesses would further the cause of language learning. Even though she may articulate such an attitude, her actual performance shows that she indeed teaches culture with language -- which is to some degree, of course, unavoidable. In her own words, from a student interview:

*Sample 32* (Referring to kinship terms; see also sample 14)

- F3: [I said] why can't it be just one word [for 'cousin'] and I was like, this is so stupid, and she [the teacher] was like, 'No, if you want to learn the language you have to learn the culture'.

What she means by "culture" here is a patterned way of doing things: You can't take a concept from English (one word for "cousin" attending to a smaller number of features) and impose that on the Chinese concept (a multiplicity of words attending to a larger number of features). Her primary concern with "culture" is in making sure students use the language in the correct way, which is in conformity to technical patterns, with the occasional value added in from time to time -- sometimes articulated, sometimes unarticulated. Here is an example of information the teacher adds to a polite formula for asking one's name:

*Sample 33*

- T: And with *gui xing*, when you answer you don't answer with *wo gui xing* unless you are the king of China, and there's no king of China!

This is the teacher's well-rehearsed patter for first-year students. It is intended to be humorous and to anticipate the learner's possible misuse of the formula (Q: 请问, 您贵姓? A: 我贵姓王). There is information embedded in this explanation, which, regardless of the teacher's implicitness or explicitness, may be construed by an American learner: Chinese are polite or flattering by asking for one's "honorable" name; Chinese are humble because they wouldn't call their own name "honorable", and perhaps other similar construals. If students want to ask why this is, as occasionally happens, the classroom exchange looks like this (from a student interview):

*Sample 34* (Referring to the incorrectness of saying "我贵姓")

- F3: I remember it was the first two weeks of class and everyone was like 'Why, why can't you say it?', and [the teacher said] 'cause, "honorable",

you don't use, you want to be humble'. And we said, 'Why?' and she's like, 'Well, you have to be humble.'

As another example of teaching Chinese ways in the course of teaching language:

*Sample 35* (Referring to the dialogue on “calling one’s teacher”, on the subject of polite ways to refuse when asked to do a favor)

- I: You teach them not to say ‘no’ directly, but to say something like ‘I’m busy’? Is that different from English?  
 T: What if I want to say ‘no’ in Chinese, that’s what I teach them, but in English I assume that I would say [pause to think] -- huh -- what would I say differently? Maybe still the same, ‘I’m busy’ -- I don’t know -- that’s - - [pause to think]. How about American way, how do you say ‘no’?  
 I: Lots of times don’t just come out and say ‘no’ either -- we’re indirect, too, in our own way.  
 T: Really? No way!

The teacher explicitly teaches her students a Chinese method of polite indirectness without framing it as a particular value in Chinese culture. She is not clear on the degree to which this method is used in English. When I say Americans are indirect in their own way, she acts surprised. This shows that she holds an assumption that Chinese are more indirect than Americans, but will not presume to make a definitive statement to me (is she indicating something to me indirectly in her discourse?<sup>9</sup>).

A final example of “cultural” (in this case, pragmatic) information inserted into lessons:

*Sample 36* (Discussing the phrase 那算了 / “never mind”, “in that case, forget about it”, “forget it”)

- T: You shouldn’t say ‘*na suanle*’ because it’s too impolite, too -- too casual.  
 I: Mm hm. Now, is this something that you’re telling your students?  
 T: So I would say, ‘Use that only to your friends’.

In sum, her implicit definition of culture is: the way we speak and do things in Chinese. She may construe this in contrast to the way things are done and said in American English, but not necessarily. As the standard-bearer for Chinese language, she does not feel a need to interpret differences or to offer reasons for the way Chinese is. Her job is to model the language and to exhort students in the technicalities of using it properly. In the words of one student:

*Sample 37* (See also samples 14 and 32)

- I: What does she say when you say things like “this is stupid”?  
 F3: Well, granted... we all respect her, so we’ll stop because this is her culture, you know.... She’s trying to make us aware as well so we don’t look like idiots when we use the language. She doesn’t get frustrated for the most part, though. She’ll say something smart like “Well, no one’s forcing you!”

## 5. Discussion

To summarize the “bottom-up” view given in the above sections: We have a picture of a native-speaker teacher with personal idiosyncrasies and a particular background of experiences which may or may not be germane to students’ overall, generalized concept of Chinese culture, but who nonetheless models the language, and in a somewhat *ad hoc* manner, models Chinese culture as well. The teacher performs her role as standard-bearer for the language and its correct use (which, inevitably, entails the concomitant culture which she more or less unwittingly models or teaches).

We have a picture of students from a variety of backgrounds including a variety of ethnicities in bilingual and monolingual homes in settings ranging from small towns to cities. Each student displays a variety of personal idiosyncrasies, experiences, and levels of competence. Each of the students is nonetheless American, having been educated in American schools, socialized among American peers using standard American English. They view language and culture in terms of *difference*: technical differences between English (or their other language) and Chinese language, and value differences between American culture (or their other culture) and Chinese culture. These students are evolving a conception of Chinese culture as they make mental connections between various experiential input by way of making hypotheses about cultural values. The classroom/textbook language and the teacher play chief roles in the students’ evolving conceptions.

Thus, several themes emerge from the picture. Four are prominent: difference, coherence, awareness, and idiosyncrasy. It is observed that, taking the perspective of the learners and the teacher, inclusion of culture in the CFL classroom should be informed by a definition of culture which emphasizes these four themes or elements, described as follows.

(1). “Culture is difference” (Kramersch 1993), and learning a new culture is a process of assimilating new information against a background of existing schema, seeing something previously known in the categories of a new system (Olson 2001). Culture is seen by learners (at first) in terms of differences and similarities. Being confronted with differences, learners look to the teacher to guide them to major themes, or a kind of cultural grammar.

(2). Language-and-culture is a complex conceptual system or “semiotic network” (Geertz 1973; Lantolf 1999). It is patterned and congruous (Hall 1959). Culture is a complex whole in which meaning ultimately coheres. Language learners look for values that fit together as they attempt to construct a coherent concept of the target culture.

(3). Culture is largely out of awareness (Hall 1966). In confronting a foreign culture, both the teacher and her students face metacognitive blind spots. This point is elaborated in section 4.1.3. below.

(4). All experience is filtered through individuals who are carriers of culture (Brooks 1968); each person carries an “individual representation” of culture (Kronenfeld 2008). The idiosyncratic makeup of each person affects their uptake of cultural information and how they will react to that information.

### 5.1. *How this study can inform CFL language and culture programs*

Taking Xing's (2006) work as a standard in the field of teaching culture in CFL, the following is a commentary from a bottom-up view at real world factors which may inform program theory and design in that field. At least three questions emerge from the classroom picture: What is the necessary culture content to teach? When should this content be introduced? How can the teacher become more aware of the cultural dimension in order that she may answer these questions for herself?

5.1.1. *How can we identify "necessary cultural elements" to teach?* Xing's criterion to identify "necessary cultural elements" for the teacher to attend extends to all that is "crucial to learning and understanding the Chinese language, the people and their behaviors" (2006: 242). Clearly this is a tall order, but Xing provides guidance as to what those elements should include specifically, and she assumes a four-year time span in which to carry it out. "The important task" writes Xing, "is to identify the elements and to determine when and how these cultural elements can be integrated into language classes and become instrumental in the advancement of students' Chinese language competence" (2006: 244).

Stated another way, the question remains as to what is the necessary non-code information, toward the goal of teaching culture, a teacher should provide in the course of teaching the language. The teacher in the present study put an emphasis on providing technical information that can assist learners in speaking the language correctly, to advance their Chinese language competence. In the course of doing that, she also imparted much about the culture in a tacit way. The language, and what she anticipated that students would struggle with based on her experience, were her guides. Perhaps what is needed in addition to an identification of "necessary cultural elements" is an understanding between the teacher and her students that all cultures share a common core of humanity -- similarities -- and, as differences are encountered, they can be treated as domains having some overlap and some non-overlap. For instance, the theme of "respect" can be treated as something which both Chinese and Americans do, albeit in varying ways and degrees in varying situations. A guide *beyond the language* is thus needed. The teacher can only be prepared to teach culture if she is alert to what culture is; knowledge of the four themes described above seems a good beginning.

5.1.2. *A graded approach?* Xing writes:

Assuming that students' cultural proficiency progresses with their language proficiency, I suggest applying the same theory of learnability in language learning to cultural learning: That is to group cultural elements based on the degree of difficulty in learning, just as we have done with grammatical elements ... (2006: 244)

This seems theoretically sound, that language and cultural proficiency develop hand-in-hand -- the more language one learns, the more culture comes along attached to it. Culture is an evolving concept in the learner's mind, and as the learner is making mental connections toward a fuller picture of the target culture, learning semantic relations

between words is useful to that goal. Xing suggests first learning key words, then key sentences, and beyond that, key genres.

Yet a consideration of learners' idiosyncrasies and L1 can also inform the teacher as to when the "right time" is to introduce key words, sentences, or concepts. When students notice differences and ask for reasons, whether this be in the elementary or advanced stages, the time is right for the teacher to introduce semantic connections in the target language and show how these may or may not overlap with the students' L1. This should not be limited to the word level, as even elementary texts encompass the sentence level and discourse level. For instance, the course text, in lesson six, has a dialogue in which a student calls her Chinese teacher to make an office appointment. A student may ask, "What if the teacher says 'no'?" This happened in the course of the present study, and the teacher had an opportunity to explain that a direct "no" isn't appropriate (see sample 35). In fact, Americans wouldn't say a flat "no" in this situation either. What then is the cultural difference?

The difference is in the way the concept is connected to other concepts in the culture. The form of refusal or declining can be introduced as "indirectness", which is related to "harmony" / 和谐 which is related to "etiquette" / 礼 and to "face" / 面子 and to "guanxi" / 关系. The point is that, although language learning may follow a concrete to abstract or simple to complex pattern, it does not mean that cultural instruction must follow the same pattern. A view from the bottom up shows that the classroom milieu, the concatenation of individuals, their native language(s), their personal concerns, competence levels, and so forth can determine the proper time to introduce any given feature.

On a related note, when it is considered that Chinese language learners in the program under study have about a fifty percent rate of attrition, meaning about half of the learners may have only these two semesters of exposure to Chinese language and culture for the rest of their lives, to follow a program that assumes that some aspects of culture are too complex for beginners is to miss an opportunity to raise the level of intercultural awareness among FL learners in the US. A senior professor in the East Asian Languages Department told me that a major goal of foreign language study in their department is to introduce students to alternative ways of thinking as well as to promote fluency in a foreign language. One wonders how much cognitive growth or new understanding of languages and cultures students who leave after one year will take with them. By introducing semantic connections early, the teacher can impart a fuller flavor of the culture earlier, to the benefit of all who go on in CFL study as well as those who will drop out.

5.1.3. *Culture is largely out-of-awareness.* Xing notes: "Native speakers of any ... language can communicate both effectively and efficiently because they *know* the culture and *understand* the society in which they live..." (2006: 238, emphasis added). In large part, cultural "knowledge" is like grammatical knowledge; most of us are unaware of the many rules of grammar that constantly guide our speech, yet in some sense we know and understand our language. We are likewise unaware of the cultural patterns that underlie our communication, yet we know how to get along. Many learners of foreign language become aware of their native grammar only upon learning the new language. So it is with culture. Missing from Xing's discussion are questions regarding the role of the native

culture in foreign language learning and the out-of-awareness character of cultural knowledge.

The teacher in the present study exhibited a lack of awareness not only of the students' culture in its various senses, but of her own culture in that, although she knew what was appropriate, she could not articulate a *reason* for that appropriateness. This reason is ultimately, as the teacher puts it, that this is just how things should be done. "You have to be humble", for example. But what the students are looking for is a sort of logic, a "cultural grammar", keys to understanding the larger system of culture. They were not satisfied with the answer the teacher gave them, and the teacher was not happy with their incessant questioning.

Perhaps by the end of the year the students had found a sort of makeshift cultural grammar. In their encounters with the language, they were confronted with differences for which they ventured hypotheses, and subsequently tested these hypotheses as their learning progressed. Being FL learners, not having the benefit of a surrounding environment filled with Chinese language, not having the opportunity to be constantly engaged in interaction with native speakers, the process of culture learning is slow, and their conceptions no doubt remain stunted and skewed.

## 6. Conclusion: Usefulness of this study to the CFL teacher

The teacher in this study was praised by her students for being able to anticipate the technical problems, as speakers of English, they have while learning Chinese. In one student's words:

### *Sample 38*

- I: She has a sense of, what did you say? She has a sense of what you think?  
 M2: Like how it seems to us, but how it is in Chinese, she can interpret that for us.  
 I: So, knowing English she can anticipate what you're-  
 M2: -like what we're gonna struggle with and what we'll have a problem with.

Yet the teacher was not as able to anticipate or answer to their satisfaction questions of world view or value differences. As a learner of English language, the teacher is able to participate with her students as they encounter language differences (and, as she said, "a little bit culture differences"). I posit that if she were also an active learner of American culture, she could also participate with her students as they encounter Chinese culture via their language learning experiences.

Herein lies the problem: *what precisely about culture should the teacher be learning?* In defining the basics of FL teacher training, Walker and McGinnis (1995) state: "An expert learner is one who has demonstrable success interacting with members of the relevant society. An expert teacher of [Chinese] is a person who is most able to assist learners in understanding the strategies and tactics of interacting with the cultures in question" (n.p.). *An expert teacher, therefore, should be an expert learner as well, and the goal of learning is success in interaction in the target culture.*

Research in the culture component in the FL classroom has given us, as already noted, an (over)abundance of material in the form of approaches and activities. What the

present study has to offer is not intended to add to the mountain, but rather is an attempt to tease out essential elements from it -- to find a sharper focus with which the teacher can better *define the task*. To that end I have suggested in section 4 above four interrelated aspects of what “culture” is.

Culture is seen by learners (at first) in terms of differences and similarities. Being confronted with differences, learners look to the teacher to guide them to major themes, or a kind of cultural grammar. If the teacher remains unaware of cultural differences, and if she is complacent in her role as language standard-bearer, she will miss the opportunity to help students grow beyond a simplistic differences-and-similarities view of culture. The teacher needs to cultivate a sense not only of how her native culture differs from her students’ culture(s), but she also needs to cultivate a sense of how meaning coheres in her own culture. Thus, via the language, the teacher can assist students to build a more coherent mental map of the target culture. The teacher should become an active learner, cultivating her students’ and her own awareness in a dialectical process of questioning her students on their native cultures and letting that inform her students’ concepts of the target culture.

There are no two students, teachers, or classrooms exactly alike, and so a certain amount of “play” or freedom should be factored into CFL language and culture pedagogy. With the language as a guide, the teacher-as-learner can interact with the unique mix of students in her class toward the goal of making connections among the aesthetic, sociological, pragmatic, and semantic senses of culture triggered by language.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> "Chinese language" in this paper refers only to Mandarin (普通话), and "Chinese culture" denotes a mainstream, generalized way of life conceptualized in distinction to other world cultures (especially Western cultures), as depicted in Chinese language learning texts and popular Chinese media, and as defined in scholarly works such as Hsu (1981) and Scollon and Scollon (1995).

<sup>2</sup> ACTFL's five C's of foreign language education are: communication, culture, connections, comparisons, and communities. "Together, these elements enable the student of languages to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world in a variety of contexts and in culturally appropriate ways" (ACTFL 2011, p.3).

<sup>3</sup> It is important to note that the various aspects, facets, and senses of culture are not discrete components, but are all overlapping and interrelated by degrees.

<sup>4</sup> This distinction arose in the mid-twentieth century as culture became more of a mainstream scientific concern, hence Kroeber and Kluckhohn's (1952) work defining the term *culture* (Kuper 1999). As this shift in thinking impacted the teaching of foreign languages, Nostrand (1956: 297) called it "selling out the humanities to the social sciences". Where the FL culture component was once primarily concerned with the finer things of civilization, it now encompassed everything from table manners to facial expressions.

<sup>5</sup> This may be construed in two ways. On one hand, as described, aesthetic culture may be treated in its own classes. On the other hand, as of the 1990s, there has been a movement toward teaching culture as a means of promoting intercultural understanding, and

framing language study as a part of the larger project of culture study, as in the "European school" of language-and-culture (e.g., Byram and Esarte-Sarries 1991).

<sup>6</sup> My attitudes, observations, and interactions with participants are no doubt influenced in more or less perceptible ways by my personal characteristics and experiences. I am a middle class European-American male, aged 48 (at the time of the study). An example of why this is relevant: When a student tells me he wants to study either Arabic or Chinese, I can infer that he wants to study an "exotic" language. He and I share a cultural background which includes the understanding that these languages are not merely "less commonly taught", but also the connotation that these languages are prestigious because they're "rare" and difficult to learn. My identity is also relevant in my interactions with the teacher, who may perceive me as knowledgeable about American culture, thus coloring her responses. My experience with Chinese language and culture comes primarily from teaching English as a second/foreign language for about 20 years; eight of those years in Taiwan, where I developed a stand-alone course on American language and culture in a college Applied Foreign Languages Department (Danison 2000). I have also taught Chinese language in a small school in the US. As a current graduate student in FL education, I am interested in the role of the linguistic code as a resource in teaching culture.

<sup>7</sup> The second hour of each interview is not included in the present study, as it took an experimental direction not under consideration here.

<sup>8</sup> An "idealized" transcription is employed here for better readability with the "hesitations and dysfluencies that are part and parcel of all speech" largely removed (Gee 2005: 129). Emphasis is italicized, pauses are indicated by double dashes, interruptions are indicated with single dashes, unintelligible portions and omissions are indicated by ellipsis, and editorial insertions are in square brackets.

<sup>9</sup> There is an observer's paradox problem here. On the occasions of my classroom observations, the teacher may have been influenced by my presence such that she resisted making cultural comparisons, knowing that I purport to be a kind of "expert" on Chinese-American intercultural communication. Also in the interview, she may be guarded in her reports on where she inserts culture into the language syllabus.

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*Abstract*

*This qualitative study explores learners' of Chinese as a foreign language perceptions of Chinese culture as it springs mainly from the linguistic code. The guiding questions are: When culture is not explicitly included as a component in the CFL classroom, what impressions of culture does the experience make upon the students? What role does the target language play in introducing the target culture to learners? What role does the native-speaker teacher play? The paper concludes with suggestions for how a native-speaker CFL teacher may prepare him- or herself for teaching culture with language in a foreign language classroom setting.*

Key words: language and culture, Chinese as a foreign language, teaching culture, learning culture.