

# **Teaching or Being Taught: The Experience of Foreign Teachers in China**

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Arts (Communication Studies)**

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### **ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP**

I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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## **Abstract**

The research recorded in this thesis examined the experience of eight foreign teachers who have taken up residence in China as teachers of oral English language. The study grew out of my reflections on my own challenging, yet rewarding, journey as an international student in New Zealand, and aimed to investigate and unfold the reality of foreigners living and working experience under the influence of traditional Chinese culture, specifically in Pan Yu district, Guang Zhou City, Guang Dong Province. I was interested to find the cultural differences that the teachers struggled to accept or understand. I wondered whether the foreign teachers would reshape their personal beliefs and values, especially about teaching, because of the cultural differences they encountered in China.

A sample of eight foreign teachers, from Australia, America, Canada and New Zealand, took part in semi-structured interviews in which I hoped to capture critical incidents in their inter-cultural experience. I was also able to undertake two observations of classroom practice. The data collected was then analysed using Boyatzis' (1998) system of thematic analysis.

The research found that participants had similar experiences during their residence in China. For instance, the majority of participants showed a long period of cultural adoption and they all defined their experience as challenging. All participants refused to reshape their moral beliefs about teaching in response to traditional Chinese culture, but that they all, to some extent, eventually adjusted to a Chinese way of thinking. However, issues that direct connected to their own cultural heritage remained unchanged.

An interpretation of the findings was that perhaps, on one hand, while the environment and cultural difference initiated various forms of difficulties, on the other hand, participants are trying to reset their personal limits. Most likely, their desire to introduce their Chinese students to a different style of learning convinced them to hold on to personal beliefs about effective teaching and learning, hoping to pass this on to a new generation of Chinese.

My research, however, focused on only very small proportion of foreign teachers in China. Further research should be pursued with an expanded focus, to find the potential of the implementation of cultural awareness programmes and support groups for foreigner.

# Chapter 1

## Overview of the research

### *Introduction*

The purpose of this research is to examine the experience of a small group of foreign teachers who have taken up residence in China to teach English there. The experience of foreigners in China interests me greatly, partly because of my own difficulties when I first arrived in New Zealand as an international student. As I reflected on my own adjustment to life in New Zealand, I began to wonder about the process of cultural adaptation of foreigners in China.

It seems that difficulties abound when people change cultures. For instance, according to Griffiths, Winstanley and Gabriel (2005), living between cultures can create conflict for individuals as they confront their established morals and values and compare them with those of their new milieu. Hammond, Burns, Joyce, Brosnan, and Gerot (1992, cited in Leonor Colon De Jesus, 1999, p. 2), Hofstede and Bond (1984; 1988) and Hofstede (1997) suggest that an individual's acceptance in one culture depends on whether or not the person has values and beliefs that are comparable to the groups around them. My personal observation was that even in modern China, with all the influences of the West and the rapid growth and opening of the economy, the prevailing culture remains immensely "other" when compared with those of Western countries. Using this observation as an underpinning assumption for the

research, I focused my interest into finding out how new-comers fit into a group which might have very different values and beliefs and set out to design research that would capture the lived experience of foreigners from a strong Western background trying to live and work in traditional Chinese cultural environment. The focus of the research recorded in this thesis, therefore, is on the ways in which newcomers to China maintain their personal beliefs and values in a completely different cultural surrounding. A secondary theme is the comparison of the cultural understanding of learning and teaching in traditional Chinese culture and in Western cultures.

As already stated, the focus of this research is to capture and unfold the reality of foreigners living and working experience under the influence of traditional Chinese culture. More specifically, the research will present the cross-cultural experiences of several foreigners, coming from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and America, who taught English language in Pan Yu district, Guang Zhou City, Guang Dong Province, China.

Recent economic “boom times” in China have attracted a considerable number of foreigners who are contributing their ideas in various industries (Idealog, 2006) and so there were many professions I might have investigated. I narrowed my research down to foreign teachers, however, because historically, teachers were and arguably still are, the most important job category with the highest social ranking among the Chinese public. The ranking, as I was taught when I was at school, was as follows: teacher/professor, followed by farmers, followed by workers and businessmen. Han Yu, one of the most influential philosophers and politicians of the Tang Dynasty (618--907), explained why teachers have been given high social status in China and why they are an influential force in the creation of a society:

古之学者 (gu zhi xue zhe), 必有师 (bi you shi)。师者 (shi zhe), 所以传道受业解惑也 (suo yi chuang dao shou ye jie huo ye)。人非生而知之也 (ren fei sheng er zhi zhi ye), 孰能无惑 (shu neng wu huo)? 惑而不从师 (huo er bu cong shi), 其为惑也 (qi wei huo ye), 终不解矣 (zhong bu jie yi)。生乎吾前 (sheng hu wu qian), 其闻道也固先乎吾 (qi wen dao ye gu xian hu wu), 吾从而师之 (wu cong er shi zhi). (Hang, 802)

### Translation

The process of learning depends on people who can take individuals through the journey and point them in an appropriate direction. In order to seek for high quality of knowledge, individuals need someone who has such experience to take them through the truth seeking journey. During such a process, individuals will face obstacles, but, the person who is leading the journey should provide them with good suggestions and answers according to her/his past experience. People who are taking individuals through the journey of learning, providing them with most appropriate answers, should be given the title of being a qualified teacher.

This paragraph shows the Chinese regard for, and understanding of, the importance of teachers in society. They see it as a teacher's duty to educate the next generation with appropriate knowledge and skills, and even more specifically, the orthodox values and beliefs of the majority of citizens. Therefore, it is possible to conclude that over many generations in China, teaching has not been seen as an ordinary kind of job that everyone can do. Teachers should have the ability to provide clear, correct answers to problems, including passing on acceptable sets of moral guidance to the next generation. The teaching and learning process was not seen simply as a process of reading books and acquiring information, but rather, as an important and necessary process for producing "matching" values and beliefs among individual Chinese citizens.

The centrality of the role of teachers in forming and perpetuating traditional Chinese values and beliefs sharpened my interest in finding out where foreign teachers stand in the profession. I became curious about the kinds of values and beliefs they would pass on to the young generation of Chinese, and whether they could accept and fulfil the role of passing on traditional Chinese ideal.

### *1.1 Research questions*

I have now been in New Zealand a number of years, and have come to define my life in New Zealand culture as rewarding, but full of puzzles. I hypothesised that this would be a typical response of foreigners trying to acculturate in China. The questions which shaped my study, therefore, are these:

1. How do foreigners describe their experience in China? Specifically, what is the experience of being a foreign teacher in China, specifically in Panyu district, Guang Zhou City, Guang Dong Province? What are the cultural differences that they struggle to accept or understand?
2. Do foreigners maintain their sense of identity and beliefs in a completely different cultural environment? Will the foreign teachers reshape their personal beliefs and values, especially about teaching, because of the cultural differences between China and their native country?
3. If foreign teachers manage to maintain their original personal values and beliefs, how do they deal with the difficulties in life and differences in culture?

Question number one was intended to provide me with a snapshot of participants' general experience of life and work in China. The question was

designed primarily as a way of settling the participants into the interview process, but I hoped, nevertheless, that their reactions to Chinese culture would provide me with some interesting insights.

Question number two was designed as the main focus of the research. It attempted to unfold how foreigners deal with the difficulties caused by cultural differences, especially in the workplace. I hoped participants would disclose in-depth personal information about their journey in China, such as, for example, how they resolve specific difficulties, and to what extent they accept Chinese methods of dealing with conflict. When I developed this question, I hoped that their disclosure about particular issues would show whether or not they had made changes in their personal values and beliefs because Chinese culture contradicted their own.

Question three was developed as a clarification and deepening of question two. The purpose of the question was to establish participant's resistance to "the system" because of personal convictions. In other words, it attempts to discover the obstacles participants face in trying to maintain their true selves.

## *1.2 Organisation of my thesis*

My thesis is divided into six chapters:

Chapter one gives an overview of the research, by briefly introducing its focus. It also sets out and justifies the research questions, and reasons for selecting English language teachers as the research focus.

Chapter two provides some background studies. In this chapter, I covered the structure of Chinese educational system, the impact of economic reform on the Chinese education sector, and the future of Chinese educational system. In chapter two, I also provide a general picture of how Chinese educational

system runs under the influence of traditional Chinese culture.

Chapter three, which is divided into several distinct sections, contains a review of some of the literature relevant to my research. In this chapter, I have discussed many aspects of the inter-cultural experience such as culture shock and also the kind of emotional labour that foreigners may experience during their working hours in China. Furthermore, the chapter also introduces the changes to traditional Chinese culture as a result of the profound influence of Western culture. This chapter also covers the different learning styles and teaching strategies of Chinese and Western students and teachers.

Chapter four outlines the methodology and methods I used for data gathering and data analysis. I have tried to recreate the interview process which I undertook in China. The chapter includes details of the participant selection process, the data collection procedure and the coding process. I have also discussed the limitations of my research process and techniques.

Chapter five is the findings section. The data was grouped into several themes which became evident when the interview material from all participants was analysed.

Chapter six contains discussion of the data and my conclusions about the research.

## Chapter 2

### Background: the Chinese Education System

#### *Introduction*

This chapter summarises key modifications that the Chinese Government has accomplished for its educational system and unfolds the history of Chinese educational system. It also shows the impact of a recent government policy called “The 211 Programme”.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the impact of modifying education policy in China on the way individuals perceive the education they receive. The chapter also aims to clarify possible future developments in the Chinese educational sector. The final section of the chapter shows that changes that have been carried out to upgrade the existing educational content, in order to best benefit both the educational institutions in China and its students.

#### *2.1 The Chinese educational reform*

Chinese education has been formulated in each dynasty to capture and then impart the unique characteristics of each historical period, yet the basic content of the material taught to students has comparable aspects across many hundreds of years (Deng, 2000; Chen, 1995). For example, the source of teaching materials has long been based on the Four Books and Five Classics, which are, namely, Lun Yu (The Analects of Confucius), Meng Zi (the Mencius), Da Xue (The Great Learning), Zhong Yong (The Doctrine of the

Mean), Shi Jing, Shang Shu, Li Jing, and Chun Qiu (China Guide, 2005; Wikipedia, 2006). These works outline moral guidelines that were desirable for the public. They also cover principles of ownership, humaneness, righteousness, filial piety, propriety and so on (Yan, 1994; Ng, He, & Loong, 2004; Liu, Ng, Weatherall & Loong, 2000; Ip, 1996 & 1990). According to Metmuseum (2006), these classic texts were introduced into the education field as preferred sources of teaching material during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127 AD). They were later selected by Zhu Xi (1130-1200 AD), under whose influence the popularity of the texts grew. This popularity spread during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127 -1279 AD) and was continuously strengthened right up until the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911 AD) as the texts continued to be favoured as sources of suitable material on which to base lessons and precepts for the young (Wikipedia, 2006).

Thus, the entire outlook of the Chinese educational system seems to have been designed to produce forms of social orthodoxy, because education was restricted, over a considerable time, to a single source of teaching materials. After the overthrow of the last emperor and the end of the Qing Dynasty, revolutionary changes took place in China, including transformation of its educational system (State Education Commission People's Republic of China, 1996). The modification of the Chinese economy, with the implementation of an open-market policy, not only rewarded China with economic growth, but also placed both opportunities and pressure on its social structures, including its educational system (Willis, 2000; State Education Commission People's Republic of China, 1996).

### **Concepts of teaching before economic reform**

Teaching in China can be traced back at least as far as the Shang Dynasty

(1027 B.C.-1523 B.C.) (Wikipedia, 2006; Surowski, 2000 & 1996). For at least 2,000 years, the opportunity to receive an education was regarded as a luxury experience in China. It was such a privilege that only the ruling class, particularly members of the royal family, were entitled to participate in education (Surowski, 2000 & 1996). The reason for excluding the lower classes from the education system was, firstly, to maximise the power of the ruling class have over ordinarily citizens. Secondly, but perhaps more importantly, the exclusiveness of possessing an education enhanced the production of qualified government officials (Surowski, 2000 & 1996; Wikipedia, 2006).

The basis of education in imperial China before 1840 was the imperial examination system, known as the “Ke-Ju”. This system selected those who would be entitled to an education according to their understanding of particular subjects. All male adults, regardless of their social status, were able to take the exams (Wikipedia, 2006). Theoretically, passing the imperial examination was the only path by which low status people could reposition themselves within society (Wikipedia, 2006). All candidates had to display a deep understanding of the Four Books and Five Classics (Surowski, 2000). Government appointed examiners also tested candidates on six subjects: “rites, music, archery, chariot-riding, history and mathematics” (Surowski, 2000, p. 2). Individuals who achieved top grades in the various different subjects would then be recruited by different government departments (Wikipedia, 2006).

The imperial examination system was strengthened and reinforced during the Qing Dynasty, but the core principle of the system became corrupted. The purpose of the examination system was to select suitably qualified government officials from the widest possible cross-section of the public. Despite the high morality of the classic texts on which teaching was based,

government positions and examination results were sometimes simply sold to those people who could afford to buy them (Wikipedia, 2006). According to Wikipedia (2006) such inequitable movement within the educational system resulted in social corruption, reduced public morale and created distrust of the government among ordinary people.

### **The loss of the opium war (1840-1842)**

The heavy toll caused by losing the Opium War (1839-1842) and the signing of the Treaty of Nanjing, an most unequal trade agreement (Wikipedia, 2006), again put additional pressure on maintaining morality in China's social fabric. Government officials re-asserted their dominance, and concluded there was an urgent need to integrate new western knowledge and technology into China's development. In consequence of this, the government successfully sent several groups of candidate to foreign territories, such as America and Britain. The aim was for these groups to receive advanced education in another unfamiliar domain and return bringing advanced skills and knowledge into China for incorporation in the standard teaching syllabus, resulting in benefits for the public (Surowski, 2000; 1996). People who remained in China still had some opportunity to learn under western influence, through the presence of free education by church groups and missionaries (Wikipedia, 2006; Surowski, 2000 & 1996).

It is possible to argue that after the damage done by the Opium War and the lost of Hong Kong, both the Chinese government and the Chinese people realised that they could no longer afford to see China as the most powerful country in the world. The successes and development of the Industrial Revolution put China behind Europe and the United States both technologically and socio-economically. The desire to build China's

international status shifted the aim of education, at least in part, towards restoring the nation's pride. Education became something that was no longer simply a matter of personal advancement and social status. It was transformed into an opportunity for individuals to affect the re-creation of China's international status.

### **The influence of the Cultural Revolution and "The Great Leap" movement (1966-1976)**

After failure of the Qing dynasty in 1912, China failed to re-establish internal peace after a long period of upheaval caused by power plays and struggles among numerous warlords and foreign powers (Wikipedia, 2006). Social order fell apart until the socialist party took control of the country. Under the socialist influence, severe changes began to take place within the new China (Wikipedia, 2006), not least of which were transformations within the educational system, specified during Cultural Revolution and Great Leap (Surowski, 2000 & 1996).

Almost everyone suffered during the Cultural Revolution in China, but especially younger generation of students. The aim of education was again transformed into a political weapon, used this time to generate and reproduce students with specific political understanding of and support for the new government. Qualified students were given the title of "worker-peasant-soldier student" (Gong-Nong-Bing-Xue Yuan) (Surowski, 2000; Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution, 2000; Wikipedia, 2006). Students who were not able to acquire such a title were sent to rural areas or factories for re-education after finishing junior or senior high school (Virtual Museum of the Cultural Revolution, 2000; Surowski, 2000). Accordingly, the goal of education which was transformed first from qualifying as a

government official into restructuring China's place on the international stage, was further changed, this time into a process for producing backup forces for the government during the Cultural Revolution period.

### **Impact of open market economy reform (1980-1995)**

A new phase of transformation within the education sector was initiated by XiaoPing\_Deng (August 22, 1904- February 19, 1997) after the Cultural Revolution era (Wikipedia, 2006). During the period 1980 to 1995, China finally reached a form of social stability that nevertheless allowed for economic expansion (Wikipaida, 2006). According to the State Education Commission People's Republic of China (SEDC) (1996). During these fifteen years, the Chinese education system started to change and adopt the structure it presently holds, and a key player in the new structure is the SEDC.

The SEDC is the government department that ultimately delivers all decisions related to education nation-wide. According to the SEDC (1996) and Surowski (2000; 1996), the Chinese education system works according to a completely top-down system. Their role also includes providing finalised educational policy, conveying strategic direction for providers of primary, secondary and tertiary education registered in China and preparing national standard teaching materials and examinations (SEDC, 1996). All finalised policies and strategic plans are put into practice or reinforced by the local Education Committees (SEDC, 1996). In summary, however, it seemed that nothing much had changed. The structure at that time reflected a strong continuity with the past, for the system had a teacher-centred, discipline-oriented national curriculum built around the hierarchically-oriented traditional values that had always influenced Chinese education (Deng, 2000).

Liao (2004), Hu (2005), Tardy and Snyder (2004), Willis (2000) all point out that there are considerable difficulties in implementing such an authoritarian management style into the Chinese educational sector. What individual teachers do in the classroom is supposedly restricted by the official government memorandums that are circulated. The national curriculum did not always meet local needs for specific content and classroom management. Therefore, it is possible to argue that the process of learning in China was constrained rather than liberated by the national curriculum.

Coming closer to the topic of my research, the style of teaching the English language in China has been limited because of blind spots within the system. The teaching of English was initially carried out under a regime that leaned heavily on grammar, translation and in-class practice (Jesus, 1999; Liu, 2005; Deng, 2000). In 1992, SEDC reduced the proportion of grammar and vocabulary learning in English teaching prospectus (Liao, 2004; Hu, 2005; Willis, 2000). The rationale for this decision was the department's desire to address the urgent need for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) into English language teaching in China (Liao, 2004; Hu, 2005).

The transformation of English teaching from a theoretical paradigm towards more practical model has given rise to the need for more specific labour skill: the ability to teach conversational English. Thus, this decision meant a need to move away from a strict adherence to textbooks that complied with the People's Education Press. Instead, there was a strong need for local Chinese teachers whose English has been enhanced through better opportunities for conversing, or for foreign teachers. Furthermore, there was a growing recognition that teachers needed to be able to choose the most appropriate teaching material and methods according to the individual requirements of the students in front of them (Liao, 2004; Willis, 2000; SEDC, 1996). The department began to enforce some practical components into the strong

national curriculum to replace some of the theoretical learning.

### **The implementation of 211 Programme (1996- present)**

When the SEDC raised concerns about the absence of practical application within the Chinese educational sector, sparking further changes to the curriculum (Liao, 2004; Willis, 2000; SEDC, 1996). The latest update within the educational sector started with replacing the centralised administration style with a decentralised management system. The SEDC (1996) claims that a degree of freedom for teachers has been enhanced by the newly-implemented decentralised educational structure. For instance, style of teaching, selection of teaching material and strategic planning issues can partially be decided according to the needs of individual institutions (SEDC, 1996). Even though the National Planning Commission and the SEDC still own the ultimate authority in decision-making in China, individual educational providers have been given more authority and freedom (SEDC, 1996).

Another important strategic change supporting the newly-decentralised education structure is the implementation of nation-wide education rating scheme, also known as the 211 Programme (Liao, 2004; Willis, 2000; SEDC, 1996). This strategic change aims to intensify competition among various educational providers and provide rating information that will be useful to students as they select the schools they wish to attend. Every educational institution in China can participate, but, there are only 211 places in the ranking system nation wide (Liao, 2004; Willis, 2000; SEDC, 1996). In the 211 Programme, all universities have to be rated according to academic performance, financial support, and student recruitment and performance (Liao, 2004; Willis, 2000; SEDC, 1996). Only the 211 top schools will be

reviewed and announced by the State Education Commission and National Planning Commission (Liao, 2004; Willis, 2000).

The rating scale is aimed at improving the service and teaching quality delivered to the vast student population in China (Liao, 2004; Willis, 2000; SEDC, 1996). The schools which are rated and qualify as part of the 211 Programme attract better funding, equipment and staff, from either the Central Educational Committee or any other private support (SEDC, 1996).

These last changes within the Chinese education sector, including the evolution towards a decentralised management style and intensified competition among various educational providers, are slowly changing the heavily government-controlled education system (Willis, 2000, SEDC, 1996). However, not all existing teachers are ready for the new styles of teaching and learning that the changes dictate, and there is now wide acceptance of the need for foreign teachers who specialise in teaching a foreign language, especially English, as a vital verification of an education provider's ability to provide better service quality and even, possibly, a guarantee for success in mastering the language.

## *2.2 Summarising the transformation of the Chinese education system*

The reform has taken place in the education system since 1996 can be categorised under four main themes, the first of which is decentralisation. Decentralisation is defined as "Reform of educational management system by replacing highly centralised management with the decentralised management under the macro guidance of the central government" (SEDC, 1996, p. 6). It is envisaged that more and more individual institutions will be empowered to make independent management decisions (SEDC, 1996; Willis, 2000) but that central government departments, including the National Enrolment

Committee, the National Planning Commission and the State Education Commission, will continue to hold final decision-making power in terms of overall national education planning (SEDC, 1996). Even though government departments still have great influence at the macro level over the process of teaching and materials selection, decentralisation within the educational industry will allow improved collaboration with private sectors (Willis, 2000).

A second theme is the expansion of source of funding for education, defined by the SEDC (1996, p. 14) as “Reform of the educational investment system by transforming the single source of government investment into diversified sources of education expenditure with a view to establishing gradually an educational input system under which the principal source, namely state appropriation is supplemented by other channels of education financing”. The object of this change is that many sources of funding will be available for developing schools. It is hoped that the expansion of funding sources will encourage further research and development in curricula and that more practical applications of knowledge may be introduced by schools presently too strapped for cash to be able to experiment with new ways of delivering teaching. According to the SEDC (1996) and Willis (2000), the experience of extending funding sources and allowing public from all social sectors to participate in decision-making in schools has further increased the awareness of providers for the need to integrate practical skills and knowledge into the academic field. The result is that students no longer concentrate solely on theory.

The third theme that has emerged is a shift in educational philosophy, which has been brought about by the process of decentralisation and the inclusion of diversified funding sources. Teaching and learning has now started to shift in a market-driven direction. This theme will be discussed more in the section “A new education philosophy” following further down the page.

Finally, the fourth theme is that of increased tension between different education providers and institutions as a result of competition. The SEDC (1996, p. 18) defines this as “Reform of internal management system of schools by ushering into the schools a system of independent school running, self-development, self-motivation and self-restraining”. What it means is that the success of a school no longer depends on government support but on its ability to attract students. In this new milieu, parents and students place great weight on suggestions from the government educational department, such as the ranking any education providers has obtained under the national measurement Project-211 (Willis, 2000).

### *2.3 The new Chinese educational philosophy*

The previous section shows major changes have taken place within the Chinese education sector since 1996. Within the new education industry, the government is pushing for managerial power decentralisation, increased social involvement, and the delivery of practical knowledge (SEDC, 1996). The idea of being educated began as a process of preparing and selecting qualified government reserve forces and evolved into a device that the government used to carry and spread specific political ideology, as encapsulated in the name - “worker-peasant-soldier student” (Gong-Nong-Bing-Xue Yuan) during Cultural Revolution and the Great Leap period. Now, the ideology of education is deeply influenced by market economics. Educational providers’ ability to provide an outstanding educational environment, including the quality of the teacher, the environment of the school, and the social recognition of the school have become the most important aspects that influence both parents’ and students’ school selection process. The idea of getting an education is no longer restricted to knowing how to write and read, but has been transformed into an

import progression that may affect a student's whole life.

Changes in the Chinese education system, including the ideological shift toward a more service-driven education sector, has intensified competition among individual educational providers, and expanded social integration into the educational industry. It is possible to argue that the presence of foreign teachers is an unavoidable development in improving individual an education provider's bargaining power within the industry. In China, there is one common understanding: "the teacher's ability determines the quality of the student". Therefore, education consumers – the parents and the students – seek not only a good educational provider, but one which offers outstanding teaching quality and services. Consequently, as foreign languages, especially English, become a compulsory subject started in primary schools (SEDC, 1996), employing first-language speakers to teach such subjects is seen as a strong endorsement of the schools by their different publics.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have briefly described the main events that have reshaped the Chinese education system, and have outlined the effects of changing philosophies, with particular emphasis on Project 211. The chapter has sketched the existence of tensions between institutions and the market-driven need for foreign English teachers in China. It is the experience of the foreign teachers in this complex and dynamic sector that is the focus of this research.

In the next chapter, I will review published research in order to discuss some of the themes that relate to the experience of foreigners as "the other" in an alien land.

## Chapter 3

### Literature review

#### *Introduction*

This chapter reviews some of the research findings that relate to my topic. My original intention was to cover published research on the experience of foreigners' who live and work in China, but, interestingly, it seems that the research on this topic is quite slight. Whereas I wanted to research the experience of foreigners in China, the majority of inter-cultural investigations I found unfolded the stories of people who moved out of China to western cultures. The dearth of specific research on my topic was disconcerting, but I decided to cover the issues that seemed likely to inform my participants' experience: namely, understanding culture in general, understanding Chinese culture in particular, and issues of adaptation to new surroundings.

#### *3.1 Defining culture*

The reading for the theoretical foundation of this research was shaped by two questions:

1. what is culture?
2. what are the unique characteristics embedded in traditional Chinese culture?

The reason for undertaking so much reading in the area of culture, is that essentially, the study is about inter-cultural experience. Some theoretical

framework was necessary for analysing the experiences that the data collection would capture.

The meaning of the word “culture” is very broad in English, and so some established meaning needed to be produced for this thesis because of its focus on personal beliefs and values. Culture is considered to be one of the most important influences on the formation and maintenance of personal value and belief systems (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Singhapakdi, Scott & Orose, 1994). According to Hofstede and Bond (1984, 1988), Hofstede (1997) and Hong (2005) “culture” consists of sets of behaviours known to and accepted by the insiders of any given group and is the reference point for establishing identity. In other words, the sets of behaviours and shared understandings within a culture function as the means by which insiders distinguish themselves from outsiders. Even though people are not “programmable” in the sense that computers are, the power with which a culture can influence individuals means that they often seem to have such broadly similar values and beliefs that they can appear to be operating on “the software of the mind” (Hofstede, 1997).

Research by Hofstede and Bond (1984; 1988) claims that the cultures of the world can be understood in five dimensions that measure different social elements within a culture. These dimensions set up certain qualities as polar opposites, allowing countries to be ranged along the continuum created between them. Critics (see, for instance, Kwek, 2003) of this way of conceiving culture point out that it is too tempting to take a simplistic and hasty view of cultures as belonging at one or the other of the ends of the continuum, whereas the truth is that all cultures contain elements of all the dimensions to a greater or lesser degree at all points in their evolution. Although the “cultural dimensions” model has its detractors, Hofstede’s influence is so nevertheless great that I have thought it worthwhile to use his

approach to exploring culture. What follows in this chapter, therefore, is an exploration of the dimensions Hofstede specified: individualism/collectivism, masculinity/feminine, power distance, uncertainty avoidance, and Confucian dynamism.

### **Individualism and collectivism**

The dimension of individualism-collectivism illustrates how people react to the issues of belonging to groups (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; 1998). According to Hofstede (1997), Hong (2005) and Hofstede and Bond (1984; 1988) Asian countries have adopted a collective social framework, meaning that during social activities and business interactions, people are more likely to consider the benefit to their group than personal gain. Hong (2005) describes the Chinese, and by extension, all members of collectivist cultures, as people who perceive themselves as part of a wider society and derive their sense of personal identity in that way. Collectivists, therefore, often apply “we” or “us” when describing what seem to be personal emotions (Hong, 2005; Walker & Dimmock, 2000).

As people in collectivist cultures identify themselves being part of a group, they may experience anxiety about the effect of their individual performance on relationships with other members of the group (Hong, 2005). Thus, a degree of social anxiety relating to the sense of the way the self is perceived by the group may be a distinguishing trait of Asian cultures. Many theorists (Walker & Dimmock, 2000; Hong, 2005; Blanton & Barbuto, 2005; Freeman, 1998) suggest that “saving face” is an expression of the sense of anxiety that accompanies self-identification based on group membership, and that this is an especially strong feature of traditional Chinese culture. Hwang (1986, cited in Walker & Dimmock, 2000, p. 171) notes several quite elaborate and subtle variations on the theme of saving face. For instance, one form of

saving face is to straightforwardly admit to a talent, but by contrast, one can also save face by concealing personal strength. Another form of saving face is to lose personal “face” for the good of the group. This form of saving face is closely aligned with the Western concept of “the buck stops here”: in other words, senior people will save face by carrying the responsibility for an incident even if the incident was not their fault. Yet another form of saving face relates to avoiding boastfulness about personal achievements.

Boastfulness, as opposed to modesty, damages the “face” of others, and ultimately, leads to isolation within the group. To behave modestly, therefore, is to save face. The concept of “face” relates to “the doctrine of the mean” which explains the traditional Chinese way of building relationships.

In socially anxious cultures such as China, face saving tends to run with self protection deriving from a high degree of reticence, and even denial of actions (Hong, 2005). Individuals, according to Hong, (2005), believe that they can preserve and enhance group harmony by unmasking only a certain degree of truth and self-disclosure, especially about negative self-characteristics.

By contrast, people from individualist cultures (such as, for instance, the United States of America) see no loss of face in admitting mistakes caused by poor personal judgments or refusal to accept suggestions during a problem-solving process (Lamiell, 2003). As one of my participants said in an interview, “In the American culture, in order to save face people need to admit to the mistake --- “I am sorry, I am wrong, I made a mistake but let’s move on” (personal communication, 2006). The “American way” described here expresses behaviour that is the complete opposite for peoples to whom saving face is important. Maintaining harmony and balance within the group can be a complex balancing act in cultures which value the concept of “face”. For example, if an error or misjudgment become public, there needs to be an exercise of “*gei mian zi*” (giving face to others) combined with

publicly providing reasonable excuses to justify the occurrence of the mistake (Hong, 2005; Walker & Dimmock, 2000). The process of sorting out the cause and effect of the problem will be carried out in private with people who are bound together in a true trust relationship.

The ties between people are looser in individualistic social structures than in collectivist cultures. One interpretation of this is that in individualistic cultures, people are expected to put their own personal benefits ahead of those of the group (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Hong, 2005; Walker & Dimmock, 2000). It is all too easy to generalise, but Eastern<sup>1</sup> people tend to perceive westerners as unafraid of expressing personal opinions, as valuing free will, as strongly believing in democracy and being willing to challenge authority, and as approaching life with a “Don’t ask (or fight), don’t get (or win)” attitude. Hong (2005) argues that from individualistic cultures seem to see themselves as separate from the group, focusing on “I” side of the story during social interaction and development (Hong, 2005; Walker & Dimmock, 2000). Of course, many may believe in supporting their in-groups and receiving support in return, but nevertheless, it may be that individuals’ personal contribution within the achievements of the group are considered to be more important than simply belonging to the group and being part of a harmonious whole.

### **Masculinity v. Femininity**

One of the cultural dimensions specified by Hofstede (1984) and Hofsted and Bond (1988) is that of masculinity-femininity, which is proposed as a way of understanding the differences in gender role in the East and the West. For

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<sup>1</sup> I am following Hofstede (1984) and loosely defining the East as collectivist and the west as individualist.

instance, traditional Chinese society is constructed with heavy emphasis on the patriarchy, with much reverence for hierarchical power and also with strict systems of gender role control (Ng, He & Loong, 2004; Swaidan & Hayes, 2005; Ip, 2003; Ng, Weatherall & Loong, 2005).

Five basic, yet crucial, relationships provide order in the traditional Chinese culture and are deeply influenced by the prevailing system of gender roles. The relationships are: father and son; ruler and minister or officials; husband and wife; older siblings with younger siblings; and finally, friend with friend (Liu, Ng, Weatherall & Loong, 2000). These five sets of relationship are the basis of certain characteristics of the Chinese culture, but the one that has perhaps the strongest influence in setting gender roles is the tradition of filial piety (Liu et al., 2000) which lies almost at the heart of Chinese society.

The core value of filial piety in Chinese culture has given men and people with high social ranking a position of dominant power over women and people in the lower classes (Liu, Ng, Weatherall & Loong, 2000; Ip, 1996). This cultural value requires that citizens pay respect to the king, to male elders of the community, to the male parent, to the husband, and the eldest son (Liu et al., 2000; Ip, 2003; Ip & Murphy, 2005). All other members of a community are deemed to be of lower status and of less importance, and are expected to offer honor, obedience, devotion and unquestioning acceptance of their authority (Liu et al., 2000; Ip, 1996 & 2003). Swaidan and Hayes (2005) suggest that by way of a stark contrast with traditional Chinese patriarchal gender role, Western societies prefer equality. Thus, in Western culture, at least some women are able to take advantage of the same opportunities. The same value is deemed to apply to both sexes.

The concept of filial piety has been interpreted as a less important feature of Western culture and an individual's personal value and belief systems (Hong,

2005). Hong (2005) argues that because Westerners see and promote the individual as a single identity, separated from other members of the same social surroundings, social responsibility is automatically inherited and carried out according to personal convictions.

### **Power distance**

The third dimension that Hofstede and Bond (1984) use to measure and describe culture relates to the way in which power is distributed among group members. Power distance dimension describes the extent to which group members accept as natural inequalities in power relations in society.

According to Hofstede and Bond (1984; 1988), and Hofstede (1997), in a low power-distance people (especially children) are encouraged to develop and to express personal opinions, and even more than that, to question the wisdom and rightness those in positions of authority. However, in cultures with a high power distance, people tend to be more accepting of power structures and the established status quo, (Hofstede & Bond, 1988; Swaidan & Hayes, 2005).

The different attitudes towards power produces an interesting relationship with uncertainty and ambiguity (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Swaidan & Hayes, 2005). According to Hofstede and Bond (1984) people in low power distance cultures are more tolerant in terms of differences (uncertainty-accepting) and have fewer boundaries to keep in their social relations. By contrast, cultures with a high power distance tend to experience nervousness, frustration, or disappointment when faced with unpredictable or volatile situations (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; 1988, Swaidan & Hayes, 2005) and may either try to avoid events or issues that they do not feel comfortable with or, more likely, develop step-by-step guidelines to regulate or prevent haphazard social situations.

### **Confucian dynamism**

The last of Hofstede and Bond (1984) dimensions that I wish to explore is that of Confucian dynamism, which describes whether a society adopts a long term (that is, future-focused) or a short term (that is, present- focused) orientation to life. People from China and other Asian countries tend to take a long term orientation to (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Swaidan & Hayes, 2005), believing in persistence and thrift, so that they will always have access to financial resources (Swaidan & Hayes, 2005). The same view of life and what life means makes it likely that in Eastern communities, a sense of shame and obligation will lead citizens to care for the elderly and under-privileged in order to maintain harmony and trust in society.

Hofstede and Bond (1984) and Swaidan and Hayes (2005) assert that people from Western cultures hold a contrasting view of the meaning of life, and that they tend to be oriented to the short term. This orientation to the present rather than the future tends to create a focus on the consequences of present action. Saving face, in this orientation, may be considered as an obstacle to the flow of business (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Swaidan & Hayes, 2005) in which the expression “time is money” sums up the typical attitude. In the long-term orientation of Eastern cultures, there is time for the reciprocation of greeting rituals, building relationships in which it is possible to give and receive favours. In brief, the long-term orientation allows for the development and maintenance of social rituals (Swaidan & Hayes, 2005).

### ***Limitations to Hofstede's cultural dimensions***

Kwek (2003) argues that the importance of Hofstede's (1988; 1984) theory of cultural dimensions may not be due to its accuracy, but its popularity among other researchers. The very certainty with which Hofstede (1988; 1984)

presents his five dimensions as a definitive way of looking at culture may somewhat obscure the fact that there are many other aspects to cultures to explore (Kwek, 2003). For example, one of the most important aspects in Chinese society is the issue understood “saving and losing face”. My own experience is that it is difficult to confine this particular issue into a single cultural dimension as Hofstede (1988; 1984) has done. Saving face is so complex issue that it is expressed across several of his dimensions at the same time.

Furthermore, the important value of filial piety has also not been clearly accounted for by Hofstede’s (1988; 1984) cultural dimensions. The tradition of filial piety is the understanding of social order based on five key relationships: father-son, ruler-minister, husband-wife, older-younger siblings, friend-friend (Liu, Ng, Weatherall & Loong, 2000). It is possible to understand the role of filial piety as part of either power distance or of the gender role divide (the masculinity-feminine dimension). Hofstede’s (1988; 1984) research did not provide any specific information about the interconnections between his five cultural dimensions.

### *The changing face of Chinese culture*

The principles behind the Confucian concept, which is the foundation of traditional Chinese culture, are difficult to confine into five dimensions. Yan (1994) describes Confucian philosophy as being based on several key tenets, beginning with taking thought for the greater good of society. Other key points in Confucianism are “the doctrine of the mean” (中庸)<sup>2</sup> (Zhong Yong)

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<sup>2</sup>中庸(Zhong Yong): part of the Four Books which deals with the philosophy of relationship building.

and the connection between Yi (义)<sup>3</sup> and Li (理)<sup>4</sup> (Yan, 1994; Walker & Dimmock, 2000). These points may be said to be the most important characteristics of traditional Chinese values and beliefs. Yan (1994) describes “Li” as a method of gaining “Yi”. For instance, if the way of gaining a profit is immoral, then the profit itself will be regarded as immoral (Yan, 1994). Therefore, according to Confucian philosophy, if a project involves the possibility of causing any sort of damage, such as environmental pollution, or an accident that could cause the loss of human life, then the project should be terminated before it ever begins, no matter the profits or benefits that might be acquired.

For individuals to be seen as morally acceptable in a society that operates within the traditions of Confucianism, they should be aware of the concerns of others, and combine their own drive to be successful with helping others (Yan, 1994). This leads to another two key Confucian concepts, those of utilitarianism and the Doctrine of the Mean (Yan, 1994; Walker & Dimmock, 2000). These two concepts push all adherents to the philosophy towards adopting collectivist social behaviour, which occurs together with a requirement to suppress personal emotions- Ren (忍)<sup>5</sup>. “Ren” is the concept that embodies the need for all individuals to be careful of issues affecting the greater social good, and to avoid creating situations that might perturb or confuse either the wider group or other individuals. Thus, competition and conflict are discouraged under any circumstances (Yan, 1994; Walker &

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<sup>3</sup>义 (Yi): the degree of loyalty that people should show to group members

<sup>4</sup>理 (Li): refers to the ethic of propriety and prescribes social relationship structures that discourage individuals from challenging or disturbing the role system (Walker & Dimmock, 2000, p. 168)

<sup>5</sup>忍 (Ren): control or suppress personal emotions

Dimmock, 2000). Society at large is urged to strive for the social harmony by subduing individual desires and being mindful of the greater good (Yan, 1994; Walker & Dimmock, 2000).

The concepts described above are the basis of the most idealistic philosophy that could have been carried from the “old” China into the “new” China, but according to Walker and Dimmock (2000), the Chinese have begun to change in their outlook on life. Internationalisation and globalisation have begun to affect traditional Chinese culture and its value system. For instance, an unquestioning acceptance of Westernisation started within businesses in China (Walker & Dimmock, 2000; Aufrecht & Bun, 1995; Yan, 1994), and the concept of concern and care for others has begun to erode. The general public has been hit hard by the economic reforms, with both positive and negative effects (Walker & Dimmock, 2000; Aufrecht & Bun, 1995; Yan, 1994). The “open market” policy, for the first time, allows people to have extra money in their pockets, and has encouraged the general Chinese public to think of how personal achievement can allow them to fulfil personal desires. The fulfilment of these personal desires often relates to the purchase of consumer good, but in some places in China, it might be that there is less worry about whether or not there will be food on the table for the next meal. Ordinary citizens have begun to started realise what money can do for an individual, including the possibility of changing social status, materialised personal lifestyle, and so on.

Perhaps an experience of consumerism perpetuates a desire for consumerism. Certainly, it seems as though the concept of “enough” is hard to form in the minds of people who have suffered deeply for a considerable period through the lack of economical security (Walker & Dimmock, 2000; Aufrecht & Bun, 1995; Yan, 1994) and this is instrumental in pulling down the practice of the concept of “the greater good”. For instance, some organisations in China

have turned solely towards profit, and have forgotten their duty of care: there are regular scandals connected with the production of poisonous baby food, wine, and even rice (Griffiths, 2006; Li, 2004). Organisations all over China are now seeking to enhance their profits by using cheap but unsuitable materials in their products. There are frequent reports of avoidable coal mining accidents and the confiscation of farming lands without proper compensation of the farming community. These events appear to be happening with less and less display of public concern from groups who have moved ahead. In other words, the economic advancement of some groups has been built on disadvantaging others (Griffiths, 2006).

Businesses that are purely profit-driven and personal gain through morally unacceptable methods contravenes the values of “old China”. The greater good is no longer the focal point of running a business, but the shift in values and beliefs also has also had an impact on education, creating it as a saleable commodity that, like the products of other industries, has to turn a profit. The education “industry” is no longer protected by the government. Rather, each educational provider is fighting for its survival and its customers, the students. Every education provider is seeking the tools, including the foreign teachers, in order to achieve a return of profits each financial year. Xu and Oise (2005, p. 304) have used metaphors to describe the role of being a teacher in China:

to transmit knowledge as ‘ferryman’, taking students from one shore of their life to another; and to transform students personally and socially as ‘gardeners of young minds’ through their life long dedication to education, teachers care about students. Like Candles, teachers burn up themselves to light up their students’ lives.

That was once the concept and the moral standard of being a teacher in China. It is arguable that whether or not the idea still can fully apply to teachers in current educational system. However, it is undeniable that teachers are no longer assessed by their desire to help their students and their dedication to education. Now, they are measured by national standard examination results and student performance (Ding & Jablonski, 2001; Liu, 2005; Moss, 2002; Su, 1995).

Section 3.1 has been an attempt to sketch in from published literature some of the forces that have worked, and are still at work, in shaping Chinese society. The section was necessary to establish the work and life context of the foreign teachers who are the subject of my research. The next section deals with issues to do with acclimatisation to, and acculturation into, an alien environment.

It has never been easy to begin life in a completely new environment, and regardless of the preparation that individuals undertake, there is always an element of surprise, followed by sense-making. The following section, I explore some of the most common incidents or difficulties that an foreign teacher might face in the process of settling in China.

### *3.2 . Life in a foreign country*

One of the ways to achieve a rewarding cross-cultural experience in a foreign county is to avoid or minimise the period of culture shock (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2005). Griffiths et. al. (2005) describe the culture shock phase as a process of getting used to the prevailing way of life in the adopted environment. However, culture shock is more than merely adapting to the

new system. It also affects or changes how people see themselves.

### **Culture shock**

Culture shock first occurs at arrival (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2005) for a number of reasons. It could happen when individuals feel a loss of control over the ordinary issues in life, such as unfamiliar food, inexplicable commands on an ATM machine, difficulties with the local transport system, and most commonly, being cut off from communicating due to poor understanding of the local language (Griffiths et. al., 2005). Culture shock experience may also start because of the personality of the incomer and a feeling of being isolated from membership in a community (Griffiths et. al., 2005). If the newcomer does not achieve a sense of inclusion by the new environment, they are likely to develop negative emotions, reject the new culture and suffer homesickness.

Abel (2002) and Hofstede (1997) assert that culture shock goes through four main stages, starting with a "honeymoon" stage, which occurs when the incomer first arrives and is finding everything fresh and exciting. People experience the "high" of being convinced that living overseas will be a defining experience of their life (Abel, 2002; Hofstede, 1997). After the honeymoon phase, however, the new environment has to become home, and in this period, incomers begin to take notice of the differences and inconveniences and to develop a sense of the sacrifices that they need to make to fit into their new communities. Not all individuals are willing to make the changes. When people experience impaired ability to carry out simple tasks such as using banking services, or finding the right bus, they may suffer feelings of inadequacy or incompetence. Difficulties and frustrations may push people to the point that they start to discard the rules of their new culture. Abel (2002) and Hofstede (1997) describe this period as the rejection

stage.

After experiencing struggles in life or at work, some individuals may realise that adjusting their personal demands to suit the environment could make the process of settling in to the new culture go much more smoothly. A period of appreciation begins, when the differences between the home culture and the new culture are less irritating. During this process, incomers move from the rejection stage to an adjustment period (Abel, 2002; Hofstede, 1997).

After the personal adjustment process, newcomers reach the final step of moving from culture shock to the adaptation stage (Abel, 2002; Hofstede, 1997), with various results. On one hand, some individuals achieve a positive outcome if they adjust well into the new environment and develop an eagerness to bond with the new culture. On the other hand, newcomers can still experience a negative outcome if they constantly have difficulties with daily life: transport, food, power cuts, difficult access to money, and the like. Some people are simply neutral about the entire experience of living overseas. They neither deny the possibility of having further development in the new environment nor reject the chance of returning home. This group of people is able to identify similarities between the inherited beliefs of their old culture and the value systems of their new culture (Hofstede, 1997; Abel, 2002).

### **Minimizing the effect from culture shock**

Although culture shock is hard to prevent entirely, various techniques might minimise its effect. People experiencing culture shock have difficulties controlling the practices of their ordinary routines (Abel, 2002; Hofstede, 1997). Therefore, Ball (2005) suggests that people focus on events that they can control to regain confidence. While facing problems that cannot be resolved in one stage, individuals need to develop the ability to be self-controlled,

reinvesting their energy into things that are worth the struggle (Ball, 2005). Instead of carrying out a solo fight, incomers could ask for help and receive appropriate assistance, so that problems might be resolved.

### **Culture shock in the classroom: differences in learning and teaching**

As though the process of adjusting to Chinese culture were not enough, foreign teachers must face another important adjustment process in their professional lives: the differences in learning and teaching in China comparing with Western education. Researchers suggest that students from different culture background employ different learning styles according to their cultural inheritance (Holmes, 2004; Liu, 2005; Moss, 2002; McCallum, 2004). Research by Holmes (2004), Liu (2005), Moss (2002) and McCallum (2004) suggests that Chinese students are learn in ways that are markedly different from students in Western countries, specifically, USA, Canada, and New Zealand. The learning style that Chinese students in general seem to adapt is called the “surface learning method” (Biggs, 1996, cited in Holmes, 2004, p. 295). Surface learners are passive learners who rely heavily on memorisation and repetition of knowledge (Hammond and Gao, 2002, cited in Holmes, 2004, p. 295; McCallum, 2004).

Research suggests that Chinese students lack critical thinking skills (McCallum, 2004; Holmes, 2004; Liu, 2005; Moss, 2002; Goodson, 1993). They will perform better if they are given a firm direction or permitted to learn by practicing specific skill or knowledge. This may account for the reason that Asian students, and especially Chinese, achieve better success in science and math in world wide comparisons (Elliott, 1999). However, teachers in Western institutions share comparable concerns: Asian students, generally, perform poorly in terms of thinking creatively, providing coherent argument, or analytical and critical thinking skills (Elliott, 1999; Holmes, 2004; Thaine,

2004; Moss, 2002; McCallum, 2004).

Compared to the learning style that Chinese students are accustomed to, students in Western countries favour opposite of learning methods. Holmes (2004, p. 295) argues in his research that Western students are “Socratic” learners. In other words, knowledge is not simply delivered and learnt by rote in its original form. Students’ understanding about specific knowledge is constantly generated, reconstructed or co-constructed through questioning, answering and the process of evaluating information (Holmes, 2004).

Success is not measured solely against a student’s ability to repeat rote-learned knowledge: rather, critical thinking and problem solving skills are considered necessary and important in western educational system (Holmes, 2004, McCallum, 2004). Therefore, students in western countries experience learning at a deeper level than Chinese students. Under the Western educational system (ideally, at least), individual students become motivated by the process of seeking explanations through in-class interaction and self contribution.

The differences in learning style among the Chinese and Western students are a product of culture, specifically in the area of educational tradition (Holmes, 2004; McCallum, 2004)). Lee (1996, cited in Holmes, 2004) and McCallum (2004) claim that the Chinese educational system is still strongly influenced by Confucian ideology, in which learners are expected to be respectful to the person who are providing the education and knowledge itself. The student-teacher relationship is constructed on a hierarchical basis (Holmes, 2004; McCallum, 2004) and questioning and in-class interaction with the teacher and other students is restricted unless the teacher has given the indication of open discussion. Chinese students perceive the teacher as their role model and respect and obey the directions that have been given by the teacher. Hammond and Gao (2002, cited in Holmes, 2004) and McCallum

(2004) share similar understanding of Chinese learning patterns. They both describe the Chinese teaching and learning model as involving characteristics that are “fragmented, linear, competition-oriented, and authority-centered” (Hammond & Gao, 2002, p. 228- 229, cited in Holmes, 2004).

In contrast, Western learning and teaching strategies allows teachers to deliver information to students for open discussion. The model for class interaction could be initiated by student to student or student to teacher formations (McCallum, 2004). Western students are more actively involved into the process of learning and have no fear of critiquing information or engaging in questioning the teacher (McCallum, 2004; Holmes, 2004).

Studies by Su (1996), Zhang & Sternberg (2002) and Shi (2003) point out that there are crossovers between Chinese and Western learning approaches caused by time limits and the requirements of the actual task. It is possible to argue, therefore, that to a certain extent, Chinese students sometimes apply deep learning skills, including critical thinking or information evaluation skills if the task requires them to do so. Similarly, Western students may learn by rote when the need is there: not many pupils question the truth of the “times tables”. However, it is fair to say that these broad categories of difference do exist between Western and Chinese styles of learning and teaching and these differences make professional life challenging for the foreign teachers, who are already in the process of adjusting to a new culture. The question for them is whether to maintain their own style, based on Western philosophy, or change so that they fulfil the requirements of the Chinese educational system.

*The classroom and emotional labour:*

Because of broad differences in the learning needs and habits of Chinese, and

the ancient and unique characteristics that the Chinese educational system is constructed upon (see chapter two), foreign teachers are unlikely to settle in to teaching readily. The restraints of working in such a long-established system (even though it is under-going change) may impose “emotional labour” (Hochschild, 1983) on the incoming teachers.

The term “emotional labour” applies to people who subdue their true selves to meet the requirements of a commercial or professional situation (Hochschild, 1983). According to Hochschild (1983), whether or not an employee is required to be an emotional labourer is strongly influenced by the employee’s role(s) and status within the organisation and to the types of image that the organisation wished to portray to its publics.

The commodification and commercialisation of employees’ emotion is driven by concerns for profit (Hochschild, 1983). Thus, employees’ facial expressions during customer interaction, together with their interpersonal communication skills, and the impact of personal connections outside of business, become sources of profit for the business (Wouters, 1989).

Hochschild (1983, cited in Bolton & Boyd, 2003) describes emotional labour as the requirement by organisations to make an individual’s personal emotion into a business commodity in all business-related circumstances. For instance, in my part-time job as a beauty consultant, I am required to be emotionally engaged with the customer, and to always appear interested in their needs and excited by the products I can sell to meet those needs (personal experience, 2006). The requirements for simulating particular emotional responses are codified in my employee handbook, and are constantly reinforced by the manager (personal experience, 2006).

Disneyland, one of the most famous and successful organisations on the planet, exercises strong restraints over its employees’ emotional engagement

with the job. This insistence on emotional labour derives from Disneyland's business goal, which is to be the "happiest place on earth" for its customers (Van Maanen, 1991, p. 58). In order to accomplish their business plan, Disneyland organises its employees' happiness as a company product that gets bought by visitors along with tickets for the rides. Disneyland management even specifies a form of aesthetic labour employees: "...[employees should be] single, white males [or] females in their early twenties, without facial blemish, of above average height and below average weight, with straight teeth and conservative grooming standards..." (Van Maanen, 1991, p. 59). The organisation takes maximum control of its employees' performance and appearance by emphasising desirable qualities in training sessions, employee manuals and close surveillance of staff at work.

Hochschild (1983, cited in Tolich, 1993) argues that employees are not necessarily aware that their organisations are constructing their personal emotions as saleable items. Hochschild (1983) also claims that organisations demand two types of emotional labour. The first form is the "surface acting" (Hochschild, 1983, cited in Bolton & Boyd, 2003, p. 297) that occurs when personal contribution to the business is channelled voluntarily by the employee in accordance with company rules and guidelines (Bolton & Boyd, 2003). The second type of emotion labour is called "deep acting" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 37). Bolton and Boyd (2003) points out that in deep acting, employees are required to conjure up personal emotion to satisfy business demands, like having to summon an unreal excitement about a new company direction. Individuals may also be required to alter themselves to perform in a manner approved by the business regardless of the social situation they are in.

Common examples of deep acting in emotional labour are among female workers in the service industries. Hochschild (1983) believes that because of

women have been portrayed as care givers under most of social circumstances, organisations are likely to buy into their capacity to “be mother” and show characteristics warmth, friendliness, caring and helpfulness. Consequently, some of the most common job categories filled by women -- nurses, sales assistants, flight attendants and teachers -- all show instances of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983)

In terms of my research, teachers in China, are required to perform in certain specified ways. Thus, I hypothesise that foreign teachers will undergo a form of emotional labour in their efforts to conform, not only to the systems and procedures of the Chinese education system, but also its demands for a “way of being” in the classroom.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, I have summarised a range of cross-culture research findings, including Hofstede and Bond’s (1984; 1988) work on cultural dimensions, to provide a research background for my research. I have drawn the picture of the China that the foreign teachers must enter and experience, including the effects of a relatively rapid Westernising of traditional values. I have shown that despite Westernisation, the Chinese way of thinking may be quite unlike the philosophies that formed the values and beliefs of the foreigners, and that acculturating into Chinese communities is likely to be a tough challenge. I have suggested that special difficulties await those who are the employees of the Chinese educational system because foreign teachers face the extra pressure of dealing with the traditional requirements made on teachers in China. I have suggested that one source understanding the difficulties of adjustment for foreign teachers may be in terms of emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983).

In chapter four, I will discuss the methodology that informed my data gathering and data analysis.

## Chapter 4

### Methodology and Method

#### *Introduction*

Research for this dissertation was conducted early in the school year of 2006 (February to March) with support from one agency for foreign teachers in Pan Yu district, Guang Zhou city, Guang Dong Province. All the participants who contributed to my research are currently working in five different high schools located in Pan Yu district.

During my data gathering process, valuable information was collected through one-on-one interviews based around eight questions. I was provided with opportunities and support from both local schools and the agency to conduct two separate sessions of in-class observation in two different institutions. After the completion of data collecting in China, I returned to New Zealand to begin the data coding and analysis.

#### *4.1 Theoretical framework of the research*

I undertook my research within the interpretive paradigm. Higgs (1997) argues that interpretive research methods attempt to uncover and interpret the hidden meanings in individuals' social actions and what caused such action. The aim is to capture the "lived experience" of participants and to understand of how beliefs and values make meaning for an individual, or how individuals make sense of events (Radnor, 2002). Therefore, it is

possible to argue that interpretive research paradigm rests on the premise of understanding individuals' social interactions (Radnor, 2002). Interpretive research enhances researchers' ability to find connections between participants' social environments, their personal values and beliefs, and causes of specific behaviour, which is appropriate for my research project. Rich the data can be, the techniques of interpretive research, however, may affect participants both emotionally and physically (Williams, 2002) and therefore way of mitigating harm to participants is something for researchers to find.

I gathered my data through semi-structured interviews, and analysed it using Boyatzis (1998) system of thematic analysis. The semi-structured interviews allowed me to formulate a general picture of the foreign teachers' experience in Pan Yu district. During the interviews, I explored the teachers' experience of their jobs as English language teachers in China and how they coped with the various differences they encountered.

#### *4.2 Semi-structured interviews*

A digital voice recorder was used to capture the conversations between me, as the researcher and the participants, as the interviewees. I then transcribed all the interviews into MSWord so that data would be easily available for quoting. According to Wengraf (2001), semi-structured interviews have their own unique benefits. It is a qualitative research method which encourages a fairly open framework to gather dialogue-based data. It also allows both the interviewer and the interviewee to exchange information during the interview. Unlike questionnaires and structured interviews, where detailed questions have been formulated before the interview takes place, semi-structured interviewing starts with general questions which allow open discussion.

During the interview process, relevant topics will be identified by the interviewer. Then, possible relationships between these topics will become the basis for further and more specific questioning and discussion (Wengraf, 2001). Wengraf (2001) points out that the semi-structured interview method encourages both interviewer and interviewee to be proactively involved throughout the interview process. Because the majority of questions are identified and created during the interview, the interviewer is able to maintain a greater degree of flexibility to explore discussable topics.

There are certain limitations to research using semi-structured interviews for the data collection process. Uneven distribution of power between interviewer(s) and participants is the primary concern. Gillham (2000) points out that regardless how much freedom has been given during the interview, interviewers, fundamentally, control the interviewees. I tried to address this issue of power by starting interviews with an open ended question such as, "Why do you use [insert appropriate idea] to describe your teaching and living experience in China?" In this way, I have given the participants a degree of power to control the information exchange. Despite my efforts to offer power to the participants, I may still have fallen into the trap that Gillham (2000) points out, in that, with all the possible answers that could be given by the participants, interviewers tend to overly control the information collection process.

Gillham (2000) suggests that the fault of over-controlling occurs because, with open-ended questions, interviewers are frequently dealing with unexpected information. They are constantly under the pressure to restructure and reshape a list of questions in response to specific information that has been given by participants. In order to establish the linkages between information received and the focus of the research question(s), interviewers tend to focused narrowly on the information that relates to the research.

Consequently, unexpected and research unrelated information may be excluded from the data collection and information analysis process.

The narrowness of the data collection is only one of many shortcomings of using semi-structured interviews. Angelides (2001) suggests that the one-on-one information collection technique can produce even more unexpected problems after the completion of interviews. For instance, researchers describe interviewing as a time- and resource-consuming process, and they have to deal with what is often a large quantity of raw data after the completion of information gathering. Sorting out the relevant material from the unexpected information after the completion of interviews can be a serious problem (Angelides, 2001; Gillham, 2000).

According to Oliver (2003) the process of informing interviewees about the involvement of any forms of recording and the way that data would be stored is intended to ensure participants are relaxed and confident before the interviews take place. During the interview, there were close interactions between me and each participant, and I felt quite busy dealing with all the preliminary requirements of informed consent. I used a digital recorder during the interview process, so I had to inform all participants that their conversation will be recorded during the interview. I provide all interviewees with a verbal explanation of the need to record this private conversation which would include personal stories about living in China as a foreign language teacher.

I also explained in detail about the voice file storage, the ways in which the interview information would be used and explained who would have access to the data (me and my supervisor). Therefore, I felt I guaranteed that all participants were well informed before the interview began. By giving clear indications about the interview process and details of information storage, I

have maximised all participants' capability to end or refuse answering any question if they experienced discomfort during the interview.

Secondly, as my research topic touches on interpersonal information, participants might have been intimidated by the digital recorder and the fact that I was recording their self-disclosure. Discomfort might have caused participants' attitudes to change from willingness to talk openly to being prepared only to touch on general issues. In fact, it does not matter how many reassurances are given about confidentiality, participants are seldom ready to talk to a stranger – in this case an interviewer/research student -- about personal matters, especially if the environment in which the interview takes place is unfamiliar (Oliver, 2003). In order to encourage the maximum information exchange between me and the participants, I was conducted six out of the eight interviews in an environment that participants were familiar with: an empty classroom in the headquarters of the foreign teachers' agency. The other two interviews were conducted in a place chosen by the participants. The digital recorder was placed close to respondents, and at the beginning of the interview, I explained to the participant that they could use the "pause" button at any time they felt the need to stop. In this way, they could take time to reflect upon particular question by slowing down the interview process (Oliver, 2003).

After completing an interview, it is common for participants to feel hesitant about the recorded conversation, and the ideal situation to allow participants to recover from this uncertainty is to offer an opportunity for listening to the recording or reading a transcript of the interview (Oliver, 2003). This gives participants a chance to reflect on and review what they have said during the interview, and they can then modify their answers to a particular question, or amplify their answer with further discussion (Oliver, 2003). At the end of the interview, I offered all my participants the opportunity to play back the

recorded conversation or to receive a copy of the interview transcript. I also gave them my e-mail address so that they could reach me to review the data they gave. Every thing that I prepared for the interviews was aimed to maximise the quality of collected data, and I believe all participants have presented me with a sense of their lives, a glimpse that is close to the reality of being a foreign language teacher in China, specifically in Panyu district.

Regardless of the downside of using semi-structure interviews, I still see the benefits of doing so. As Gillham (2000) suggests, data that are collected by interviews are unique, relevant to either the specific research purpose or individual participants' characteristics. I feel that this quality of immediacy maximised the validity of the research data. Every participant disclosed stories about their personal experience in China, and so the reality of the incidents promised to become the rewarding point of the data analysis.

### *4.3 Thematic analysis*

After the completion of data gathering, I realised that the quantity of raw data would make the decoding process complicated. It is difficult to seek appropriate explanations for the causes of diverse human emotions such as anger, frustration, sadness, jealousy or even happiness, without considering the involvement of other factors including gender, ethnicity, age, culture background, and personality (Mesoudi, Whiten & Dunbar, 2006; Medlin, 2006; Gomm, 2004). The method of data analysis needed to allow a coding system that would reshape massive amount of information into forms it was feasible to work with. It seemed that using thematic analysis would allow the location of recurrent concepts and events in the data of all the participants.

Thematic analysis is a type of research method that describes how to locate unifying forms of sense-making in data derived from (mainly) conversation

(Boyatzis, 1998) and allows researchers to identify the possible meanings behind particular expressions of human action and emotion (Boyatzis, 1998; Gomm, 2004). Boyatzis (1998) and Gomm (2004) explain the logic behind thematic analysis data analysis by pointing out that people leave something like trails when they think, feel, and act. Therefore, researchers can hunt for traces of defining characteristics by closely examining participants' behaviour in specific situations (Boyatzis, 1998). Then, with the findings from one incident, researcher can search for and, perhaps, replicate and reflect such behaviour in other situations.

Boyatzis (1998) further explains that in order to pinpoint a codable moment, researchers need to be open-minded during the process of searching for themes. He also suggests that by taking into account the frequency, consistency, and emotional engagement of participants towards particular incidents, researchers' ability to catch a codable moment can be enhanced (Boyatzis, 1998). For example, referring to my research, several participants have described their cross-cultural experience as "challenging". The frequency of the occurrence of the "challenging" theme showed me that it was not just an ordinary word that participants were using to describe their experience in China. By working with my raw data in both written and spoken formats, I came to the realisation that there were more stories to be discovered behind the "being challenged" experience. At this stage, I was working through the first step that Boyatzis (1998) describes as sensing a pattern in the raw data.

After sensing a codable moment, the next step is to identify whether a theme exists (Boyatzis, 1998). By reading and listening to my research "conversations", I came to believe that the "challenging" experiences occurred not only during participants' personal activities but also in their professional activities at work. They were facing incidents that they described as

“challenging”. The frequent occurrence of incidents that related to “being challenged” allowed me to determine that participants were sharing similar experiences, and that the experiences amounted to a theme (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 30). By interrogating both the words that participants used to describe “being challenged” and the voice files recorded during interviews, I was able to determine participants’ level of emotional engagement, their “passion” about the topic, and this strong emotional engagement confirmed the existence of a theme.

Once I had identified a codable incident in one interview, I could extend the search for similar incidents into other collected data. The occurrence of several similar incidents showed a theme emerging through the whole corpus of the data. The data analysis, therefore, emerged as a pattern requiring four steps:

1. sense the pattern or a codable moment through the interview;
2. interpret and describe patterns;
3. sort similar patterns into themes;
4. analyse the theme in the context of theoretical framework that has done from pervious research findings (Boyatzis, 1998).

People have their own way of seeing things and even when they have been given the same information, they may reach different conclusions (Boyatzis, 1998). Instead of presenting explanation only from my own perspective to answer the “whats” and “whys” of foreign teachers’ cross cultural experience in China, thematic analysis allows me to present highly concentrated information, which has been sorted into similar incidents, then, further sorted as themes, which include input from the perspectives of the different participants. The themes then become the unit of analysis and discussion which allow insights into cause and sense of human actions and reactions.

One of the most appealing strengths of thematic analysis is that it offers a comprehensive, consistent and moderately quick way to sort raw interview data. However, the method is not without its limitations. For instance, Gomm (2004) and Boyatzis (1998) both warn that the process of theme creation and incident selection rely purely on the interviewer's assumptions of what makes a theme. Seeing themes within the participants' disclosure of cross-cultural experience in China is filtered through my perception and understanding of each story and the way I categorised and dramatised them. Other limitations are the relevance and labeling of each theme, and the way in which any given theme is justified as being, in fact, a theme. One other issue that can limit the reliability of the research is the manner in which the participant group is established (Boyatzis, 1998)

#### *4.4 Selecting my participants*

The candidate selection process was more complicated than I thought it would be. I tried to contact various teachers' agencies to sponsor my research while I was still in New Zealand, but even after my arrival in Pan Yu district, there were no responses. Fortunately, I received a break through from my aunt's friend, who worked with an agency that deals with foreign language teachers. In the end of my sponsor seeking process, the agency (Eureka Culture & Education Academy), which has direct contract with foreign teachers, supported me through the entire data collection stage but required me to fulfil an internship for the business.

In fact, taking an internship enhanced the quality of relationship establishment process between me, the agency and the foreign teachers. Since I needed to work for the business while I initiated the data collection process, I managed to get my name and the nature of my research known to

the majority of currently-employed foreign teachers in the academy. Even though all the foreign teachers who contributed in my research are employed by the same company, they are markedly different in age, gender, time in China and also in terms of the institutions that they are working for, so the group was moderately diverse.

My association with the agency allowed me to build a degree of trust with the foreign teachers, and so I was able to observe two demonstration classes with three participants in two different educational institutions, which I found hugely beneficial to understanding the reality of both having a foreign teacher and being a foreign teacher. The visits enhanced my understanding of how foreign teachers manage their classes, and of Chinese students' attitude and reaction of the presence of foreign teachers.

I selected eight foreign teachers to become the final research participants. They were asked to take part in the interviews, which took approximately 30 to 45 minutes, in their spare time. In order to begin the interviews, I started by settling the participants in with a short questionnaire focusing on their understanding of the learning flow concept and whether they were concerned to establish it in their classes. The questionnaire also included some closed questions regarding participants' age, gender, original country, previous language teaching experience before and after arriving in China, and period of time in China. These closed questions were less important to me than the open questions, but did allow me to establish length that participants went to in order to obtain a teaching job in China or elsewhere overseas.

The open questions invited participants to talk about their cross-cultural experience in Pan Yu district. I used the answers to initial open questions to explore further each participant's experience. Thus, each participant was asked a similar set of "base" questions, but then these were supplemented

with further open questions that varied from participant to participant and tended to be worded along the lines of “Why do you use... to describe your overall experience in China?” “How do you deal with....?” “What is your opinion on...?” The aim of asking exploratory questions was to allow participants to ramble and digress a little, to collect richer data, and to clarify points made earlier.

During the open-ended questions, I included some based research by Tardy and Snyder (2004) about the importance of the concept of “flow” in language teaching. Tardy and Snyder (2004) suggest that in order to achieve a creative learning environment for a class, the teacher needs first to set up a learning flow.

A flowing learning atmosphere can be achieved when the teacher has been given a fair degree of autonomy in designing the teaching process and materials, as well as the planning of individual lessons (Tardy & Snyder, 2004). Having established a degree of freedom, teachers can lead students through a period of exploring knowledge, during which, instead of simply focusing on subjects in textbooks, teachers can present information that introduces one topic, then expand and attach other interesting topics in discussion and can vary the approach to better attract students’ attention. For example, the flow of questioning and answering during discussion may give some students the desire to contribute voluntarily through learning more about the topic. The learning flow makes it less challenging for students to develop critical judgment skills and increases the enjoyment of learning (Tardy & Snyder, 2004).

Tardy and Snyder (2004) argue that many variables can affect the strategy of learning flow. Gender, age, previous language teaching experience work together with such external factors as restraints from Chinese educational

system and the working conditions for foreign teachers could all influence individuals' use and understanding of in-class learning flow.

#### *4.5 The coding process*

Once the information collection process was complete, I used the rest of my time in China to transcribe the interviews in preparation for the later data analysis which took place in New Zealand. As already stated, data analysis followed Boyatzis's (1998) theory of thematic analysis.

I began the data analysis routine by simply revisiting the conversations and reading through all the interview transcriptions. The aim of listening to the interviews was to recreate the actual atmosphere in which the interview took place, including re-capturing participants' non-verbal signals.

I then sketched out certain categories that appeared throughout the conversation, capturing the "codable moments" (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 11). Then, I slowly, working in close detail, read through all interview transcripts again, working in Microsoft Excel to find emergent themes as personal emotions became obvious from participants' words. When I sensed a codable incident, I moved to the next step in thematic analysis: sort similar patterns into themes. If any incidents stood out in the data, yet did not fit into any of the established themes, I created a blank 'worksheet' in Excel and sorted the incidents into a new theme. There was no point in proliferating themes indefinitely, but sometimes incidents appeared critical, and I did not want to ignore them in the data. I discussed the incidents with my supervisor seeking for advice on theme categorization.

The process of establishing themes from the transcripts took many weeks after my return from China, but once that process was complete, the establishment

of themes required further attention so that the research could be deemed reliable and valid. The second step was to interrogate the voice files, listening to all the interview conversations and noting the level of expressed emotion by giving a tick “✓” for the rating of “passion” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 11). Participants’ emotion was rated from one to four: in other words, four ticks meant the respondent had shown extreme emotion towards a particular issue. The verb used in this highest rating might be something as strong as “hate”. By contrast, one tick only meant that the respondent showed some personal engagement with the issue, perhaps along the lines of “Oh, well, perhaps I think so...”. Two ticks suggested that the participant had given me a clear indication of personal emotion engagement during our conversation. The words used might be, for example, “I think I will do that instead” or “I think this is not right”. Instead of expressing their emotion in an extreme form, they have indicated a clear attitude change while discussing specific issues. The incidents that have been rated with three ticks suggest the participants show a stronger emotional engagement towards particular issues, but not strong enough to be rated as high passion.

The rating of passion expressed during the interviews depended entirely on non-verbal signals such as voice tones caught on the tapes and body movements I have re-called or noted at the time of the interview. For example, in all the interviews I asked the participants the same question: how do they feel about the saving face issue in the Chinese culture. Some participants’ attitude towards the subject has been rated four ticks. It is because their expression of words has given me a strong indication of how they regard the issue. One participant applied “Absolutely rubbish!” to describe what he thinks about the topic. Another participant, however, described saving face as an important aspect to be aware of for anyone who is coming from a western background instead of telling me what she felt about

the issue. In this case, the second participant did not express any forms of personal emotion engagement towards my question compared with the first participant. Therefore, I rated the second participant with no tick for passion of this topic even though we had a long discussion regarding the topic. On the other hand, the first participant who said two words only yet earned a four-tick rating because in those two words he gave me a clear, yet, strong indication of deep personal emotion engagement about face-saving issue in China.

All ratings for passion (Boyatzis, 1998) are based on how I interpreted the non-verbal messages in the interviews. Like the themes, the ratings, again, were developed based on the observations I carried out and the relationships that I have developed with all participants during and after the interviews in China. Even though my way of rating the data was personal and subjective, it follows Boyatzis's (1998) indications and falls within the parameters that he defined. It is true that every one has a different way of viewing data, but if more than one person can reach a common understanding of what constitutes a theme within the data, and agree with the passion ratings, there is some validation of the coding process (Boyatzis, 1998). During my coding process, I constantly consult with my supervisor about how I understand the data, the way that I see the information, and the categories that I have developed for each theme. Therefore, there are reasons to believe my decoding strategic and rating skill could best describe collected data.

## Chapter 5

### Research Findings

#### *Introduction*

In this chapter, raw interview data has been sorted and reorganized into three themes. The first theme presents the reality of living and working as an English teacher in Pan Yu district, Guang Zhou, Guang Dong, China. The second theme focuses on the conflict between foreign teachers' personal cultural inheritance and Chinese culture. The theme study unfolds participants' cultural recovery process which includes the modification of respondents' attitudes to teaching, and future expectations as an English language instructor in Pan Yu district.

#### *5.1 The setting of the research: Pan Yu District*

Before I present the three case studies, I desire to briefly introduce the place that I undertook my data gathering process- Shiqiao, Pan Yu district. I was not born in Pan Yu, yet the place has been my second hometown since I was 10 years old. Comparing the appearance of the town in my memory with the actuality, Pan Yu has changed completely from the outside. It was formerly a city ruled by the administration of Guang Zhou (Wikipedia, 2006). It still administratively has control over 16 rural towns, which include Shiji, Shawan, Zhongcun, Dashi, Nancun, Xinzhao, Huanong, Shiluo, Langhe, Lingsha, Dagan, Dongchong, Yuwotou, Huangge, Hengli and Wanqinsha. The

district is constantly under development, bringing about changes in the town structure, social facilities, transportation, environment protection, and traffic control related issues. Every time I return, the changes that the place has undergone amaze me. Because of various modifications in city structuring, the town that I am familiar with is slowly disappearing. However, the people, the language, the lifestyle, and the food still have some presence in the new Pan Yu.

The language of the people is Cantonese, a different language from Mandarin in both pronunciation and structure. People who can not speak the dialect are treated differently by the locals (personal experience, 2006). For instance, the retailers may not offer non-Cantonese speakers the same service quality or price comparing to the local shoppers. As participant 8 said, *“Every time, oh no, maybe most of the time, I took a taxi, I got to play with the taxi driver. I got to make sure the driver is not going to charge me more. Every time I got to a store, they try to charge me more because I am a foreigner”* (Personal communication, 7 March, 2006).

Karaoke is a very important part of people’s lifestyle. It is common for events, such as singing of a contract, business talks, or simply just high school reunion, take place in a Karaoke room. Another important part of the culture is food, which is one of the reasons I enjoy going back.

People, food, and lifestyle features all remind me of something from the past but there are further elements that have stirred my memories of the “old” Pan Yu and these were among the themes captured during two sessions of class observation in the data collection process. First of all, the classrooms are still full of students just like the time when I was in high school ten years ago. Teachers, including foreign teachers, are dealing with 60 to 68 Chinese students in one classroom per teaching “section” which lasts 40 to 45 minutes

(personal observation, 2006). Secondly, the structure of the classrooms remains unchanged. Students still are paired up, sitting in rows, and movement is still restricted because of limited space between rows. Their seating order is still according to their heights: for instance, the tallest student sits at the very back of the classroom, and the shortest sits at the very front. The teacher can walk around, but students will not be able to see the teacher as their space is restricted to facing the blackboard at the front of the classroom. Therefore, the only practical area for teaching is at the front of the room, and teachers still have to raise their voices to ensure that all students can hear the lesson.

## *5.2 The experience of being challenged by being other*

Pan Yu is unique. It is a constantly changing small city. Development aims to modernise and, somewhat, to Westernise the area, but key elements of the city, including its people, the lifestyle, and its educational structure, are still deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture. The first theme, presented as a case study, focuses on the reality of being an foreign English language teacher in local educational institutions in Pan Yu.

The theme “being challenged” emerges when participants describe issues that they are having difficulties resolving. For instance, Participant 4 (personal communication, 27 February, 2006) pointed out that “... *Having to adjust to their [the general public] reaction of me it was quite difficult at first because you think you will get used to someone always pointing at you, but you don't really...*”. The initial challenge that participants need to overcome in their life in China is the personal readjustment process of the general public's reaction to their appearance. Participants remarked that the general public's reaction constantly reminded them of being “different”. They knew they were seen

“the outsiders” and “other”, outside the group because of looking different on the outside, having different their hair colour, and perhaps speaking a different kind of language. Despite their awareness of being different, they just wanted to lead a normal life in a different city without the constant reminder of “[being a] foreigner!” (participant 4, 27 February, 2006).

The general public’s strong reaction to foreigners is only part of reason for participants’ challenging experience in Pan Yu district. Life can be miserable when people are living alone in a new environment, and the inability to communicate increases the challenge. If foreign teachers come to China with some language dialect preparation, it is most likely a few words in Mandarin. Since Cantonese is the main dialect, the communication barrier is even more serious than the participants anticipated and they felt some urgency to overcome it. As participant 2 stated “... *it is really scary for being really broke in a strange country that you can't speak the language ...*” (participant 4, personal communication, 27 February, 2006).

Overcoming the language barrier was not simply a matter of being able to hold a basic conversation, but took on the status of a mission for the participants as they tried to create an understandable dialogue between them and the listener. Frequently, when the participants were trying to make a point, the locals are also trying to understand such information-“... *It has been a big problem, you know. I kind of started with not knowing Cantonese. ...The first time, they kind of see you as an idiot, but when you can explain what you mean, then it is a lot easier*” (participant 4 , personal communication, 27 February, 2006).

In order to enjoy the life in Pan Yu, participant 4 continues and suggests that “*I should learn the language a little bit more. It would be another experience ...*”.

The communication barrier left participants in a situation of not knowing how or where to seek for support while facing difficulties. Participant 4 (27 February,2006) complained about the complexity of seeking information in

Pan Yu: “... if I want to find out certain things, I just need to call someone and ask if I need this and this and this ... It is very easy if I went back home. But here [in Pan Yu], it is difficult, ...”. For participants, the process of accomplishing anything simply takes becomes a “mission impossible” because of not being able to find appropriate information (participant 2, personal communication, 23 February, 2006).

This theme presents some incidents that participants believed contributed to their “being challenged” cross cultural experience in Shiqiao, Pan Yu district. Unsurprisingly, the majority of participants exhibited a certain degree of frustration and confusion about their decision to come to Pan Yu district because of what seemed (at least from their perspective) unnecessary challenges in life and at work.

It is possible to argue that participants’ frustrations are caused by confusion caused by the Chinese way of handling daily events. Participant 1 (22 February, 2006) identified a telling example of the way that, in his opinion, Chinese people make life difficult for the foreigners. He said, “*People have no common sense, there is no logic, for instance, you go to bar everyday, they give you a beer that you asked for, but they don’t give you a glass, you have to ask for the glass everyday ...*”. His confusing experience was shared by Participant 3. This incident took place when he wanted to purchase a pen from a local store. “*I actually grip the pen the lady was holding and told her what I want, they just told me to ‘hold on’ and got together and somehow just walked away ...*” (personal communication, 25 February, 2006). Participants’ ability to successfully accomplish simple tasks, such as purchasing an item or just enjoying personal time has been jeopardised by these tiny incidents in cross-cultural misunderstanding, and instead filled by confusion. For the participants, understanding the Chinese way of thinking adds a degree of difficulty to their daily lives and becomes a mission for simplifying their lives.

### *5.3 Professional performance under pressure*

Frustration and confusion surrounded the participants, even at work. For instance, not being able to communicate jeopardised relationship development at work with the school, with teaching assistants and with the students. Since participants had difficulties creating understandable conversations, the agency and several middle schools have provided foreign teachers with teaching assistants whose job is to help participants overcome language barriers. A teaching assistant is a Chinese teacher who acts as a translator between the foreign teacher and the students. The goal of providing teaching assistants for the participants is to maximise the communication between the foreign teachers and the students (personal communication, 22 February – 7 March, 2006) and to support foreign teachers by enhancing their teaching. However, participants claim that the “support” of a teaching assistant makes their job even harder to accomplish. As participant 5 (personal communication, 1 March, 2006) commented about his teaching assistant:

*... I talked to them [the students] in English but they seemed never to understand what I have said. But once the TA translated into Chinese they understand what I am talking about. And now, I don't know how, but they just start to look for the TA constantly to translate into Chinese.....*

The activities of the teaching assistants, on one hand, ensure students fully understand information and instructions given by the foreign teachers. On the other hand, the consistency of learning in an English environment has been broached and participants point out that such “communication support” neither enhances the students’ ability to master oral English nor improves the teacher-student communication flow. Therefore, foreign teachers argue that it is questionable whether or not the students get a chance to really learn English. Participant 3 (personal communication, 25 February, 2006) directly

addressed dissatisfaction, stating that "... [in China], I see 60 kids for 40 minutes one time a week ... Kids may speak, what, 15 minutes of English a week? They don't speak [English] in their Chinese teachers' class ...". His argument was supported by participant 1 (22 February, 2006) "...you have 60 students in one class, 40 minutes per class, it is about 50 seconds per students. Not everybody can speak."

Participant's desire to enhance oral practice of English in China has been somewhat limited and curtailed by various external conditions. While they are trying to maintain a peaceful life style without provoking too much public interest, their focus is distracted because of concerns and challenges at work. All pressures add extra pressure to participants' mental bonding with the new culture.

Participants 4 and 8 (personal communication, 27 February, 7 March, 2006) are both struggling to understand the absence of what they see as discipline in the Chinese style of parenting and schooling. Participant 5 (1 March, 2006) argue that "...the younger generation is extremely spoiled by the one child policy...". The parents treat their child so well that "... [they] don't know how to give respect..." (Participant 7, personal communication, 5 March, 2006). Participant 8 (7 March, 2006) also argue that the concept of "reward for good behavior and punishment for bad behaviour" has been underestimated by parents, with the result that "the kids [Chinese students] here seem to feel they can't admit to mistakes. They deny their mistakes more". The relationship between teachers and student has been put at high risk because the students do not cooperate with the teachers. At the same time, students' attitude to admitting mistakes reduced participants' commitment to teaching. Participant 6 expressed extreme forms of frustration towards the issue:

*... so why are the dummies, why all the children who just want to go to sleep and why are all the non-active children sitting with others who want to*

*[learn]? ... Why aren't they put into a special class? Why don't they have a special teacher, a Chinese teacher to put them in a line? If not, put them in a special class! ...Why are they mixed together? (personal communication , 4 March, 2006)*

The frustrations of everyday life were lifted into a whole new level that affected participants' enjoyment towards teaching. Students' non-cooperative attitude towards learning is challenging foreign teachers' sense of satisfaction from their job.

Another issue that challenges participants' interest in being a teacher concerns the books that they have to follow through individual sections. Participant 3 (personal communication, 25 February, 2006) remarked that it is challenging and frustrating to carry out English teaching based on non-academic teaching material. He pointed out:

*...How do I teach kids bad English? I can't do it. If they want me to follow the book, I will say 'this is wrong, this is wrong and this is also wrong' but in the exam, the teacher will say 'no, you are wrong' ... the teacher [the Chinese teachers] gives them [the students] the mark, not me. They still need to take Chinese exams, not mine. What am I supposed to do? Correct the teachers, and tell them what actually proper English is?*

Participants' frustration and confusion arose from every perspective of social and work life while in Pan Yu, caused by incidents as small as not being able to purchase an item from a retailer, getting a glass for a drink, the accessibility of relevant information, to matters relating to child discipline, class organisation and the quality of teaching material.

A cursory reading shows that the "being challenged" experience emerges because of difficulties in life, but a deeper analysis suggests that participants

are challenging themselves to “set the record straight” and trying to push for the things that is right according to their perspective, as participant 3 pointed out when he asked, “...*How do I teach kids bad English? I can't do it...*”

### **Overcoming cultural clashes**

Evidence from the last section suggests that the life of being a foreign language teacher in China is not easy. It is full of confusion caused by communication blocks, limited information and differences between the Chinese educational system and the systems that the teachers were used to. Frustration is the consequence of confusion in life and at work. This section sets out the second theme, which deals with the participants' attitude towards overcoming the various challenges and obstacles that they encounter.

My participants accepted the fact that China is different from their homes. It is also a place that full of confusion and surprise for foreigners, as participant 3 pointed out “... *the stuff should be easy, it will cause you the most problem, and the stuff should be hard, it always turns out to be the easiest in China*” (personal communication , 25 February, 2006). In order to find the equilibrium between the challenges and enjoyment, the participants seemed to be seeking opportunities that introduced personal ideas and creativity into “the system”. Instead of fighting alone and struggling to get the information across to the students, participants have developed original ways of teaching, which in return, help them generate students' support. For example, participants had begun to develop their own ways of disciplining students. Participant 4 (personal communication , 27 February, 2006) provided anecdotes that show the rewards of disciplining a pupil creatively. She relates her system:

*a point system, the class starts with 5 points for each or so. It is kind of silly, but they [the student] respond to it really well. So if one kid is being bad in*

*the team, I will take off few points off their team. Usually, their team mates will tell them 'Hey, stop it, ok! Or we will lose point', so usually the peer pressure works better.*

Participant 8 (personal communication, 7 March, 2006) also implemented the same concept to discipline the students: *"like the point system ... if I see them speak Chinese, I will say '-1 point for your group', is they say 'no, [we did not speak Chinese]. Then, I will give them '-2' for lying ..."*. The point system, on one hand, encourages well behaving students or groups with pride and rewards. On the other hand, the group that is not behaving acceptably such as being non-cooperative, lying, distracting, or showing disrespect to the teacher, will be punished. Through the process of rewarding the well-behaved students, and imposing non-hurtful punishments, such as extra duty after the class, cleaning the blackboard, or carrying books for the teachers, the research participants are encouraging good behaviour and also are sending messages to the 'rule breakers' that bad behaviour will be punished. Participants wish to see students slowly develop an understanding of what is acceptable and what is not.

Participants face problems of getting students to contribute in class, so they also invented games to strengthen students' motivation to participate.

Participant 1 (personal communication , 22 February, 2006) explains:

*I have two little soft balls, so if I want someone to read, I ask, 'Who wants to read this? and if ' nobody puts their hands up, OK, so, I throw the ball backwards, if the ball bounces on your [the students'] desk or hit you [the student], you speak. Once you done that, you come to the front and you throw it, you do it not me. So everybody is involved, they think this is great and fun, and this is different kinds of involvement...*

By the end of the teaching period, the participant's creativity enhanced the

learning atmosphere among students and maximised the opportunity allowing every student to participate and get involved during short class sections.

Unlike the Chinese teachers, participants think their class should be filled with enjoyment, creativity, and songs. They want to teach the students how to enjoy the moments while still learning English. Participant 1 and 6 both enjoy singing and share their enjoyment with the students. Participant 1 (personal communication, 22 February, 2006) proudly told me that

*[singing] is a different kind of involvement you know ... I sing lots of songs to them, English songs, like 'you are my sunshine...' and they love those kinds of things... you teach them adult songs. Tell them the differences about vocabularies and lyrics..*

From the participants' perspective, enjoyment is the starting point of learning. Since English is not yet a language pupils can use in their daily activities, creating an interesting spotlight in learning English can lead to a better success (participant 6, personal communication , 4 March, 2006).

None of the innovative methods that participants have implemented during their teaching periods have been encouraged or supported by the Chinese teachers. Participant 6 (personal communication, 4 March, 2006) remarked, *"The teachers [the Chinese teachers] always have comments."* In fact, the concerns from the Chinese teachers are understandable as none of the methods that the research participants have begun in class have been approved or put into practice by them or the school management. The research participants' individuality and creativity pushed them to have the courage to question the usefulness of Chinese teaching methods. However, instead of seeking support from a managerial level, foreign teachers prefer to try new ideas and see the results.

#### *5.4 The process of cross-cultural recovery*

The last theme has shown that the reality of working life as a foreign teacher in Pan Yu district is difficult and challenging. However, because of participants' individuality and belief in their jobs as teachers they create moments of enjoyment in life and at work. The next theme shows the way that participants adjust their personal beliefs in the face of all the difficulties.

Since participants are trying different approaches in teaching which have not yet been approved by the officials, relationship development at work again has been put under high intensity. In order to constantly monitor the teachers and ensure they were delivering approved course material in class, the school forced the participants to hand in weekly lesson plans (participants 2, 3, 4, & 7, personal communications, 22 February – 7 March, 2006). Foreign teachers are disappointed to see such action has been implemented to regulate their class periods. Participant 3 (personal communication, 25 February, 2006) said “... *it is useless. But I will do my best ...*”. The participants are starting to learn that by accepting the rules and leaving decision making to management, their lives at work can be less challenging.

Even though the participants became more tolerant of accepting Chinese ways of handling situations, they still have concerns for the consequence of such decisions. For example, participant 3 points out the approved English teaching materials, that every Chinese student based their English learning on, could jeopardise students' understanding of the language. His concern for the practicality of English learning is also shared by participant 1 (personal communication, 22 February, 2006) who suggests “... *they [the Chinese educational system] need to be more creative, to have more practical knowledge, not just academic theories...*”. Lack of practicality within the learning process is only part of the concern that participants have identified for their Chinese

students. They also fear for the consequences of poor of child discipline. Participants also expressed anxiety about issues such as information regulation, uneven distribution of opportunity, and restricted freedom of choice, considering these aspects of society as urgent matters for the Chinese government to resolve.

Regardless all the challenges, frustration, and concerns that participants have experienced or overcome, foreign teachers experienced moments of excitement in their life. Participant 1 (22 February, 2006) proudly point out his moments of pride that came when students are contributing, having fun in class but still learning English. His excitement is shared by the participants. While rewarding results are coming from work, participants are also experiencing some pleasurable moments in their lives. Participant 2 (personal communication, 23 February, 2006) suggested that:

*I have grown from this [cross-cultural journey in Pan Yu, China] tremendously. I feel like I am such a completely different person. ...I am becoming the person that I thought I was going to become when I was 25.*

The energy of the city and the challenges that participants described, have all pushed them to reset their personal limits. Undeniably, the participants' journey of overcoming some of the obstacles in life and at work is full of struggles. However, it seems that by continually having strong faith in what participants can achieve in China, the rewards after the confronting all challenges can be "mind blowing". Participant 5 (personal communication , 1 March, 2006) said to me, full of excitement:

*I don't want them just to understand the words on the pages. I want them to understand what is going on around the world plus a lot of questions. I want them to know that it is important to know what is going around the world as well as the important things in daily life.*

With their contribution to the Chinese educational institutions, participants are hoping that the students will develop a better interest in learning the English language, and as well as that, that they will take notice of the world that is around them. In return, participants' involvement within the system can be better rewarded and recognised by both the public and government departments.

### *Conclusion*

In this chapter, data that was collected from the interviews has been analysed and reorganised into three case studies built around themes that emerged from the data. The first case study explained the reasons that contributed to the participants' "being challenged" cross-cultural experience in Pan Yu district. Evidence suggests that the too great public interest in the foreign teachers' existence interrupted their normal daily activities. From participants' perspective, they are no different compared to ordinary Chinese except for their physical appearance and language. However, the general public's focus has been fixed upon those two factors that foreign teachers have no control over.

Another area where participants felt pressure was the way that the Chinese educational system is organised. Instead of adopting an attitude of "do nothing and agree with the boss", participants were not satisfied to comply with the status quo. The second case study unfolds how participants overcame various forms of restrictions including big class size, short class periods, and students' uncooperative attitudes by being creative in their approach to classes. Participants' desire to practise another form of teaching style is driven by the mentality of "*how do I teach kids bad English? I can't do it...*" (participant 3, 25 February, 2006). By having strong faith in what they

can offer to the students, the participants implement a personal style of teaching, regardless that the strategies were not yet approved by the schools.

Since participants are committed to what they could offer to the system, or the students, their journey in Pan Yu has not been easy. Participants are struggling to understand the Chinese public's mentality and the elements within the Chinese culture. They struggle with concerns about various issues. In their own words, they are waiting for in the future in China: *"So I view my teaching here more as planting seeds... I don't think I am going to change anything. What I am hoping is with some of the students that I have contact with, they will learn to or grow to think more for themselves..."* (participant 2, personal communication , 23 February, 2006). Participants are still trying to maintain a positive attitude about their job and life in Pan Yu while hoping for a rewarding future.

## Chapter 6

### Discussion and Conclusions

#### *Introduction*

This research attempted to unfold foreign teachers' cross-cultural experience in China, particularly in the Pan Yu district. The broad purpose of the study was to find out whether or not foreign teachers' beliefs and value systems changed because of their cross-cultural exposure. In chapter five, the data analysis section, themes were identified showing the lived experience of being a foreign teacher in China. Chapter six is the discussion chapter. It aims to provide answers to the research questions in relation to the themes that have been uncovered in Chapter five, and the theories that were gathered in Chapter three.

My research was framed around the following three questions:

1. How do foreigners describe their experience in China? Specifically, what is the experience of being a foreign teacher in China, specifically in Panyu district, Guang Zhou City, Guang Dong Province? What are the cultural differences that they struggle to accept or understand?
2. Do foreigners maintain their sense of identity and beliefs in a completely different cultural environment? Will the foreign teachers reshape their personal beliefs and values, especially about teaching, because of the cultural differences between China and their native country?

3. If foreign teachers manage to maintain their original personal values and beliefs, how do they deal with the difficulties in life and differences in culture?

The three sections that follow address each of these research questions in turn.

### ***6.1 Research question 1: How do foreigners describe their experience in China?***

The simple answer to this research question is that they felt challenged. To expand on this simple statement, Seven out of eight participants (a total of twenty-five recorded incidents) showed a long cultural adaption process while living in Pan Yu district. They all have used “challenging” as the term to define their cross-cultural experience. In fact, the struggle to become part of a new environment is a time-consuming process, especially for people who are coming from a Western background and trying to be part of an Eastern community (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2005). Hofstede and Bond (1984, 1988), Hofstede (1997), Hong (2005), Ip (1996; 2003), and Liu, Ng, He and Lonng (2000) have identified several differences in cultures comparing the West and the East working from both a macro and a micro perspective. Therefore, with all the dissimilarities between the two cultures, it is not an unexpected issue that foreign teachers should face obstacles during the process of cultural adoption.

I asked myself why the foreign teachers felt that they had been challenged by the system and what caused them to believe that the Chinese educational system is putting too many restraints on the teachers and too much pressure on the students. Is that because the system is truly outdated or is it because of something else? Like people in Western cultures, Chinese people have their unique way of seeing the world (Hofstede & Bond, 1984, 1988; Hofstede, 1997). There are many elements within the traditional Chinese culture that

contradict Westerners' ideologies about relationships, guidelines for behaviour, authority and even the meaning of life (Hofstede & Bond, 1984; Ng, He & Lonng, 2004; Swaidan & Hayes, 2005; Hong, 2005; Yan, 1994; Walker & Dimmock, 2000). Indeed, the explanation for the challenging experience that all participants have described is two sided: on one hand, cultural differences and on the other, foreign teachers' expectation of being part of the Chinese society.

Because of the differences in culture and social orders, China developed and implemented an educational system that fulfils its own social demands (Republic of China State Education Commission, 1996; Willis, 2000). As Hochschild (1983) pointed out in her studies of emotional labour, employers, (in my study, the Chinese educational system), believe they have the right to regulate their employees' emotional responses at work. This notion of emotional labour applies to the foreign teachers in my study. They have to perform surface acting emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) so that there are no deviations from established classroom norms, and a standard performance can be delivered for the whole organisation. The participants' classroom "self" has therefore been devalued in order for the organisation to achieve a matching set of performances across the breadth of the system. It seems that in the eyes of Chinese authority, conformity may be more important than creativity.

The consequence of asking foreign teachers to reshape their personal teaching techniques to satisfy the expectations of traditional Chinese values is one reason for the unpleasant and difficult cultural adjustment process the participants experienced. At the same time, the "challenging" experience is not solely because of the various restraints of the Chinese education system, but is also generated by the foreign teachers themselves and emerges from the very quality that made them employable as foreign teachers in the first place:

their “Western-ness”. Participants claim that by testing to what extent they could freely incorporate their personal style into their teaching, they are trying to confront the limitations of the education establishment of China. Their beliefs about effective teaching and learning strategies contradict the long-established patterns of education in China (Holmes, 2004; McCallum, 2004; Elliott, 1999). Even a foreigner might perceive that the Chinese education system, having been around in a top-down form for many hundreds of years, might not be easily malleable. In reality, the desire of the participants for change was probably not realistic, and appears to have been driven by their Western individualism (Blanton & Batrubuto, 2005; Hong, 2005) and confident self-belief that they had the right to question the status quo.

Due to the influence of individualism within Western cultures, my participants refused to give up their personal creativity and understanding of effective teaching. By pushing for change to take place in areas, such as learning attitude and teaching strategies in local schools, they were trying to demonstrate that Western teaching and learning styles are more effective than the traditional Chinese ones. Another effect of individualism is the need to test and expand personal limits: participants felt obliged to test the system by seeing how far they could take change in the classroom before they were stopped. Therefore, participants cannot entirely blame either the system or differences in cultures for feeling challenged. Evidence suggest that foreign teachers also have to take responsibility for the difficulties during cross-cultural journey in China.

## ***6.2 Research question 2: Do foreigners maintain their sense of identity and beliefs in a completely different cultural environment?***

The quick answer to research question two, is “not entirely”. To expand on

this, participants faced a difficult journey of re-shaping their personal values and beliefs, and never entirely gave up the values with which they arrived in China.

Participants' mobility in pushing for new sets of teaching and learning methods contradicted my assumption that people could or would completely change their personal beliefs and value systems. Before I began the research, I held a hypothesis that foreign teachers would, in the end, conform and fulfil teaching guidelines based on requirements from the Chinese educational system. Parts of my research findings support my assumption, but nevertheless, several key results made me question my initial claim.

As Hofstede (1997), Hofstede & Bond (1984; 1988) point out, a majority of Westerners hold a short term orientation to life. It is this cultural factor working that seems to have influenced my participants to reluctantly accept the unchangeable nature of "the system". Nothing altered their internal beliefs, but an attitude of "life's too short to worry" eventually prevailed upon to accept the system, at least on the surface. They have concern for the future of their students, however, and their strong individualism (Hofstede, 1997; Hofstede & Bond, 1984, 1988; Hong, 2005) means, they refuse to give up hope that one day some people will change the system because of their contribution.

Therefore, it is possible to argue that participants made some changes in terms of personal adjustment to being part of a new culture. They managed to formulate acceptance attitude while facing issues that are caused by cultural differences, but still maintained their original sense of being Western. They reformatted certain parts of personal beliefs and value system in order to be approved to obtain their job as an oral English language instructor, but those changes were more cosmetic than endemic.

**6.3 *Research question 3: How do participants deal with the difficulties in life and differences in culture?***

The simple answer to this question is that in the end, participants decided to have fun and get on with life with humour. Since only parts of the participants' values and beliefs were ever allied with the Chinese culture, the life of being a foreign teacher in China shows a struggling progression towards equilibrium. In other words, the experience of being an English teacher in China is neither entirely full of excitement and enjoyment nor entirely full of disappointment and frustration. Hofstede (1997) and Abel (2002) describe this as a neutral experience of intercultural adaptation. While participants felt many forms of disappointment, they often balanced unhappy incidents with those that rewarded them with satisfactory outcomes.

Sometimes participants learnt to appreciate the beauty of traditional Chinese culture (Walker & Dimmock, 2000; Aufrecht & Bun, 1995; Yan, 1994). They accepted that the changes that they wished would happen in the education system would not take place simply like flipping through a book or because of their personal contribution (Walker & Dimmock, 2000; Aufrecht & Bun, 1995; Yan, 1994). On the other hand, they could not stop themselves from trying to bring about certain small changes, and responded positively to even just one incident of a pupil showing willingness to participate in class.

At the same time, they often fought with their inner selves about accepting the dissimilarities between traditional Chinese culture and their original cultural heritage. For instance, participants tended to socialise among other foreign teachers, but at work, they were surrounded by people who held on to traditional Chinese beliefs and values. The teachers tried to escape from the difficult work environment to a social atmosphere that is a creation of themselves and other teachers, and is somewhat artificial in China.

*Conclusion*

My research findings suggest that my participants' initiative in teaching in China is to, first of all, extend their personal experience, and secondly, to introduce different concepts of teaching and learning to the Chinese educational system. In another words, my participants desired change: first, perhaps, to themselves, and then to the system. These two motivations may have blurred and merged because of the pressures of life and work, but the two drives remained in some recognisable form for all the participants.

The teachers' stories could be interpreted in many ways: for instance, as a David-and-Goliath battle of puny personal conviction against the giant system, which is a version that Westerners might admire. On the other hand, the stories might also be interpreted as an exercise in arrogance: a belief that a few years' teaching experience is entitlement to undermine a system that has been in place for thousands of years. At a more pragmatic level, the stories might simply be a natural response from people wanting to make their situation less boring and more enjoyable for themselves.

Many readings of the stories might be provided, but in the end, the research did not set out to discover the motivation of the teachers: rather, it aimed to see how the teachers maintained their own values and beliefs. It is clear that, at this stage of their acculturation, the teachers were confident in their own cultural values and were able to maintain their beliefs about teaching and learning. This may be partly because the schools they taught at did not require them to be immersed in mainstream teaching, and by providing teaching assistants, made it easy for them to avoid learning Cantonese and forming work relationships with Chinese teachers. However, it is also clear that this group of Westerners had strong convictions about their own "rightness", at least in the classroom.

It is questionable how open the participants were to cultural change of any sort. Most had undertaken little preparation for their work in China, and they admitted to being puzzled or even angered by such fundamentally important elements in Chinese culture as saving face. Then too, their standards of professional expertise varied greatly: for instance, one participant did not have any teaching experience at all before taking up the position in China (participant 2, personal communication, 23 February, 2006).

The participants were confident that they were bringing in the most practical and effective language learning strategies to benefit both the system and the Chinese students, and in fact, compared to the formal teaching style perfected by the Chinese educational system, the participants did encourage communication and information evaluation among students, allowing for deep learning to take place (McCallum, 2004; Holmes, 2004; Liu, 2005; Moss, 2002; Goodson, 1993). However, the current Chinese system does not yet recognise, much less reward, everything that the participants favoured and indeed, being “their own person” created higher degrees of tension and difficulty for the participants.

Let us assume that one day in the future, the Chinese government accepts and puts into practice a Western style of teaching. I believe there would have to be a deep change to Chinese thinking, a revolutionary change, before that could happen. The current Chinese government has already begun some innovations, by adding practical skills into the curriculum (State Education Commission People’s Republic of China, 1996), and claims that no feasible suggestions will be ignored, and nor will the need for urgent change be hindered (State Education Commission People’s Republic of China, 1996). Yet, despite all the government’s assurances, change does not take place instantly. The people guiding and running the education system now are products of long tradition, and even when there is great goodwill towards

change, the inertia caused by thousands of years of tradition is hard to overcome.

Consequently, a revolutionary change within the educational system will probably not take place. Even now, as China adapts to its new economic strategy, and opens its door to all kinds of people and information, only a small proportion of the Chinese people and cities have access to the new knowledge that is available. The information divide is one problem for a standardised education system. However, at the same time as the new information is made to seem necessary and desirable, the government is trying to maintain traditional Chinese values in the young generation by making Chinese language, history, literature, and Chinese polity compulsory subjects (State Education Commission People's Republic of China, 1996). Those subjects are taken very seriously by the students as those papers are focal area within the national examinational system (State Education Commission People's Republic of China, 1996), so students cannot escape knowing the traditional Chinese culture. Knowledge of and practice of, however, are two different things, and are driven by personal desire: in the rapid industrialisation and Westernisation of the new China, the ideals of the old China may seem irrelevant and impractical to many.

I see the influence of my participants as limited but nonetheless essential for Chinese students. Learning can come alive if teaching involves communication and fun. However, I accept that the foreign teachers are oddities in the system, and are destined, perhaps, to defeat. Their creativity will not be accepted by the Chinese public in general, nor by the system, which has not given an opportunity for such revolutionary changes to take place.

#### ***6.4 . Implications for further research***

My research allowed me to discover that there is no management system for maximising the usefulness of the foreigner teachers. My observations and interviews revealed that participants are left alone to deal with their problems, and that the time they put in to merely surviving culture shock (Griffiths, Winstanley & Gabriel, 2005; Abel, 2002; Hofstede, 1997) in Pan Yu could be used far better on behalf of the schools and pupils. At the moment, neither the local government nor the agency that participants work for, know how to fulfil demands or provide guidance for foreign teachers. Much valuable work could be done in researching a cultural awareness programme for foreign teachers.

Even more, research could be done to develop colloquiums which would allow exchange of knowledge about teaching and learning styles, so that China could develop an education system that expresses the best of East and West. That would make the presence of the foreign teachers less of a “tick the box” affair, in which the presence of the foreigners is simply a marketing tool.

#### ***6.5 What I have gained through this research process***

For me, the entire research process seemed to take forever to kick start or to finish. It took a long time to formulate a feasible research topic, and then once the topic was confirmed, it seemed an all-consuming effort to collect data, analyse, and evaluate it, let alone write it up. There are so many things that I have missed because of my thesis research. I missed out on my dad’s 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, and on the same day that I also missed out my dear grandpa’s 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. However, at the end, I realised that when I missed out on something in life, I was always able to gain extra rewards because of the loss.

I have finally reached the last stage of my thesis.

Through the research process, I further my understanding of myself, my limits, and the learning strategies that I am comfortable with. Early during the research, I mindlessly gathered masses of information which I thought would prepare me well for later stages. However, the huge amount of data created extreme difficulty in focussing on my research areas. Now, I understand information quality is far more important than quantity.

In terms of my research technique, I also discovered ways to improve in the future and room for further development. Through the research process, I notice that all participants are willing to share in-depth personal experience although they have only met me once or twice before that actual interview. In another words, participants trusted me because of the way that I have presented myself. I did not see myself as an interviewer who only wants to gather data to benefit individual needs. I approached them as an outsider who is willing to provide support to over come difficulties in their life or even at work. Occasionally, I helped them to sort out personal matters such as renting problem, purchasing monthly local transportation tickets. I also provided all participants with translations when they needed to overcome language barriers. I even took them out to experience night-life in Pan Yu district. With all the events that I involved in my data gathering stage, I managed to gain positive response from majority of the participants with healthy friendships as rewards after the interviews.

Looking back at my data gathering method, I believe I can do even better by expanding my research area beyond Pan Yu district. I could generate more public attention for the research by incorporating support from more foreign teachers' agencies, and by approaching local universities and even local government departments for sponsorship. I could also employ "focus

group” research technique which would allow foreign teachers to share stories among themselves for deeper discussion.

Since there are so many elements I could incorporate in the future in order to achieve better findings, I now realise that I have left many areas undiscovered. However, given the limitations in resources, both money and time frame, I am still proud of the journey that I have made. As I finish, I see that I have achieved my initial goal of discovering the reality of foreign teachers’ cross-cultural experience in Pan Yu district, China.

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