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A Case Study Based Inquiry into the Adoption and Adaptation of Communicative Language Teaching in Chinese Universities

by

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Declaration

I declare that all the materials contained in this thesis are my own work, and have not been published before. Also, I confirm that this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at another university.

Xue, Qing Qing

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the extent to which Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is adopted and/or adapted by Chinese tertiary teachers of English with the experience of teacher education overseas. It employs a case study approach in order to explore the extent to which CLT is compatible with the Chinese EFL context at tertiary level. Twenty-three informants in four institutions participated in this study (including two participating in the pilot study). Classroom observation and semi-structured interview were adopted as instruments for data collection. By looking into the teaching beliefs and actual practice of the target group, an attempt was made to reveal their general conceptions of CLT and their perceptions of good language teaching beyond CLT, as well as to identify the factors conceived as constraints on CLT implementation in the local context. In addition, through observation, an effort was made to explore the extent to which CLT was adopted and adapted in real teaching practice. Adjustments made by the participants to facilitate adoption of the approach were particularly focused on, as well as the extent to which intercultural experience contributed to effective teaching.

The main findings suggest that the CLT is seen as important by nearly all the informants in terms of its effectiveness and contributions, potential usefulness and complexity. Although constraints on CLT implementation were both mentioned and observed, 'communicative ideas' were found to be widely reflected in the teaching practice of the majority of the participants. The findings show that great attention is paid to learners as they are nowadays greatly involved in different teaching phases (pre-teaching, while-teaching and after-teaching). There exists a tendency of eclecticism in the teaching practices of many informants and the phenomenon of what is termed a 'seeming-communicative' approach is reflected in some participants' ways of teaching due to a recognition of the fundamental importance of the learning skills of recitation and memorization. The experience of teacher education overseas is generally considered as conducive to enhancing practitioners' intercultural competence and critical thinking -- two factors identified as essential

prerequisites for CLT implementation and seeking of appropriate methodology. The findings give rise to discussion of three major problems in relation to interpreting CLT as an appropriate approach in Chinese EFL teaching context. These problems are essentialism, overgeneralization and labeling. The prevalence of these problems confirms that there is a need to understand CLT and its appropriateness in different cultural contexts from an anti-essentialist perspective.

Abbreviations

1. **Abbreviations of data sources**

    DS: Degree study

    FB: Fresh-back

    E: English majors

    FDU: Fudan University

    GSC: Guangzhou south campus

    NC: North campus

    NE: Non-English majors

    OETE: Overseas English teacher education

    P: Programme

    PKU: Peking University

    PS: Pilot study

    SYSU: Sun, Yat-Sen University

    VS: Visiting scholar

    YZU: Yangzhou University

    ZHC: Zhuhai campus

2. **Other abbreviations**

CC: Communicative competence

CET: College English tests

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

EFL: English as a foreign language

ELT: English language teaching

ESL: English as a second language

IC: Intercultural competence

ICC: Intercultural communicative competence

IM: Instrumental, modernist

LOTE: Teaching of foreign language or languages
Other than English

PPI: Political, postmodern, imperialism

TEM: Test for English majors

TESEP: Tertiary, secondary and primary state
English language education

TESOL: Teaching English to speakers of other
language

CHAPTER 1   INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background

Communicative language teaching (CLT) has remained in fashion for a long time since its first emergence in the 1970s. This approach has been exported worldwide and seems to still occupy a dominant position in the global ELT industry nowadays. Nevertheless, in parallel with this dominance a global debate has increasingly arisen among applied linguists, researchers and practitioners about CLT's appropriateness and effectiveness in different cultural settings, as more attention has been paid to the important role played by social context in the process of methodological application.

This thesis investigates the interrelation between CLT and appropriate methodology in a 'periphery' (Phillipson 1992) or 'TESEP' (Holliday 1994) context. Holliday (1994) argued that while appropriate methodology needs to be culturally sensitive, the communicative approach 'contains potentials for culture-sensitivity which can be enhanced and developed to suit any social situation surrounding any TESEP classroom' (1994:165). Nevertheless, in the debates which have arisen regarding its appropriateness or otherwise, there seems to exist a tendency of

misinterpretation, essentialism and overgeneralization. Given the fact that CLT is an umbrella term and there is no standard model of CLT accepted as authoritative (McGroarty, 1984; Markee, 1997), I therefore adopt the viewpoint that CLT can be more constructively interpreted from an anti-essentialist perspective due to its open and flexible nature.

1.2. Starting assumptions

The debate on whether CLT is an appropriate approach in the Chinese EFL context has remained heated since it was first introduced into China in the early 1980s. Although the importance of CLT has been highlighted by some Chinese scholars and practitioners, most literature in this area indicates that CLT has failed to achieve the expected outcomes in the Chinese EFL context, as the approach is considered to be largely in contradiction with the Chinese learning culture dominated by Confucian philosophy (Hu, 2002). The constraints on CLT promotion in China which are frequently identified include teachers' insufficient proficiency in English, teachers' inadequate intercultural incompetence due to limited exposure to the target language culture, large class size, inadequate resources, examination pressures, and learners' concerns about the neglect of grammar.

Although it is undeniable that these problems do exist in the Chinese EFL context, nevertheless, a view is adopted here that not only CLT but also Chinese culture has been misinterpreted and stereotyped to some extent. In addition, evaluations of the effectiveness or otherwise of CLT have also tended to be over-generalized in varying degrees as well. Zhu (2003) argued that it is urgent to elevate the communicative and intercultural communicative competence of Chinese learners of English given that English has become an international language under the circumstance of globalization. Zhu also pointed out that this urgency poses great challenges to the Chinese EFL profession in terms of teaching conceptions, teaching proficiency, and the reform of the current examination system. Based on my own understanding of these challenges, in my view, CLT does have its place in China. I share the viewpoint proposed by Holliday (1994) that CLT has the potential to be tailored as culturally appropriate in different teaching contexts, and I question the standpoint represented by Hu (2002) that CLT is culturally ill-fitted in the Chinese EFL context. Although the identified difficulties of CLT promotion should be taken into consideration, I consider CLT's potential for enhancing learner's communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence should by no means be underestimated. In this connection, it is important to take an in-depth look into how practitioners, in practice, attempt to improve the

communicative competence and intercultural communicative competence of Chinese learners of English with appropriate teaching methods in an effective way, and identify the extent to which such efforts are related to CLT.

Indeed, there exists an evident research gap in this field. Firstly, few studies have been carried out in China to look into the appropriateness of CLT from practitioners' perspectives through the investigation perceptions of CLT and actual teaching practice. Secondly, the effectiveness and appropriateness of CLT implementation at tertiary level is very much under-researched in China given the fact that the approach is identified as not being as popular with university teachers as with primary teachers (Zhu, 2003). Thirdly, very few research studies have been launched in China which involve teachers with intercultural (overseas) experience as research participants (this point will be explained in detail in the subsequent chapter, see 2.4.). Therefore, I decided to carry out a study to investigate how CLT is adopted and adapted at tertiary level by Chinese teachers with experience of teacher education overseas.

1.3. Aims and objectives

The findings for this research are expected to fulfill the following aims and

objectives. Firstly, it aims to identify the characteristics of CLT from practitioners' perspectives. Secondly, it aims to assess perceptions of the effectiveness and appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context at tertiary level taking into account also perceived constraints on CLT promotion. Thirdly, it aims to find out how and in what ways CLT is adopted and adapted by the practitioners, and the extent to which 'communicative ideas' are actually reflected in their teaching practice. Fourthly, it aims to indicate the extent to which the participants considered their experience of teacher education overseas to have been effective in facilitating CLT implementation and enhancing their teaching proficiency in a general sense. In accordance with these aims the following research questions more specifically guide the research:

1) 'What are the conceptions of CLT held by Chinese tertiary teachers of English with overseas experience of teacher education?'

2) 'To what extent do these teachers perceive CLT as appropriate in the Chinese EFL context?'

3) 'Do Chinese tertiary teachers of English with overseas experience of teacher education attempt to adopt or adapt CLT? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?'

1.4. Organization of the thesis

Following this introduction, in the Literature Review (Chapter two) I take an in-depth look at the issues outlined above in relation to CLT as appropriate methodology. This will be followed by the Methodology chapter (Chapter three), in which I justify the adoption of the overall research design, as well as explaining the procedures of data collection and analysis. In Chapters four, five and six I then present the findings for each research question in turn and incorporate initial discussion. In Chapter seven I present an in-depth overall discussion, based on the contributions and problems emerging from the findings, in relation to the major issues identified in the Literature Review. Chapter eight will present the conclusion and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2   LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter consists of five parts. I shall start the chapter by providing an interpretation of CLT (2.1.), in which I will highlight the complexity of CLT from a theoretical perspective based on my understanding of different aspects of this approach. In the second section (2.2), I will discuss CLT from the perspective of appropriate methodology in different cultural settings, examining the theory of CLT also in relation to post-method pedagogy. This will be followed by a discussion of the debates on the appropriateness of CLT specifically in mainland China (2.3). In the fourth section (2.4), I will identify potential gaps which emerge from the literature and suggest how the present study can bridge these gaps. In the fifth and final section (2.5), I will justify the actual research questions pursued for the present study.

2.1. How to interpret CLT?

In this section, I shall attempt to describe CLT from an anti-essentialist perspective on the basis of my understanding of the argument made by Savignon (2002) that CLT has a cross-disciplinary theoretical background. The rich theoretical base of CLT reveals its open and flexible nature as well as the complexity and diversity of ways it can be interpreted. This

also explains the difficulty of making a precise description of any typical classroom procedure of CLT implementation. As Richards and Rogers (1986:82) argued, 'how to implement CLT principles at the level of classroom procedures remains central to discussions of the communicative approach'. The multidisciplinary perspective on CLT indicates the inappropriateness of pinning down CLT as a fixed concept. This implies that it may be important to interpret the approach from an anti-essentialist perspective in order to gain a more holistic understanding of the approach as appropriate methodology in different cultural contexts.

2.1.1. The development of CLT

The origins of Communicative Language Teaching (subsequently referred to as 'CLT') can be traced back to the late 1960s. Its emergence was a great challenge to the two dominant approaches at the time, namely British Situational Language Teaching and the American Audiolingual Method. In line with Chomsky's criticisms of structural theories of language (Chomsky, 1957), applied linguists and practitioners began to question both approaches as merely focusing on the mastery of structures, with mechanical practices such as drilling being considered as insufficient in terms of enhancing the real-life communicative proficiency of language learner (McDonough and Shaw, 1993). This led applied linguists to focus

attention on the functional and communicative potential of language and raised the issue of how to articulate learners' linguistic knowledge and actual communicative performance effectively with a new approach.

Wilkins (1972) was one of the pioneers in this field. He highlighted the significance of understanding of the underlying systems of meanings in communicative uses of language and classified such meanings into two types, namely, notional categories (time, location, sequence, frequency, etc) and communicative functions (requests, offers, complaints, etc). His book entitled *Notional Syllabuses* (Wilkins 1976) was at that time, and has been subsequently acknowledged as a great contribution to the development of CLT. Based on the theoretical ground proposed by Wilkins, along with other scholars such as Widdowson, Candlin, Brumfit, Johnson and Littlewood, work on the theoretical framework of a communicative or functional approach mushroomed, and this work was widely accepted by theorists, practitioners, textbook writers and curriculum designers. The rapid acceptance of this work exerted a huge influence on the ELT profession worldwide, and the principles presented became known collectively as the Communicative Approach (widely known as Communicative Language Teaching, or – in the early days – the notional-functional approach or functional approach) (Richards and

Rogers, 1986).

2.1.2. A methodological concern – method or approach?

'Method' and 'Approach' are two basic concepts in the field of
methodology. Rodgers (2001) argues that they differ in that methods refer
to 'fixed teaching systems with prescribed techniques and practices'
whereas approaches 'represent language teaching philosophies that can be
interpreted and applied in a variety of different ways in the classroom'. It
should be emphasized that misunderstanding the connotations of the two
concepts, and falsely describing CLT as a 'method' might cause problems
with interpretation of CLT.

CLT is generally recognized as an approach rather than a method, as
argued by Mitchell (1988), CLT is an umbrella term characterized by a set
of distinctive principles, features and types of classroom activities.
Richards and Rogers (1986) claim that CLT is derived from the theory of a
communicative model of language teaching, which can be specified at
three levels, namely, approach, design and procedure, and that the
approach level mainly involves two types of theory – theory of language
and theory of learning.

The 'theory of language' underlying CLT mainly reflects the relativity and complexity of the concept of 'communicative competence' (hereafter referred to as 'CC'), which is central to CLT. CC was initially expounded by Hymes (1972) and defined as 'what a speaker needs to know within a speech community' (Richards and Rogers, 2001:159). Hymes broadened Chomsky's theory of competence by arguing that linguistic theory should be extended from linguistic competence to what he called 'communicative competence', including both linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions. Hymes described CC in terms of systemic potential, appropriateness, occurrence and feasibility (Hinkel, 1999). In his view, being communicatively competent calls for speakers' competence in producing the language to concern both grammatical and socio-cultural acceptability in a speech community.

While Hymes tended to lay the emphasis on the element of speech acts (whether verbal or non-verbal) of CC, other theorists contributed to the linguistic theory of CLT from the perspective of the functional aspect of language. For instance, Halliday (1970) argued that one's linguistic competence is reflected by his or her performance in using the target language for functional purposes. His standpoint was then deepened by Widdowson (1978), who focused on the relation between linguistic

systems and communicative acts. Widdowson laid emphasis on the speaker's competence in transferring the knowledge of linguistic systems to the ability of producing effective communication by differentiating between 'usage' and 'use'. In his view, 'usage' implies learners' knowledge of linguistic systems and 'use' reflects learners' real ability to produce an effective communication with the application of such knowledge.

Compared with Hymes, Halliday and Widdowson, who tended to perceive CC as a unitary concept, Canale and Swain (1980) broke the notion down into four interdependent dimensions, namely, grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, strategic competence, and discourse competence. Sociolinguistic competence was later broadened by Savignon (2002) into the notion of socio-cultural competence, which refers to the interpretation of the social context where language is used for communication with proper cultural knowledge and sensitiveness. She also identified two kinds of processing in discourse competence and considered both as 'essential' for CC. These two types of processing are: bottom-up (a full understanding of the text with the identification of certain sounds or words) and top-down (the recognition of certain sounds or words via the understanding of the theme or purposes of the text).

CC can be interpreted from an intercultural perspective as well, taking into account recognition of the integral relationship between language and culture (Byram, 1989). Cortazzi and Jin (1999) identified intercultural competence [1] as a fifth aspect of CC, which corresponded to the emergence of a concept which is complementary to CC – intercultural communicative competence (hereafter referred to as 'ICC'[2]). ICC contains the connotations of both sociolinguistic (socio-cultural) competence and strategic competence of CC, while 'intercultural' extends the scope of 'social context' to recognize the hybridity of source and target cultures.

The theory of language underlying CLT therefore can be seen as constituting three major dimensions, namely, the linguistic or structural dimension (grammatical / discourse competence), the functional dimension (strategic competence) and the intercultural dimension (sociolinguistic / socio-cultural / intercultural competence). It justifies one of the most distinctive features of CLT proposed by Littlewood, which is to 'pay systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view' (1981:1).

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[1] Guiherme (2000:297) defines intercultural competence as 'the ability to interact effectively with people from cultures that we recognize as being different from our own'.
[2] Byram (1997b:61) defines ICC as 'the knowledge, skills and abilities to participate in activities where the target language is the primary communicative code and in situations where it is the common code for those with different preferred languages'.

Another type of theory underlying CLT at approach level is the theory of learning, which relates to the idea that CLT is a 'learn by using' approach. Certain principles of this theory of learning may be inferred, according to Richards and Rogers (1986:72), from communicative practices, including the communication principle, the task principle and the meaningfulness principle. The communication principle refers to the idea that 'activities that involve real communication promote learning'. The task principle refers to the notion that 'activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning'. The meaningfulness principle refers to the idea that 'language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process, and learning activities are consequently selected according to how well they engage the learner in meaningful and authentic language use (rather than merely mechanical practice of language patterns)' (Richards and Rogers, 1986:72). All the principles focus in a general way on the need for learning activities to be authentic and meaningful in order to facilitate the language learning process (Littlewood, 1981; Johnson, 1982). However, theorists working on this field hold different opinions on how CC can be developed. For instance, Johnson (1984) and Littlewood (1984) proposed a skill-learning model of learning, and argued that CC can be acquired through skill development and practice. This viewpoint was not shared by Savignon (1972) and Krashen

(1988), who claimed that language proficiency is better developed via using language in a communicative way rather than practising discrete language skills. Savignon (1972) denied the idea that rote memory or mechanical practice can enhance learners' ability to produce meaningful communication.

2.1.3. Aims and features of CLT

CLT is considered by Brown (1994) as a practical approach, this being reflected in its aims, features and principles. CC reinforcement and authenticity are two basic goals that CLT aims for. As Brown (1994) argued, the ultimate goals of a CLT classroom are 'focused on all of the components of CC', and language teaching techniques are 'designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purpose' (p.245). Nevertheless, what needs to be stressed is that authenticity at this point contains two layers of connotations, Firstly, it means learners' ability in producing linguistically and socially acceptable language (or learners' intercultural competence). Secondly, it refers to the authenticity of the set activities as well as the supporting materials adopted in a CLT classroom in order to familiarize learners with situations of real-life communication and the idiomatic use of target language (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Dublin, 1995; Widdowson, 1996; Canale and Swain,

1980). Importantly, it should be noted that 'authenticity' is a relative term, as pointed out by Kramsch and Sullivan (1996): what is authentic to native speakers of English might not be authentic in non-native speaking settings.

The goals of CC reinforcement and authenticity are reflected in some basic features of CLT. For instance, the goal of CC reinforcement is reflected in one of the basic features of CLT known as to 'pay systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view' (Littlewood, 1981:1). The goal of authenticity reinforcement is reflected in the feature of being experience-based: as argued by Richards and Rogers (1986), CLT calls for the need to build up an authentic classroom environment for communication purposes.

In addition, learner-centeredness is another distinctive feature of CLT (Richards and Rogers, 1986), as CLT tends to put a particular priority on learners and their communicative needs. Savignon argued that 'the essence of CLT is the engagement of learners in communication to allow them to develop their communicative competence' (2002:22), and that 'learner communicative needs provide a framework for elaborating program goals in terms of functional competence' (2002:3). However, many theorists

question the notion of 'learner-centeredness'. For instance, Hutchinon and Waters (1984) argued that being 'learner-centered' in a simplistic sense can tend to overlook the social context of the learning process and can fail to articulate learning needs with external expectations. In their view, CLT ought to be 'learning-centered' rather than 'learner-centered'. Holliday (1994) also challenged the term 'learner-centered' by claiming that the notion is too vague to transfer, as being 'learner-centered' can rest on a stereotyped image of learners, which can hinder teachers from achieving a fair understanding of different learning cultures. According to Holliday, this confusion accounts for the failure of CLT outside BANA countries. Savignon (2006) also emphasized that 'the goals of CLT depend on learner needs in a given context'. This shows that CLT can be seen as a context-dependent approach that calls for practitioners' sensitivity in relation to the variable needs of different teaching contexts.

Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) provide a detailed discussion of the features of CLT, which can be summarized as follows:

1.   As it is recognized that language is used for communication, with a view to achieving effective and appropriate communication, learners are expected to develop an awareness of linguistic variation and contexualized

language use during the process of language learning;

2.   Although 'meaning' is the central focus, comprehensible pronunciation and fluency are targeted as well, while accuracy is also evaluated, according to context;

3.   CLT encourages teachers to adjust the types of classroom activities and teaching techniques to respond to learners' needs;

4.   Dialogues or drills can be adopted but just for the purpose of 'communicative-function' practice rather than memorization; the native language is not totally forbidden in a communicative classroom and translation can be used to clarify misunderstandings; reading and writing do not necessarily need to be deferred till mastery of speech;

5.   Teachers are expected to motivate learners and encourage them to learn through collaborative work and by reflecting on mistakes.

The features put forward by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) overlap with the principles which have been previously identified above, namely all-round development of CC (linguistically, functionally and interculturally), being experience-based and learner / learning-centered, and encouraging learning-by-doing.

2.1.4. General principles of CLT

The aims and features of CLT identified above correspond to some other descriptions of standard principles of CLT. Mitchell (1988) summarized these principles at three levels, namely, the approach level, the design level, and the procedure level as follows:

1.   Approach: FL proficiency should be developed along with FL communicative competence.

2.   Design: The syllabus is expected to be notional-functional as well as to be appropriately individualized based on an understanding of learners' needs and expectations.

3.   Procedure: In a communicative language classroom, the target language is supposed to be the only medium for communication through certain cooperative activities such as role play, group or pair work.

Mitchell's interpretation of CLT principles was supplemented by Berns (1990), who proposed:

1.   Foreign language is learnt for the purpose of being able to engage in real-life communication effectively and appropriately in the target language, which is supposed to be linguistically and socioculturally

acceptable.

2. Linguistic and contextual diversity and variability should be recognized in the process of language acquisition.

3. Learners' competence should be comprehensively enhanced (ideationally, interpersonally and textually).

4. There is no standard or fixed model of the methodology or sets of techniques.

5. Culture plays an instrumental role in developing learners' communicative competence.

The CLT principles suggested here to a great extent reflect the general aims and features of CLT as described above. However, the 'English-only' principle proposed by Mitchell is in contradiction with the argument made by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) that native language can be used as assisting medium language in a CLT classroom. The principles suggested here relate to the different levels of approach, design and procedure (Richards and Rogers, 1986). Given that the theories in relation to the approach level have been discussed above (see 2.1.2.), it is worth navigating through the theories in relation to the other two levels as well in order to demonstrate further the complexity of CLT in terms of interpretation.

2.1.5. Curriculum design, communicative activities and roles of teacher and learner in a CLT classroom

According to Richards and Rogers (1986), the design level of CLT touches upon the aspects of objectives, syllabus, leaning and teaching activities, instructional materials, and roles of learner and teacher. Piepho (1981:8) summarized five levels of objectives in CLT: 1. an integrative and content level (language as means of expression); 2. a linguistic and instrumental level (language as objective of learning); 3. an affective level of interpersonal relationships and conduct (language as means of expressing values); 4. a level of individual learning needs (remedial learning based on error analysis); 5. an educational level of extra-linguistic goals (language learning within curriculum). Although these levels were then considered by Richards and Rogers (1986) as umbrella objectives that can be applicable to general teaching as well, nevertheless these objectives do mirror the nature and function of language from a communicative perspective. In addition, these objectives identify the importance of the curriculum being pragmatically tailored to reflect learning needs in given contexts.

Nevertheless, the potentially multi-faceted nature of CLT corresponds to different versions of syllabus models, as Yalden (1983) summarized:

Type	Reference
1. Structures + functions, notional	Wilkins (1976)
2. Functional spiral around a structural core	Brumfit (1980)
3. Structural, functional, instrumental	Allen (1980)
4. Functional	upp and Hodlin (1975)
5. Interactional	Widdowson (1979)
6. Task-based	Prabhu (1983)
7. Learner generated	Candlin (1976), Henner-Stanchina and Riley (1978)

These models provide insight into the development of communicative syllabus design, but the last three models (interactional, task-based, and learner-generated) particularly reflect the current tendency of communicative syllabus design. This is because increasing attention has been paid to the communicative process rather than the acquisition of communicative competence as a product. However, although communicative syllabus models vary, Savignon (1983, 1997) proposed five components of a communicative curriculum, and this model was widely accepted and considered as conducive to strengthening the theoretical and practical foundations of CLT (Sato and Kleinsasser, 1999,

Pham, 2007). These components are: 1. language arts (which may include exercises used in mother tongue to focus on formal accuracy); 2. language for a purpose (use of language for real communication); 3. personal English language use (learner's emerging identity in English); 4. theatre arts (teach in a way to provide learners with the tools needed to act in new language); 5. beyond the classroom (enable learner to use language outside classroom) (1983, 1997).

Trends in communicative syllabus design relate to the design of classroom activities. Littlewood (1981) contributed to this area by categorizing two major types of communicative activity, namely, functional communication activities and social interaction activities. Functional communication activities (such as picture description) emphasize learners' ability in using the target language to work out certain solutions to a problem in a specific situation structured by teachers based on given information. Social interaction activities (such as role play) lay stress on the social acceptability of language use when performing tasks with social features by building up a genuine-like classroom environment with the target language as the teaching medium. Both types of activities are intended to be task-based in a general sense.

The design of communicative activities echoes the three 'communicative principles' underlying the learning theory of CLT at approach level (see 2.1.2.) which stress on the authenticity and meaningfulness of the chosen activities. It shows that CLT tends to emphasize the process of communication rather than merely focus on the mastery of language form as product, and the approach aims to enable learners to speak the target language in both a linguistically correct and a socio-culturally appropriate and acceptable manner. Nevertheless, it should be emphasized that CLT may pose challenges to the teacher's linguistic competence as well as classroom management skills, as these are extremely important for carrying out social interaction activities smoothly. In addition, good choice of teaching materials is important as well for maximizing the effectiveness of communicative activities in a CLT-oriented classroom. Richards and Rogers (1986) reported that there are three major types of CLT materials often adopted, namely, text-based (communicative-oriented coursebook), task-based (communicative-oriented activities such as role play), and realia (authentic supporting materials such as newspapers and magazines).

Apart from objectives, syllabus, activities, and instructional materials, the design level of CLT is also concerned with the roles played by learner and teacher. Breen and Candlin (1980) considered the roles of learner as

negotiators and contributors, who are supposed to share the responsibility with teachers in terms of the academic input by actively participating in different kinds of communicative activities assigned. They considered that the teacher assumes the roles of facilitator, independent participant, researcher and learner, needs analyst, counselor and group process manager rather than merely knowledge transmitter. In short, both teacher and learner are expected to assume autonomous and independent roles in a CLT classroom.

2.1.6. Implementation procedure of CLT

The flexible nature of CLT and the diversified forms of communicative tasks give rise to difficulty in describing the typical classroom procedures of CLT implementation. Richards and Rogers considered CLT procedures as "evolutionary rather than revolutionary", for there are overlaps between CLT and other teaching methods in terms of teaching techniques and classroom management procedures (1986:81). Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983:107-8) attempted to suggest a few of standard CLT procedures that are applicable to a secondary school programme. The described procedures mainly include: 1. presentation or oral practice of dialogue; 2. Q-A or discussion based on the dialogue topic that may be in relation to learner's personal experience; 3. study of basic communicative expressions in the

dialogue and the grammatical rules underlying the functional expression or structure; 4. oral practice of freer communication activities as production; 5. sampling of assignments, and evaluation of learning.

These procedures to some extent reflect the theoretical framework of the classroom activities proposed by Littlewood (1981), including the pre-communicative activities (structural and quasi-communicative activities) and communicative activities (functional communication activities and social interaction activities). According to Littlewood, pre-communicative activities serve as the preliminary stage for learners to be equipped with the specific language knowledge or skills through practice. This is because structural activities (such as drill, Q-A, etc) aim at enhancing learners' grammatical accuracy of language use, and the purpose of quasi-communicative activities is to enable learners to relate the practiced linguistic forms to their potential functional meanings by producing understandable language. Learners are then expected to be able to transfer the acquired linguistic forms and communicative skills into a real ability to produce meaningful and socially acceptable languages through the practice of functional communication and social interaction activities. The implementation procedure of the four types of activities constitutes a process of upgrading learners' overall level in terms of

communicative competence acquisition. However, there is no fixed sequencing of pre-communicative and communicative activities. Littlewood (1981) argued that teachers can trace learners' progress more easily by placing pre-communicative activities before communicative activities, or reversely, communicative activities can be adopted for diagnostic purposes, to enable teachers to develop a more precise understanding of learning needs so that the activities could be more practically tailored in accordance with the particular weaknesses of their students.

Compared with Littlewood, who paid equal attention to the development of the linguistic and communicative skills during the process of communicative competence acquisition, Savignon (1972, 1983) declared that it is possible for learners to carry out communicative activities even before they are linguistically prepared. Although Savignon's argument reflects one of the most important aims of CLT, which is to develop CC via communicative activities, inferring from her understanding of CC (see 2.1.2.) and her interpretation of CLT implementation, it could be said that she seems to underestimate the function of linguistic knowledge (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) that actually serve as a key prerequisite for achieving effective communication for most non-native speakers of

English.

2.1.7. Versions of the CLT model

Howatt (1984) recognized two versions of the CLT model, namely, the weak version and the strong version. According to Howatt, the weak version 'stresses the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purpose and characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching'. The strong version 'advances the claim that language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself'. Howatt finally concluded that the weak version of CLT can be described as 'learning to use' English and the strong version entails 'using English to learn it' (1984:279).

It can be inferred that the weak version highlights an integral input of grammatical and functional teaching by setting up communicative activities for the practice of language use, and both the structural and communicative aspects of language are emphasized in this version. Importantly, it should be emphasized that 'the practice of language use'

calls for an integral development of the skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening rather than merely focusing on the enhancement of one's oral / aural abilities, although according to Nunan (1987), one's oral performance serves as a crucial criterion for CLT.

Comparatively, the strong version lays the focus on the discourse level, as it claims that progress in communicative competence acquisition can be facilitated with the text-based tasks. The importance of task-design is particularly highlighted, as all activities are supposed to be problem-solving-oriented. In other words, learners are expected to improve their language proficiency by dealing with different sorts of language problems through practice. Current 'task-based language teaching' is very much a 'strong version'.

This raises the question of whether 'task-based language teaching' (which is much-discussed nowadays) represents a strong or a weak version of CLT, since it can be seen as a continuation of communicative approach in the broad sense (Littlewood, 2004). As Littlewood has pinpointed, there are problems in defining a task-based approach similar to those in the case of CLT due to the ambiguity of the term 'task'. For instance, Williams and Burden consider a task as 'any activity that learners engage in to further

the process of learning a language' (1997:168). Estaire and Zanon (1994) tend to define the term by making a distinction between 'communication tasks' (with the focus on meaning) and 'enabling tasks' (with the focus on linguistic aspects) (1994:13-20). Other theorists such as Stern (1992), Willis (1996), and Ellis (2000) take the position of understanding 'task' from a communication-oriented perspective, as they consider a key criterion to be whether the adopted tasks can fulfill a communicative purpose. Littlewood therefore proposes two dimensions of tasks in order to clarify the conceptual confusion relative to task-based language teaching. These two dimensions are 'the continuum from focus on forms to focus on meaning', and 'the degree of learner-involvement that a task elicits' (2004: 321). Littlewood classifies the first dimension into five individual sections, namely, non-communicative learning (with the focus on language structure); pre-communicative language practice (practising language with some attention to meaning, e.g. Q-A); communicative language practice (practising pre-taught language in a context where it communicates new information, e.g. information-gap); structured communication (using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language, with some unpredictability, e.g. role-play); and authentic communication (using language to communicate in unpredictable situations, e.g. discussion) (2004:324). He then argues that these units correspond well

with 'activity-types' within the CLT framework, and that the combination of the two dimensions makes a task-based approach oriented towards a learner-centered communication-directed language teaching approach (pp. 324, 326). In addition, he points out that structured and authentic communication activities or 'tasks' play essential roles in the task-based framework. In this sense, it can be said that he concurs overall with the idea that task-based language teaching represents a relatively 'strong' form of CLT, although, as we have seen, with some qualification.

According to Holliday (1994), the major distinction between the 'weak' and 'strong' versions of CLT lies in the following three aspects. Firstly, the weak version emphasizes the communicative interaction between people (either between teachers and students or between peers) to practice the language use, whereas the strong version focuses on the interaction between learners and the text. Secondly, the weak version calls for an integral development of each component of communicative competence, whereas in the strong version, it is one's discourse and strategic competence that are emphasized most. Thirdly, due to the different purpose of the set task in collaborative work, the weak version requires learners to use target language to perform tasks to enhance accuracy and fluency, whereas in the strong version, learners could use mother tongue to

assist the learning process to solve the language problems based on the analysis of the given text. It is the weak version of CLT that is prevalent among practitioners worldwide (Nunan, 1988), and which is widely interpreted as 'standard practice'.

2.1.8. Some misunderstandings of CLT

The open nature of CLT has given rise to some fundamental misconceptions about CLT, relating to some extent to stereotyping of what the approach involves. Thompson (1996) summed up four particular aspects that are most misconceived, namely, relating to grammar, speaking, pair work and teachers. In his view, the ongoing development of CLT depends on how well these misconceptions are clarified.

To begin with, grammar teaching is by no means trivialized by CLT. This is because effective communication can hardly be achieved without the linguistic forms that are grammatically acceptable, as grammar is the very basis of communicative competence. Perhaps the fundamental grammatical concern in CLT is not whether grammar should be taught or not, instead, it is a matter of how and in what ways it is taught. I share the view of Krashen (1988), who declared that grammatical knowledge does not necessarily need to be taught with rules. In fact, according to the

principles of CLT (see above), the grammar taught in CLT may be more inclined to be unconsciously transmitted through exposure to the target language via different kinds of communication-oriented activities.

Another common misconception is that CLT tends to over-emphasize oral/aural competence at the expense of reading and writing skills (Faersch, Haastrup and Phillipson, 1984:170). A superficial interpretation of CC may be one possible reason for this misinterpretation. However, as related before, the aim of CLT as to enhance the learner's overall repertoire of language skills in an integrated way, and this proves this misconception wrong.

The third misconception of CLT is that the approach requires small group or pair work. This misconception might be attributed to a failure to understand the theory of communicative activities proposed by Littlewood (1981) (see 2.1.5.), in which a diversity of communicative tasks is recognized. It needs to be emphasized that communicative activities can be actually carried out in different forms.

The last misconception is that CLT tends to expect too much from teachers compared with the traditional teaching methods (Medgyes, 1986). In my

view, we should perhaps interpret this as a challenge rather than a misconception. Although CLT is often termed a 'learner-centered' approach, it undeniably does pose demanding challenges to both native and non-native speaker teacher practitioners. The native speaker practitioners of CLT can be greatly challenged by a lack of familiarity with the alien learning cultures of their students, while the non-native speaker CLT practitioner might consider his/her own lack of communicative competence in the target language as the biggest obstacle to implementing CLT effectively. In addition, it is important to be aware of teachers' important role pedagogic innovation. Although it can be argued that innovation initiatives may depend on education policy both at national and institutional levels which is beyond the control of teachers, innovation can take place at micro level as well. De Lano et al (1994) considered that teachers, as 'the main agents of change', need to have a 'high degree of motivation to work towards the change'. (p. 487).

Up to this point, I have discussed a number of key issues in the definition of CLT. I have attempted to avoid stereotyping the concept by breaking it down into different areas, and my discussion of the basic theories underlying the approach has been carried out from different angles. I firstly navigated through the development of CLT, and then looked into the

methodological concerns of CLT by differentiating between approach and method. I then discussed a few key issues of CLT, including its aims and features, general principles, curriculum design, communicative activities and roles of teacher and learner in a CLT classroom, implementation procedures of CLT, versions of the CLT model, and misconceptions. I have therefore aimed to provide a holistic interpretation of the approach. In the next section, I would like to take an in-depth look at CLT from the perspective of appropriate methodology in different cultural contexts.

2.2. CLT as appropriate methodology in different cultural contexts

Under the circumstances of globalization, the ELT profession has witnessed a changing trend in methodology, from the attempts of seeking a best method (Prabhu, 1999), 'beyond methods' (Richards, 1990) to the 'postmethod condition' (Kumaravadivelu, 1994), by way of Brown's declaration of the 'death of methods' (2002) (Bell, 2007). Despite the argument made by Kumaravadivelu (2006) that CLT has been replaced by task-based language teaching as a pedagogic shift due to the 'serious doubts' about its efficacy in terms of authenticity, acceptability and adaptability' (p.62), global debates on the appropriateness of CLT in different cultural contexts continue to be heated. This phenomenon reflects Block's (2001:72) standpoint that method still plays a dominant role in the

thinking of teachers, as he said, 'while method has been discredited at an etic level (that is, in the thinking and nomenclature of scholars) it certainly retains a great deal of vitality at the grass-roots, emic level (that is, it is still part of the nomenclature of lay people and teachers)' In addition, in the view of Jacobs and Farrell (2003:5), the CLT paradigm shift has not yet been fully implemented, stating that to some extent it represents the 'larger shifts from positivism to post-positivism and from behaviorism to cognitivism' in second language education. They identified eight changes involved in the CLT paradigm shift, including learner autonomy, the social nature of learning, curricular integration, focus on meaning, diversity, thinking skills, alternative assessment, and teachers as co-learners. They assert that the CLT paradigm shift has only been partially implemented over the past 40 years, and they attribute the reasons to practitioner's failure to perceive and implement these changes from a holistic perspective.

The arguments made by Block, and by Jacobs and Farrell are insightful when it comes to considering the adoption and adaptation of CLT in different cultural contexts from a postmethod perspective. They have identified the interrelation between teacher's beliefs and interpretations and decisions on methodology adoption. This suggests that there are

challenges to the expertise of practitioners in terms of CLT implementation, as argued by Harmer (2003: 292), 'the problem is not with the methodology itself, nor with the ideas that it generates, but rather with the way they are amended and adapted to fit the needs of the students who come into contact with them'.

The above arguments provide a general back ground for the layout of this section, in which I will navigate through theories relating to appropriate methodology and postmethod pedagogy. I shall then try to link them with the application of communicative principles and discuss CLT as appropriate methodology in different contexts.

2.2.1. Appropriate methodology, postmethod pedagogy and application of communicative principles

With the increasing attention which has been paid to the cultural influence exerted by the global ELT profession, the term 'appropriate methodology' was first introduced to TESOL in 1986 by Bowers and Widdowson (1997), who claimed that 'appropriate' indicates the sociocultural applicability of not only a particular programme but the general curriculum design as well.

Holliday (1994, 2005) further developed this idea by identifying three

basic types of methodology, namely, methods or approaches, curriculum development and social investigation. They correspond to three major aspects of English language education, namely, teacher beliefs and teaching behavior, syllabus design, and ethnographic action research on a particular social context. Holliday argued that cultural sensitivity is the prerequisite to an appropriate methodology, consisting of components of a teaching methodology and a process of learning about the classroom. In his view, culture-sensitive methodology develops with a perceptive appreciation of the uniqueness of language classrooms through investigations into the social context of English language education. This includes classroom-based action research (the micro level) as well as ethnographically-oriented research on the culture of particular classrooms (the macro level). To sum up, with a culture-oriented curriculum, the teaching effectiveness of foreign language education can be largely maximized by adopting culture-sensitive or context-dependent methods or approaches.

Apart from recognizing the social dimension of the language classroom, Holliday tends to conceptualize 'appropriate methodology' as 'becoming-appropriate methodology'. This is because he considers the adaptation of methodology as a continuing process, involving the

incorporation of the procedures of 'how to teach' and 'learning about how to teach' (1994:164). Teachers are expected to be able to respond promptly to the uncertainty and diversity of their classroom through observation, evaluation and self-reflection in order to adjust teaching plans and techniques.

Compared with Holliday, who tended to build his argument on pinpointing the significance of the cultural dimension of ELT from a method-based perspective, Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2003, 2006) points out that the trend of TESOL methods is toward a 'post-method pedagogy' era; as he argued, 'the L2 profession is faced with an imperative need to construct a post-method pedagogy' (2001:537). The major underpinnings in relation to the emergence of post-method pedagogy are the work done by Pennycook (1989) and Prabhu (1990), who rejected the notion of 'neutrality of method' and 'best method', respectively. Pennycook argued that the concept of method 'reflects a particular view of the world and is articulated in the interests of unequal power relationship' (1989:589-590). Prabhu claimed that the 'teacher needs to learn to operate with some personal conceptualization of how their teaching leads to desired learning – with a notion of causation that has a measure of credibility for them' (1990:172). He called for recognition of a teacher's 'sense of plausibility',

signifying teachers' initiative in justifying and rationalizing one's way of teaching. Kumaravadivelu described the shift from the concept of method to the concept of post-method as a 'process of decolonization of ELT method', with the implication of seeking an 'alternative to method rather than an alternative method' (2003:544). He argued that post-method pedagogy contains three principles, namely, particularity, practicality and possibility. Particularity refers to the development of a 'context-sensitive and location-specific pedagogy based on the understanding of local linguistic, social, cultural, and political particularities'. Practicality refers to the development of teachers' competence in 'theorizing from their practice and to practice what they theorize'. Possibility means the investigation of the 'sociopolitical consciousness that students bring with them to the classroom which functions as a catalyst for identity formation and social transformation' (2006:69). The three parameters relate in turn to a macrostrategic framework, which contains ten macrostrategies: a). maximize learning opportunities, b). facilitate negotiated interaction, c). minimize perceptual mismatches, d). activate intuitive heuristics, e). foster language awareness, f). contextualize linguistic input, g). integrate language skills, h). promote learner autonomy, i). ensure social relevance, and j). raise cultural consciousness. The macrostrategies serve as guidelines for practitioners to work out the microstrategies or activities

appropriate for the local EFL context.

It can be said that both of the terms 'appropriate methodology' and 'post-method pedagogy' attempt to pinpoint the key role played by cultural context in EFL teaching. Both terms call for the practitioner's true understanding of local teaching contexts as well as competence in constructively tailoring and improving one's way of teaching based on such understanding through exploration and self-reflection. The major difference between the two terms is in the emphasis on the requirement and expectation placed upon teachers. Holliday's model of appropriate methodology tends to stress the importance of the development of the teacher's cultural awareness and sensitivity, whereas Kumaravadivelu's model of post-method pedagogy pays more attention to teacher's creativity and capability of theorizing what one creates. Practitioners following the framework of post-method pedagogy are expected to assume a more active role in terms of pedagogic innovation as both practitioner and theory builder. In addition, Holliday's interpretation of appropriate methodology contains three perspectives – methods or approaches, curriculum development and social investigation. These touch upon both the micro (at classroom level) and macro (at socio-cultural level) levels of the recognition of cultural diversity and uniqueness of EFL context.

Comparatively, Kumaravadivelu's emphasis is more on the micro level, as he tends to lay the focus on rationalizing teacher beliefs and teaching behavior in the language classroom in line with the values of a particular culture.

Thus, the ideas of 'appropriate methodology' and 'postmethod pedagogy' both reflect concerns about the appropriateness of CLT in different cultural settings. Interestingly, the communicative principles proposed by Holliday (2005) actually echo the general goals and essence of CLT as identified above. Holliday (2005:143) identifies three communicative principles, namely, 'treat language as communication', 'capitalize on students' existing communication competence', and 'communicate with local exigencies'. He argues that these principles can be applied differently in different social contexts, as the word 'communicative' implies the meaning of 'geared to the competence and expectations of those participating in the learning process' and 'negotiation between all the parties concerned' (Hutchinson and Waters 1984:108, cited by Holliday, 2005:147). Holliday recognizes that the first principle is usually seen as the core element of CLT. However, for him the second and third principles are also important since they lead to CLT becoming appropriate. The second principle emphasizes the learner's individual contribution and teacher's ability to

respond to the learner's 'expectations' and 'changing needs' (Breen and Candlin, 2001:15, cited by Holliday, 2005:143). The third principle relates to how CLT can be culturally transferable through the interaction between communication and its peripheral environment. Holliday's interpretation of communicative principles echoes those proposed by Mitchell (1998) and Berns (1990) (see 2.2.2.) by identifying CLT as a sort of approach which calls for accommodation between stakeholders (student, teacher, syllabus designer, and institutional manager, etc) based on an analysis of learning needs through ethnographic action research. This also echoes Savignon's (2006) viewpoint of the goal of CLT as being dependent on learner needs in a given context. In addition, his argument seems compatible with the principles of 'particularity' and 'possibility' in Kumaravadivelu's (1994, 2001, 2003, 2006) post-method pedagogy model. Holliday's argument shows the feasibility of interpreting CLT from a postmethod perspective as a context-dependent and context-adjustable approach. On this grounding, I will present a discussion of CLT as appropriate methodology in different cultural settings in the following section.

2.2.2. Discussion of CLT as appropriate methodology in different contexts

Due to the international popularity of CLT, the academic debate on the

appropriateness of CLT in peripheral countries has become heated, with increasing attention being paid to the importance of context in terms of methodology application. In company with the prevalence of CLT at a theoretical level is the sharp contrast between governments' enthusiasm and local practitioners' reluctance and resistance in relation to the approach. For instance, Sakui (2004) argues that despite the Japanese government's stress on communicative ability in the curriculum, the fact is the grammar-translation method is still dominant in the majority of public schools in Japan. She argues that in classes led by local teachers, CLT takes up less than 10% of class time in total; in team-teaching classes with a JET programme ALT (Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme Assistant Language Teacher), she found that most so-called CLT activities actually 'resembled audio-lingual practices'. In mainland China, although CLT has been introduced for more than twenty years and has been required by the government to be implemented in a top-down way, its adaptability and effectiveness remain contentious. For instance, Hu (2002) claims that CLT has failed to make the expected impact on ELT in China due to being in contradiction with Chinese learning culture dominated by Confucianism. Wei and Chen (2004) argue that CLT has failed to take account of the differences between first language acquisition and second language learning. Wei proposes the notion of the integration of a

Grammar-Translation method that 'allows the native language to assist the learners' cognitive understanding of the target language with CLT that requires using a target language to shape communicative competence in a target language context' (p.11). Other examples can be found in countries such as India, Pakistan, South Korea, Bangladesh, and Vietnam. For instance, Shamim (1996) found that her efforts to implement CLT were actually 'creating psychological barriers to learning' (p.109). Li (1998) and Kim (2006) identified that despite the attempt made by the South Korean government to promote CLT, CLT actually causes more difficulties than expected. Chowdhury (2003:285) identified that 'the popular theories from the West are incompatible in Bangladesh because of cultural differences between the West and Bangladesh'. Ellis (1996) suggested that western teachers should mediate between Vietnamese cultural values and CLT in a more careful way.

These interpretations have provoked a global debate on the appropriateness of CLT. Holliday (2005) argues that critiques of CLT can be divided into two distinct camps, namely, the political, postmodern, imperialism (hereafter referred to as 'PPI') camp, and the instrumental, modernist (hereafter referred to as 'IM') camp. The PPI camp is represented by Canagarajah, who tends to take up a position against the

localization of CLT from the perspective of pedagogical imperialism. Canagarajah (1999) argues that pedagogies are 'not received in their own terms, but appropriated to different degrees in terms of the needs and values of the local communities' (p.121-122). Whilst Pennycook considers that Western methodologies have been widely packaged and exported to the rest of the world, Canagarajah stresses that the 'possibility of the potential resistance to such methodologies might be even higher' (Pennycook,1999, Canagarajah, 1993, cited by Pennycook, 2001:118). This viewpoint was then developed by McKay (2003), who argued that 'CLT, while the most productive method, is not feasible in many countries because the local culture of learning tends to promote mechanical learning and a lack of individualism and creative thinking' (p.15). Ellis (1996) also feels uncertain about the likelihood of CLT as a globally appropriate approach. The IM camp is represented by Bax (2003), who advocates that CLT should be replaced by a Context Approach, as CLT fundamentally ignores the context in which the language teaching takes place. Bax argues against the message that 'the communicative approach is the way to do it, no matter where you are, no matter what the context' (2003:281). He stresses the importance of analyzing the learning context, including learning needs, expectations, strategies, classroom and institutional culture, national cultural, and so on. Bax's standpoint was criticized by Harmer

(2003), who asserted that methodology still plays a vital role in language teaching. Although Harmer shares Bax's view about the counter-productiveness of teachers' insensitivity towards contextual factors in terms of methodological implementation, he points out that Bax tended to build his argument on an assumption about the opposition between methodology and context.

Holliday (2005) then summarized that the arguments made by Canagarajah and Bax only touch upon the first two communicative principles. According to Holliday, they tend to blur the distinction between communicative principles and the 'specific methodology of the English-speaking Western TESOL 'learning group ideal[3]', as they presume CLT is 'in essence an English-speaking Western construct' (2005:144). Holliday denies the idea that the western origin of CLT is the crux of the reason why the approach is ideologically ill-fitting in different cultural contexts. He emphasizes that a perceptive understanding of the third principle (communicate with peripheral surroundings) provides a solid basis for an effective implementation and adaptation of the CLT approach, as, he claims, 'the presence of native-speakerist elements in the 'standard' communicative methodology does not mean that the deeper principles

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[3] 'Learning group ideal' comprises predominant attention to oral skills and group work. (Holliday, 2005:144)

from which it springs are also native-speakerist[4]' (2005:145).

Holliday's arguments highlight the risk of essentializing the conception of CLT and stereotyping the cultures of the countries where CLT originated and was imported from and to. Although Nunan (1998) argues it is the weak version of CLT that is prevalent and widely accepted as the standard practice of CLT, the richness of the theoretical background of CLT implies the importance for the approach to be more constructively contextualized in different teaching settings both at a socio-cultural level and at classroom level. In addition, it is important for the CLT practitioners to assume a post-method perspective towards the approach, as argued by Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001:2). For them, the communicative approach 'was explicitly a post-method approach to language teaching…in which the principles underlying different classroom procedures were of paramount importance, rather than a package of teaching materials' (cited by Bell, 2007:140). This argument reflects the inappropriateness of interpreting CLT as a static and context-free approach. In addition, Canagarajah, McKay, and Bax may have tended to neglect the potential contributions brought by CLT to the importing countries. This point is particularly

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[4] This notion is related to the concept of 'native-speakerism' that is defined by Holliday as "an established belief that 'native-speaker' teachers represent a 'Western culture' from which spring the ideals both of the English language and of English language teaching methodology". (Holliday, 2005:6)

emphasized by Larsen-Freeman (2002) who identifies the danger of exaggerating the negative side of imported methodology. She claims that 'we may fail to understand the cause of the problem and run the risk of overreacting overacting and losing something valuable in the process' (p.67).

In fact, there are a few works which reexamine the effectiveness of CLT, and the results reveal that CLT theories are partly reflected in teachers' teaching philosophy and actual practice. For instance, Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) present a study on Japanese LOTE[5] teachers' beliefs about CLT and CLT implementation in their classroom by looking into how their knowledge about CLT is acquired and developed. The results show that despite the identified challenges of CLT promotion (such as subject matter articulation, lack of institutional support, and lack of proficiency in the L2), the participants consider CLT as 'possible' and their practices reflect the 'tendency to use both CLT and traditional teaching aspects' (p.512). Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood and Son (2004) report that the participants in their research who claim to adopt CLT actually taught eclectically, since her understanding of CLT as shown in her practical theory is 'an amalgam of many features of CLT approaches and of general

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[5] LOTE: Teaching of foreign language or Languages Other Than English

teaching' (p.1). Pham (2007) launches a case study on teacher beliefs and use of CLT by three Vietnamese tertiary teachers. He finds out that although the participants feel 'ambivalent' about the techniques to realize the CLT principles, all the participants 'highlighted the potential usefulness of CLT, stressing that CLT primarily meant teaching students the language meaningful for their future life, and helping to improve the classroom atmosphere' (p.197). He finally draws the conclusion that CLT is a sort of 'unity within diversity' approach, and practitioners in Vietnam or elsewhere need to 'make further efforts to develop and generate, within the communicative approach, classroom techniques appropriate to their condition' (p.200).

The above findings suggest that the controversy about CLT does not negate the usefulness of the approach. In addition, they also show that there exists a tendency of eclecticism in teachers' practice. The eclectic mixing of CLT principles and traditional teaching methods reflects practitioners' quest for context-dependent methodology suitable for local cultures, and such a trend can be interpreted from a post-method perspective. This is because the above findings coincide with the results shown by the study carried out by Bell (2007), in which he took an in-depth look into teacher's beliefs on methods. Bell reports that most

participants in his study tended to 'equate post-method with eclecticism' (p.140), as they interpret a post-method approach as 'a freedom of combining all and any methods in their most effective combination in the teaching-learning process' rather than a concrete method (p.139-140). Moreover, it can be inferred that apart from the contextual element, the success of CLT implementation depends on other factors, such as teacher belief, linguistic competence in L2, national and institutional requirement. All these factors can actually affect practitioner's decision on their way of teaching in an influential way.

Up to this point, I have discussed CLT as appropriate methodology in different cultural settings by taking an in-depth look at theories of appropriate methodology and post-method pedagogy. I then discussed how these theories influence the application of communicative principles by identifying the interrelation between the two terms. This was followed by a discussion of CLT as appropriate methodology in different cultures, in which I examined the global effectiveness of CLT based on a number of published studies. I identified the importance of developing post-method and anti-essentialist perspectives on understanding the appropriateness of CLT as a context-dependent approach as well as pointing out other influential factors of CLT implementation. In the next section, I will take

an in-depth look at the debates on the appropriateness of CLT in mainland China. I will firstly provide a brief overview of its development in China, and this will be followed by a discussion in relation to its appropriateness in the Chinese EFL contexts from an anti-essentialist perspective. I will end the section by identifying the potential gaps for further research emerging from current debates and the extent to which this study might fill these research gaps.

2.3. CLT in mainland China

The CLT approach was first introduced to China in 1979 by two Canadian teachers and a Chinese teacher working at the Guangzhou (Canton) Foreign Languages Institute (Li, 1984). They assumed the responsibility of designing new materials based on the communicative approach for Chinese university English majors, and this project was named Communicative English for Chinese Learners (CECL). From then on, great efforts have been made by the Chinese government to implement CLT as a reform in the Chinese EFL world with the publication of several series of coursebooks incorporating a communicative perspective. A great step in this progression was the establishment of a Sino-British institutional development project – the DFID ELT project (Gu, 2004) – which was supported by the UK Department for International

Development and hosted in twenty-seven Chinese higher institutions under the joint administration of the British Council and the Chinese Ministry of Education from the late 1970s to 2001. This project aimed to promote CLT throughout China in the form of 'on-the-job counterpart training at Master's level'. The top-down movements gradually generated two contradictory standpoints towards CLT implementation in the Chinese EFL profession, represented by the works of Li (1984), Liao (2004) and Hu (2002, 2005).

Li's (1984) article entitled 'In defence of the communicative approach' is probably the earliest published work containing discussion of the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context, in which the author gave a detailed introduction of the CECL project in relation to its feasibility in China. She clarified three principles underlying 'communicative' activities: 1. real situations, real roles; 2. need, purpose, and substance for communication; 3. freedom and unpredictability. She emphasized the importance of authenticity of the situation and roles set up by communicative activities, as well as learners' cooperation in being both mentally and verbally active in communication situations. She identified the common pitfall fallen into by Chinese learners of English as incompetent communicators in responding with 'lumps of memorized

language' with no sensitivity to the context of communication (p.8). Li also argued that communicative practice is not receptive training; instead, it should take the unpredictability of communication into account. Based on these principles, Li argued that the CECL project can be distinguished from traditional syllabus design due to the following CLT features: aim to develop learner's competence in using 'authentic, global, and appropriate language from the very beginning' (p.6) via sufficient exposure to target language; learner-oriented and integrated course design with combined development of four skills; and transition of the language-learning process from 'quantitative increase' to 'qualitative change' (p.11). In Li's view, the aim of language education is not only to develop learners' communicative competence but to develop their potential and cultivate them as 'intelligent beings' to enable them to 'play a really useful role in international communication between cultures, which of course goes far beyond mere linguistic exchange'. In addition, Li pointed out that the 'knowledge-imparting plus disciplining theory' in the Chinese learning culture is the deep-rooted reason for resistance to CLT. She finally concluded that 'effective communication' is the key criterion for assessing learners' communicative competence (p.12), which relates to the factors of linguistic accuracy and sociolinguistic appropriacy.

Li shows a very good understanding of the essence of CLT as a learning-by-doing approach and the challenges faced in CLT implementation are well perceived by her as well. She pointed out the urgent needs to change the EFL situation in China, and identified the lack of CC (particularly the lack of language appropriacy) as the major problem of Chinese learners of English in general at that time. Her arguments speak well for her as an advocate and pioneer for CLT promotion in China, playing a central role in initiating a new era for the pedagogic development of Chinese EFL profession. Her work triggered heated debates on the compatibility between CLT and Chinese learning culture among Chinese theorists and practitioners with the rapid promotion of the approach in the nation at primary, secondary and tertiary levels. More recent and the most representative works in this area are those by Liao (2004) and Hu (2002, 2005).

Liao (2004) tends to interpret appropriate methodology as context-free. He asserts that CLT is best for China from an 'absolutist' perspective (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:182) and attempts to build on his arguments on the Chinese government's promotion of the approach. He argues against the importance of contextual factors in terms of the adoption of imported methodology by claiming that what is appropriate in the Chinese teaching

context is 'to teach in accordance with government requirements' (2004:271). In his view, the Chinese centralized educational system largely restricts the development of teacher autonomy in terms of adoption and adaptation of teaching approach. He declares that situational constraints (such as large class, grammar-based test, etc) can be tackled, as he finds out in his study carried out in 2003 which showed that an observed lesson given by a Chinese secondary school teacher is communicative (e.g. teaching functional language, pair / group work, communicative activities, etc). In addition, he claims that the findings suggest the teacher's understanding of CLT is clear and correct. Liao then identifies some reasons for the infeasibility of implementing Bax's Context Approach in China, including that Chinese teachers of English generally lack competence and time to analyze learning needs and adopt appropriate methodology; teachers' preference for CLT restricts   acceptance of a new approach; and the eclectic nature of the Context Approach is hard for practitioners to follow given that this approach fails to provide concrete design or procedure. Liao finally summarizes that the notion of 'relativism' proposed by Larsen-Freeman (2000) does not work in the Chinese EFL context.

Liao's standpoint is then trenchantly criticized by Hu (2005), who argues

that Liao's argument is based on 'a problematic assumption of CLT's universal effectiveness / appropriacy that ignores the diverse contexts of ELT in China' (p.65). Hu argues that maximizing the effectiveness and appropriateness of CLT cannot be achieved without taking cultural aspects into account. He pointes out that Liao's statements are 'specious, unconvincing and dogmatic' and show a poor understanding of what appropriate methodology actually is. Hu then strengthens his arguments by referring to his paper published in 2002 entitled 'Potential cultural resistance to pedagogical imports: the case of communicative language teaching in China', in which he contends that CLT has failed to achieve the expected influence on Chinese ELT due to its incompatibility with the nature of Chinese learning culture dominated by Confucian philosophy. He points out that this mismatch can be reflected in three aspects, namely, teacher and teaching, learner and learning, and learning strategies. In terms of the aspect of teacher and teaching, Hu argues that the teacher's role expected by CLT as 'facilitator' or 'negotiator' contradicts the traditional image of the Chinese teacher as an authoritative knowledge transmitter and decision-maker with a profound body of knowledge. In relation to the aspect of learner and learning, Hu argues that the incompatibility mainly lies in learning habits, as CLT emphasizes the learning process as interactive. Therefore, whereas CLT calls for learner's contribution of

being verbally active when performing authentic task-based activities, in the Chinese learning culture, it is the teacher's contribution which is appreciated most, as Chinese learners normally position themselves as passive knowledge receivers in conformity with textbook knowledge most of the time. Although Chinese learners might be mentally active in the classroom, they seldom challenge teacher authority in public in order to be respectful. Another major difference lies in the emphasis on the development of learning strategies. In order to encourage learners to use the target language for the purpose of real-time communication, CLT allows the existence of speculation during the process of learning as it pays less attention to formal errors as long as they do not interfere with meaning. This tolerance for ambiguity is considered to be largely in contradiction with the learning strategies commonly practiced in the Chinese learning culture descried by Hu as 4 R's and 4 M's. 4 R's stand for reception (students are expected to receive and retain the knowledge imparted by teachers and textbooks); repetition (repeatedly practice what they do not understand); review (reviewing what has been received and repeated is not only to consolidate learning but to gain new knowledge and to deepen understanding), and reproduction (accurately reproduce the transmitted textual knowledge on demand from the teacher or tests). The four M's stand for meticulosity (attention to the smallest details of knowledge),

memorization (memorize with understanding, which does not mean rote-learning), mental activeness (active mental analysis, questioning, discriminating and reflection), and mastery (no approximation to knowledge or pretension to understanding is tolerated). Nonetheless, Hu does emphasize that some elements of CLT (such as collaborative learning, authentic material use, and so on) can be integrated into Chinese pedagogic practice. Therefore, instead of excluding CLT from Chinese EFL, Hu calles for the emergence of an 'eclectic approach' that fundamentally conforms to the Confucian thinking of Chinese education.

Although the standpoints of Liao and Hu represent opinions at two opposite extremes on the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context, there is a tendency of essentialism in both their arguments, as both of them seem to conceive of CLT and Chinese learning culture as fixed entities. In philosophy, essentialism 'is the view that, for any specific kind of entity, there is a set of characteristics or properties all of which any entity of that kind must possess' and 'a generalization stating that certain properties possessed by a group (e.g. people, thing, ideas) are universal, and not dependent on context' (Wikipedia, accessed on 10 November, 2008). It presumes that 'particular things have essences which serve to identify them as the particular things that they are' (Bullock and Trombley,

1997:283, cited by Holliday, 2005:17). In addition, both Liao's and Hu's arguments are not strictly research-based. Instead, their arguments made seem to be grounded on personal assumptions, which to a great extent lower the validity and reliability of what they claim. These points serve as the a major basis for launching the present study.

In terms of stereotyping of CLT, as pointed out by Hu, Liao's rather dogmatic advocacy of CLT reflects his misinterpretation of appropriate methodology and of a central aspect of CLT – that it is learning-centered and context-dependent. His argument only touches upon Holliday's (2005) first communicative principle and fails to appreciate that contextual factors (both at broad cultural level and at classroom level) are vital for effective implementation of CLT, overlooking the variables in teaching context. Liao tends to interpret the classroom as a vacuum and considers teaching approaches as immune from cultural differences and complexity. His statement that 'in China the educational system is centrally controlled, with government specifying both the content and methodology of teaching…for China it can be argued that what is appropriate is that teachers should adopt CLT' is too arbitrary to be convincing and persuasive. This attitude reflects a superficial understanding of the interrelation between language teaching and culture, as he is unaware that

CLT highly values close cooperation between teacher and learner as co-contributors and the goal of the approach is actually geared to 'learner needs in a given context' (Savignon, 2006).

On the other hand, the declaration of an incompatibility between CLT and Chinese learning culture is a major deficiency of Hu's argument. Although Hu shows a good understanding of the CLT theories in his paper, he fails to interpret CLT from a post-method perspective, as he seems unaware that the approach is in fact not just context-dependent but context-adjustable as well, due to its flexible nature and the goal of being consistent with the learner needs in a particular context. The context not only includes the socio-cultural context at macro level, but more importantly, it includes the classroom context at micro level, as it is the principles underlying the actual classroom practice that reflect whether or not the classroom is CLT-oriented. Moreover, study of teacher's beliefs underlying the adopted principles can reveal practitioners' own, varied interpretations of CLT. This actually mirrors the very basis of post-method pedagogy – the development of teachers' sense of plausibility as well as the parameters of particularity, practicality and possibility.

The tendency of essentialism reflected in the interpretations of CLT

conveyed by Liao and Hu indicates that both of them fail to understand CLT as an approach with open and flexible nature. In addition, their arguments also indicate the danger of stereotyping this teaching approach as a fixed pedagogic entity. Unlike the concepts of 'methodology' and 'method' which represent a generalized set of teaching systems and procedures with fixed techniques and practices rationalized by a theoretical framework (Rogers, 2001; Xinmin and Adamson, 2003), an 'approach' or 'pedagogy' provides practitioners with the possibility of tailoring their ways of teaching to the needs of given teaching contexts. This is because 'approach' represents a language teaching philosophy that can be various in form during application (Rogers, 2001), and 'pedagogy' refers to 'the teacher's personal construction of beliefs and practices about teaching and learning' (Xinmin and Adamson, 2003:323). Kramsch and Sullivan (1996) raise concerns about the problem of stereotyping CLT from a pedagogic perspective. As they say, 'appropriate communicative language teaching in Hanoi [Vietnam]…might use the same pedagogic nomenclature as in London, but look very different in classroom practice.' (p.201). Therefore, it can be inferred that CLT is open to different ways of interpretation and implementation in different teaching contexts. Given the fact that not many studies have been undertaken to investigate how CLT is actually interpreted and implemented by L2 practitioners (Karavas-Doukas,

1996, Sato and Kleinsasser, 1999), it is my wish to contribute to this area by looking into how CLT is conceived of and promoted by Chinese tertiary English practitioners, based on their understanding of the actual difficulties encountered during its implementation in China.

The second reason for launching this study relates to the problem of stereotyping of Chinese learning culture and fixed images of the Chinese learner. This problem is mainly represented by Hu's conviction that CLT is culturally ill-fitting in the Chinese EFL context (2002, 2005). This viewpoint actually reflects what Holliday (2005) refers to as 'culturism[6]'. It should be noted that Chinese culture differs dramatically in different regions given the geographic complexity of the nation. However, Hu tends to stereotype Chinese culture in relation to Confucianism and fails to perceive the diversity, richness and dynamism of the changing social atmosphere nowadays under the circumstances of internationalization. Whilst some researchers (like Holliday, 2005 and Ge, 2005) express their concerns that ELT in China might be stereotyped by western educators due to their fixed impressions of Chinese learning culture labeled as involving 'passive learning', 'rote memorization' and 'mechanical accumulation of

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[6] The term 'culturism' is used to relate to any thought or act which reduces a person to something less than what she is according to an essentialist view of culture. Culturism constitutes essentialism (essentialist view of culture), a colonialist legacy (colonialist ideology), a generalized other and the other side (politics of Self and Other) and reification.　(Holliday, 2005:17-23)

language knowledge', it is worth noting that Chinese EFL educators themselves might be unable to appreciate the positive side of pedagogic innovation due to their own stereotyped understanding of the local culture. In addition, Hu's argument is merely concerned with the macro-level of the social context and ignores the influence exerted by the micro-level elements (regional / classroom culture). Importantly, it needs to be stressed that cultural sensitivity needs to relate not only to teaching methodology but also needs to involve a process of learning about language classroom as well (Holliday, 1994). In other words, the imported methodology cannot be well adapted without a perceptive interpretation of the uniqueness of particular language classrooms. In addition, Hu's arguments show a tendency of stereotyping Chinese learners as passive knowledge receivers rather than critical and independent thinkers:

> students should maintain a high level of receptiveness, wholeheartedly embracing the knowledge from their teacher or books…Chinese students tend to feel uneasy in a more egalitarian communicative learning environment and find it difficult to suspend their beliefs to engage in light-hearted learning activities on the one hand and critical self-expression on the other.
>
> (2002:100)

Hu's stance regarding Chinese learning culture and Chinese learners can

be challenged by some recent studies on the changing climate of Chinese learning culture and the image of Chinese learners of English. For instance, Kumaravadivelu (2003) questioned the tendency in TESOL to culturally stereotype learners from Asia. Nichol (2003) reported that learners' cultural identity may lead to practitioners' misunderstanding of their ability in critical thinking. Chalmers and Volet (1997) criticized some authors for stereotyping students from South-East Asia as 'rote and passive learners' who adopt a 'surface approach to learning' (p.88, 90). Littlewood (2000) questioned the stereotyped image of Asian students as obedient listeners. Coverdale-Jones (2006) and Clark and Gieve (2006) respectively identified the phenomenon of problematizing Chinese learners as 'passive, lacking critical thinking, reliant on simplistic rote memorization strategies' and the frequent attribution of these traits to a Confucian model of learning. They called for the need to reflect on the 'appropriateness and effectiveness of the conceptual frameworks in which these identities have been created' (Clark and Gieve, 2006:54). Ha (2004) argued that there can be 'much more going on under the surface in respect to terms such as 'rote learning', or being an 'authoritarian' teacher'' (p.52). Cortazzi and Jin (2006:14) argued that there are some 'new emphases in ELT in China', which include the following aspects: 1.more learner-centered through the analysis of learning experiences and learning strategies; 2.more chances

for active participation to develop learner's team-work spirit and competence in using language for practical purposes; 3.trying to develop learner's critical and evaluative thinking and keeping learner highly motivated (p.15); 4.cultivating learner's intercultural communicative competence and intercultural competence and becoming transnational beings. They also pointed out that 'Confucian-heritages learning culture' as labeled by Biggs (1996), is partially interpreted. This is because apart from emphasizing the teacher's role as a respectable knowledge transmitter and the hierarchical relationship between teacher and learner, it also contains the 'strong traditional elements of the student's own efforts, the need for reflective thinking and independent interpretation, for internalization of understanding, and putting what is learnt into practice' (p.12). This point was also emphasized by Shi (2006), who argued that the 'multi-dimensionality of Confucianism often fails to be recognized' (p.124). Shi questions Hu's interpretation of Confucianism by comparing his arguments with those 'drawing closely on The Analects' in terms of six aspects, namely, attitude towards education and learning, how to learn, teacher-student relationship, the model of traditional Chinese education, the focus of teaching and the purpose of learning. She pinpoints that, different from Hu's interpretation, Confucianism actually promotes edutainment and encourages learner to think critically and independently

through a 'heuristic' teaching philosophy. Confucianism values the equal relationship between teacher and learner, and emphasizes the importance of both textbook knowledge and real life experiences. It considers the ultimate goal of learning as being 'to act virtuously and cultivate a moral character' (p.126-127). Shi claims that she shares the view that Chinese learners are actually 'valuing active and reflexive thinking, open-mindedness and a spirit of inquiry (Chan, 1997; Cheng, 2002; Jones, 1999; Lee, 1996; Watkins & Biggs, 2001; cited by Shi, 2006:125). She reports that the findings of her study suggest Chinese learners are 'critical of their teachers, learning materials / environment and themselves'. Xinmin and Adamson (2003) launched a study in which they looked into the pedagogy of a 'traditional' Chinese secondary school teacher. The findings suggest that the stereotypical image of Chinese teachers of English as 'transmitters of grammatical knowledge, bound by textbooks' portrayed in the literature can be challenged due to the efforts made by the participant to 'reconcile his pedagogy with the innovative methodology in a context constrained by examination requirements and the pressure of time' (p.323). They finally drew the conclusion that the stereotyped perception of a particular teaching and learning culture can result in a failure to 'capture the dynamic nature of pedagogy as a personal construct forged by the interplay of beliefs, experiences and practice, and contextual

factors operating at the micro-level (the chalkface) and at the macro-level (state policy)' (p.323). The findings of this paper seem to be supported by similar work in other countries such as Vietnam. Ha (2004) reported that he found out the two Vietnamese university teachers of English participating in his research tried hard to incorporate new ideas into their teaching practice, taking account of the cultural context of the classroom. He argued that the ways they taught did not 'conform to the cultural stereotype' of being 'deficient and imposing, didactic and backward, following an "empty vessel" teaching method' as reflected in the perceptions of the teaching style of Eastern EFL practitioners held by many Westerners (p.50).

The above interpretations show the inappropriateness and judgementalness of attributing the challenges of CLT encountered during its implementation in China to the reason of its being culturally ill-fitting due to Confucianism rooted in Chinese culture. On the contrary, as suggested by Shi, Confucianism can be considered harmonious with the major features of CLT so that Chinese learning culture actually provides sufficient conditions for CLT promotion in the Chinese EFL context. Although Shi's stance seems to imply the feasibility of CLT implementation in China, nevertheless, the opposition between the

arguments made by Hu and Shi itself reflects the possibility of interpreting Confucianism differently. This point further indicates the inappropriateness of labeling a particular culture without appreciating its diversity and being open to various interpretations. Importantly, it should be stressed that the feasibility of CLT implementation in China does not necessarily mean the approach should be adopted by every Chinese teacher of English in a compulsory way. Although the Chinese government has attached great importance to its promotion from its introduction, and the new emphases of the Chinese EFL profession and the results of some studies indicate that CLT does have a lot of things to offer to China, teachers should be considered to have autonomy to tailor their own lessons and decide the way of teaching based on their understanding of learners' expectations, needs, and just as importantly, their English proficiency. This is because a teacher's beliefs always plays a decisive role in decisions on the way of teaching, as argued by Pajares (1992): 'beliefs are far more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organize and define tasks and problems and are stronger predictors of behavior' (p.311). Perhaps one key to successful implementation of CLT might fundamentally rest in Chinese teachers' English proficiency, as it cannot be denied that the CC and IC that CLT aim to develop and enhance greatly challenges the English competence of non-native speakers of

English in general in terms of linguistic correctness and socio-cultural acceptability and appropriateness. Hutchinson and Waters (1984:108) also argued that, 'an essential attribute of the communicative approach is that methodology is geared not only to the competence but also to the 'expectations of those participating in the learning process'. The complexity of this issue highlights the importance of carrying out an investigation into the effectiveness of CLT in China at tertiary level to reveal the obstacles encountered during its implementation and explore the extent to which obstacles can be tackled with adjustments made to accommodate CLT with the local needs of Chinese EFL practitioners. By studying the reasons underlying any adjustments made by practitioners, the study will aim to find out the extent to which the difficulties of CLT implementation are at a cultural level, as well as the actual teaching philosophies held by Chinese EFL practitioners at tertiary level.

Apart from stereotyping of CLT and Chinese learning culture, the third problem in the arguments made by Liao and Hu is that both of them seem to ignore the endeavours made by Chinese practitioners to implement CLT, with resulting overgeneralization in relation to the process of CLT promotion in China. Both Hu (2002, 2005) and Liao (2005) fail to provide solid evidence for supporting their standpoints, which leave the general

impression that their statements seem to be based on personal assumptions, lowering the validity and reliability of the arguments they make. Actually, there have been a number of research studies conducted in this area. For instance, Rao launched case study research in 2002 in which he investigated Chinese university English-major students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classrooms dominated by the CLT approach. He reports the major difficulties perceived by Chinese university learners of English (such as lack of motivation for communicative competence due to the EFL rather than ESL situation in China, teacher-centered learning styles, and lack of funding), and suggests a combination of communicative and non-communicative activities could be an eclectic way to meet the learning needs of Chinese learners. Rao also identifies the importance of clarifying fundamental misconceptions about CLT (such as exclusion of grammar-teaching, overemphasis of oral / aural competence, etc). This stance is reemphasized by Jin, Singh and Li (2005), who presented a paper entitled 'Communicative language teaching in China: misconceptions, applications and perceptions' at the AARE' 05 Education Research Conference.[7] They report the findings of an empirical study conducted in 2002 in a Chinese college non-English-major reading class using communicative reading

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[7] AARE: the Australian Association for Research in Education; by Jin, Singh and Li (2005)

activities to facilitate learners' vocabulary acquisition, and demonstrate the feasibility of adopting a communicative approach in such classes. Learners are divided into two contrastive groups, and four classes are taught with the communicative approach (C group) and the other four with the grammar-translation method (G group). C group classes are then introduced to three kinds of activities, namely, warm-up activities, reading activities (including predictive and jigsaw activities) and follow-up activities. After a two-semester experiment, both groups are given the same listening and reading tests, and the findings show that the overall score achieved by C group students is higher than G group students.

Compared with the volume of work highlighting incompatibility between CLT and Chinese learning culture, the amount of research defending the appropriateness of CLT may be not substantial enough to demonstrate the positive impact brought by the approach in the Chinese EFL context. Nevertheless, all the efforts made to maximize CLT's pedagogical effectiveness should by no means be ignored or underestimated despite the fact that the traditional ways of teaching (such as grammar-translation) are still widely adopted and may be considered most productive by the majority of Chinese teachers. For instance, Rao (1996) reports that there still exists the tendency to perceive communicative activities as divorced

from serious learning in China, as most Chinese teachers of English believe 'only by emphasizing linguistic details can they expect to help their students pass the standard discrete-point, structurally based English examinations' (p.504). He points out that repetition and reviewing strategies are widely used by Chinese learners at the expense of social strategies and 'the strategies leading to the improvement of communicative skills' due to the pressures exerted by the Chinese examination system. He argues that CLT is not appropriate for all Chinese learners and highlights the urgent need to 'reconcile the Grammar-translation Method with CLT to promote strategies that lead to a greater emphasis on communication' (p.505). Ding (2007) reports that text memorization and imitation are valued as the most useful methods of learning English by three winners of nationwide English speaking competitions and debate tournaments in China. Gu and Schweisfurth (2006) claim that although the participants in Sino-British ELT projects (which aim to promote CLT in China) show positive attitudes towards CLT, traditional approaches still take up a key role in their teaching. However, they emphasize that the exposure to CLT enabled project participants to 'review critically their traditional teaching approaches as well as the appropriateness of Western innovations' (p.80). These arguments highlight the significance of seeking an eclectic approach appropriate to particular teaching settings (mainly based on practitioners'

understanding of learner's expectations, needs, and English proficiency), aiming to avoid the tendency for extremeness in terms of pedagogic development in China. The point emerging here serves as the third reason for launching this study, as it is worth looking at how communicative principles and traditional teaching methods are eclectically and effectively mixed by Chinese practitioners with a view to discovering extent to which CLT can be conducive to maximizing the overall effectiveness of EFL in the Chinese context in general.

In this section, I have critically discussed the situation of CLT in mainland China. I firstly navigated through the development of CLT in China from a historical perspective, and followed this by introducing the most representative works in relation to the debate on the appropriateness of CLT in this context. I then identified three major problems existing in the arguments of these works, namely, stereotyping of CLT, stereotyping of Chinese culture of learning and Chinese learners, and the tendency to overgeneralize regarding the process of CLT promotion in China. I discussed the extent to which CLT could possibly contribute to Chinese EFL, and argued that CLT and the Confucianism rooted in the Chinese learning culture were fundamentally harmonious with each other. I also argued that the pragmatic difficulties of CLT implementation were more

likely to be at cognitive and technical levels (e.g. teacher's beliefs, teachers' English proficiency, and learners' preference for traditional learning strategies) rather than at a cultural level. Given that the traditional teaching and learning habits still persist, I agreed with the view of Hu (2002) that it is of paramount importance for Chinese practitioners to develop an eclectic awareness of EFL teaching in order to accommodate the changing climate of Chinese EFL nowadays and the particular learning needs of given contexts. I also expressed my agreement with Hu's (2002) idea about the necessity for the Chinese EFL profession to seek an eclectic approach that is culturally appropriate and adaptable. Nevertheless, I also assumed the starting assumption that CLT can have its place in China, as I argued that the approach can be more constructively reinterpreted and tailored from a post-method and anti-essentialist perspective. I identified three major problems that lead me to undertake this study, namely, stereotyping of CLT, stereotyping of Chinese learning culture and Chinese learners, and overgeneralization regarding the process of CLT promotion in China.

2.4. Current research gaps

Apart from the above-mentioned reasons, there exists a research gap in this field, as few studies have been carried out to take an in-depth look into the

appropriateness of CLT from practitioners' perspective through an investigation of teachers' beliefs about CLT and actual teaching practice in the Chinese tertiary EFL context. It needs to be emphasized that teacher beliefs can significantly affect practice, as argued by Tsui (2003): 'teachers' disciplinary knowledge often has a decisive influence on the process, content and quality of their instruction' (p.55). In addition, as argued by Kumaravadivelu (2003:540), 'adequate attention has not been given to a pedagogic area that matters most: classroom methodology', and he called for a 'systematic attempt to explore possible methodological means to decolonize English language teaching'. In addition, Richards and Rogers (1986:82) identified that 'how to implement CLT principles at the level of classroom procedures remains central to discussions of the communicative approach'. The earliest work done in this field was the research carried out by Mitchell (1988), who looked into the perceptions of CC held by 59 foreign language teachers. She finally concluded that the teaching philosophy regarding second language acquisition was different from the general CLT principles.

It was not until mid-90s that this issue regained the attention. Karavas-Doukas (1996) and Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) both pointed out that few studies have been undertaken to look into how well CLT is

perceived and adopted. But from then on, this research gap has been paid increasing attention by some theorists and practitioners in different countries.

Mangubhai, Dashwood, Berthold, Flores, and Dale (1998) launched a study in Australia to look into the perceptions and beliefs about CLT of 39 LOTE teachers via questionnaire and follow-up interviews. The findings suggest that the participants' understanding of CLT were incompatible with the CLT theories in the literature. Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) carried out research exploring the conceptions of CLT possessed by 10 Japanese primary teachers working in Queensland via interview and observation. The findings suggest that the participants' perception of CLT largely reflect the misunderstandings of CLT as identified by Thompson (1996) and their actual practice is grammar-teaching-oriented and failed to reflect CLT principles. Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood, Son (2004) carried out an exploratory study in Australia to take an in-depth look into the practical theory of one teacher who claimed to adopt CLT approach in her class, via interviews. The findings suggest that the basic CLT principles are well incorporated into the informant's teaching practice, and the conveyed interpretation of CLT is found to be largely consistent with those appearing in the literature on CLT.

A more recent work in this field is the research carried out by Pham. Pham (2007) launched a case study on teachers' beliefs and use of CLT at a university in Vietnam. Based on the findings gained from interviews and observations, Pham concludes that the participants actually embraced CLT as they 'espouse firmly the primary goal of CLT – to teach students to be able to use the language' (p.200). He also identifies that despite the efforts made to apply CLT principles to their teaching, the participants encounter a number of difficulties such as traditional examinations, large class sizes, classroom relationship between teacher and learner, learners' low motivation and incompetence in independent learning, and teacher's incompetence in creating communicative activities. Nevertheless, Pham's study is comparatively small-scale, as the research is carried out at one university with the number of participants totaling three. In addition, Pham does not make clear in his paper what sort of adjustments were made by the practitioners to tailor CLT to be more appropriate in the local context, nor does he specify how the practitioners actually encountered the identified difficulties and the extent to which CLT can be conducive to enhancing teaching effectiveness in particular contexts.

The present research aims to uncover more insights in these areas. In short, given the fact that studies on practitioners' understanding and knowledge

in relation to CLT are not substantial and few studies in this field have yet been carried out in the Chinese context at tertiary level, I decided to launch a study to investigate these areas an exploratory fashion, from the bottom up. My intention was to elicit Chinese teachers' voices, exploring their opinions on the effectiveness and appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese tertiary EFL context through an investigation of their understandings of CLT and their actual teaching practice.

In addition, I decided that the participants of this study should all be Chinese tertiary teachers of English with the experience of teacher education overseas. I am interested in finding out the extent to which these teachers consider their intercultural experience conducive to enhancing their teaching proficiency and effectiveness in terms of CLT implementation. This is because comparing with Chinese teachers with no intercultural experience and expatriate teachers of English teaching in China, this group of practitioners is likely to understand the appropriateness of CLT from both sides. In support of this opinion, Jin (2005) identified in her paper entitled 'Which is better in China, a local or a native English-speaking teacher?' that native-speaker norms are no longer accepted by Chinese university students as the only criterion for choosing teachers. She argues that Chinese students nowadays tend to pay

more attention to practitioners' knowledge of target language both at linguistic and cultural levels despite the fact that native-speaker teachers are still greatly preferred due to 'more reliable linguistic knowledge and a better model of standard pronunciation' (p.45). Jin concludes that the best solution to get rid of Chinese learners' 'blind adoration of native-speaker norms' is to 'raise learners' awareness of the existence of a whole range of local varieties of English worldwide' (p.45). In addition, Jin identifies that teacher professional development is of paramount importance in China. As she argues, 'educating Chinese teachers is more important and more realistic than seeking native-speaker teachers from outside…exposing such teachers [Chinese teachers] to updated research in ELT and World Englishes is a necessity to enhance their awareness of their own value' (p.45). Additionally, Gu (2004) argues that intercultural experience can exert significant influence on Chinese EFL practitioners in terms of professional enhancement. She identifies that being exposed to different cultures can considerably raise a teacher's awareness of the vital role played by cultural and contextual factors from a pedagogic perspective. In addition, she claims that intercultural experience can 'induce a more rational view of teaching and learning practice, and a more balanced attitude towards tradition versus innovation' (p.13). The arguments made by both Jin and Gu pinpoint the urgency and necessity of teacher education

overseas. However, there is a lack of studies in the literature that systematically look into the teaching effectiveness of Chinese teachers with teacher education overseas through an investigation of their teaching philosophy and actual teaching practice. As argued by Fullan (1982:107), 'educational change depends on what teachers think and do – it is as simple and as complex as that'.

Finally, the effectiveness of CLT implementation specifically at tertiary level is very much under-researched in China given the fact that the approach is not as popular with university teachers as with primary teachers (Zhu, 2003).

With a general interest in the role of CLT as appropriate methodology in the Chinese context (and with specific concerns regarding tendencies to stereotype CLT, Chinese learning culture and learners, and the process of CLT implementation in China, as detailed above), I therefore intend to take an in-depth look into the extent to which Chinese tertiary level practitioners consider their overseas education has actually changed their teaching practice and has been conducive to enhancing their teaching performance in terms of CLT implementation. The study aims to find out how these teachers with intercultural experience interpret CLT as

appropriate methodology in the Chinese tertiary EFL context.

2.5. Justification of research questions

The overall research problem is broken down into the following three research questions, and I will provide a brief rationale for these questions in this final section before turning to the methodology of the study in the next chapter.

RQ.1. 'What are the conceptions of CLT held by Chinese tertiary teachers of English with overseas experience of teacher education?'

This question aims to find out the extent to which their overseas experience of teacher education has enabled teachers to develop a thorough understanding of CLT from a pedagogic perspective. It aims to find out how CLT is described as a working definition in a Chinese tertiary EFL context and the extent to which the conveyed interpretations of CLT reflect the problems of stereotyping and misinterpretation as identified in the current literature.

RQ.2. '**To what extent do these teachers perceive CLT as appropriate in the Chinese EFL context?'**

This question intends to discover teachers' general attitudes towards CLT

application in the Chinese tertiary EFL context based on their understanding of appropriate methodology, and in the light of their intercultural experience. This will also lead to an exploration of the underlying reasons beneath their explanations, revealing the most encountered difficulties during the process of CLT implementation.

RQ.3. 'Do Chinese tertiary teachers of English with overseas experience of teacher education attempt to adopt or adapt CLT? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?'

This question aims to investigate the extent to which teachers with intercultural experience change their teaching practice in relation to CLT implementation and adjustment. It aims to find out how the difficulties identified in the RQ2 are technically challenged, how teaching is therefore geared towards helping learners to develop their communicative competence, and the extent to which the applied techniques reflect the general CLT principles and are considered as effective and useful. The findings for this question will, it is hoped, provide a general basis for the development of a framework for a context-dependent Chinese culture-oriented CLT version of CLT.

In the next chapter, I turn to the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY – RESEARCH DESIGN, DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

3.1. Introduction

To explain how I set about answering the research questions proposed, in this chapter I shall firstly explain the choice of research methods for the study. I shall then explain how this research was organized and developed through a description of the instruments and procedures of data collection for the pilot study and main study. This will be followed by a brief introduction of the research settings and a detailed description of the participants for both studies. In addition, I shall briefly explain the reasons for adjusting data collection methods for the main survey based on the problems encountered in the pilot study. Validity and ethical issues will also be considered. I shall end this chapter with the procedure adopted for qualitative analysis. An overview of all the themes and categories emerging from the data analysis will also be provided.

3.2. Choice of methodology

3.2.1. Theory behind the approach

This is a wholly qualitative research study within the paradigm of social constructivism and the tradition of case study. The choice of adopting the

case study approach within the paradigm of constructivism in this study is due to the following reasons. In the first place, as argued by Stake (1995), case study can be interpreted as 'the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances' (Bassey, 1999:27). In addition, it allows the people within their own culture to experience unique situations vicariously through the description portrayed by researchers (see Gomn, Hammersley, Fosler, 2000). Therefore, the adoption of case study approach will be helpful in creating a path through the complexity caused by the diversity of variables generated from data collection in universities at different academic levels in different regions of China. This will enable me to explore the divergences existing in participants' teaching styles from a pedagogical perspective as well as to seek out the unity in diversity in terms of the adjustments made to localize CLT in the Chinese EFL context at tertiary level in general. Secondly, the 'strong in reality' nature of case study (Nunan, 1992:78) reminds me of the danger of overgeneralization throughout the investigation. Although instrumental case study calls for the responsibility of investigators to screen the cases to maximize the possibility of generalization (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), the distinctions between participants should be noted due to the uniqueness caused by the effects such as individuality, institutional culture, regional difference, and

so on. Thirdly, I agree with the argument put forward by Roberts (1988) that teachers should be considered within a social constructivist approach as 'social beings' and teaching as a 'social activity bearing distinctive meanings and values in specific socio-cultural context' (Roberts, 1988, cited in Gu, 2004:1).

3.2.2. Validity in this research

Nevertheless, it should be noted that being labeled as a 'doubting game' by Bailey (1991:70), the case study tradition has long been queried regarding its internal and external validity (Brown and Rodgers, 2002) due to being too subjective and lacking the ground for generalization. This is because case studies might involve quite a lot of personal judgement of the researchers who collect the data from insiders' perspective. I intend to tackle this problem by enhancing the credibility of the study through the coverage of the issues of external validity, internal validity and triangulation, and ethics.

3.2.2.1. External validity

Miles and Huberman (1994:262) argued that validity can be considerably secured by the provision of a specific "Procedural Account of the Analysis". This kind of account can be useful to readers and help their

judgement regarding the relevance of the findings to their own situations

(Seale, 1999). Holliday (2001) also claims that the reliability and validity

of research can be greatly enhanced by qualitative methods that include a

concrete and detailed description of data collection strategies and a

clarification of the appropriateness to the particular cultural setting.

Therefore, with a view to assuring external validity of this study, in

sections which follow (3.4.1., 3.4.2., 3.6.1., 3.6.2), I will present a full

description of research settings as well as the profile of participants for the

pilot study and the main survey. Emphasis will be laid on reporting the

procedure of data collection. Data will then be descriptively analyzed in

order to minimize the effect caused by subjective evaluation. An overview

of all the themes and categories emerging will be provided in order to

render a general picture of data analysis. The interview transcripts (see

appendix (2)) can further enhance the external validity of this research.

Given that the majority of Chinese universities are under the

administration of public educational system, this research was conducted

at four public Chinese universities in different regions.

3.2.2.2. Internal validity and triangulation

Internal validity is defined by Silverman (2000) as "the true value of a

piece of research", reflecting authenticity of the reported data. The extent

to which the interpretation of the gathered data conforms to reality is a major concern of many researchers. Despite the argument made by Miles and Huberman (1994) that internal validity and external validity actually share some similarity in relation to certain criteria, triangulation is a concept of particular importance in terms of the understanding of internal validity. This is because the validity of a research can be secured by triangulation of data as the same research question can be looked into by adopting various data sources and methods of analysis. In this study, data were collected with the instruments of interview and classroom observation, and the generated data will be qualitatively analyzed.

3.2.2.3. Ethical issues

Informed consent and confidentiality are considered as two very important issues in educational qualitative research (Kent, 2000; Baez, 2002; Burgess, 1989; Fraendel, 1990). In this research, I tended to tackle the issues by abiding by the five elements proposed by Kent (2000), namely, information, understanding, voluntariness, competence of potential participants, actual consent to participate, and aiming to protect the ethical principle of autonomy.

Given that this research was not meant to be conducted at the university I

previously worked in due to some personal reasons, how to get access to other universities and establish my credibility turned out to be a serious concern to me before launching the pilot study. I therefore contacted my former supervisor in Shanghai who introduced me to his friends working at different universities in China. I contacted these people mainly through telephone and briefly explained my research to them. In addition, a written application for launching the research was submitted to them via fax. The application, which was written in Chinese, consisted of three parts, namely, an outline introduction of my research topic (including the aim of the study, the research questions, research methods and procedure of data collection); requirements of participants; confidentiality and anonymity. As a result, I was able to carry out the pilot study at Yangzhou University, and was then granted access to Yangzhou University, Fudan University, Sun,Yat-Sen University and Peking University to launch the main survey. When I arrived in each research setting, I contacted the English department first and asked for the teachers' profile and the teaching timetable. I then called the potential informants whose qualifications matched the requirements of this study to enquire about their interest in participating. For those who agreed to participate, I confirmed with them about the time and classroom for observation and interview. All the participants were told that both the observation and interview would be recorded, and reassured that their

identities would not be disclosed since pseudonyms would be used in my report in order to protect their privacy. I gained verbal consent from most of them. For those who decided to drop out or declined to be interviewed or observed, their wish was respected.

3.3. Instruments

3.3.1. Interview

The interview is argued by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) as the best means to access the minds of research subjects so that their knowledge, information, values, preferences, attitudes and beliefs could be reflected. Moreover, it is considered as a useful tool to test hypotheses and follow up certain unanticipated outcomes. The reason why I think the interview method is particularly appropriate for this study is mainly due to the fact that the research questions basically set out to investigate the cognitive aspects of knowledge such as 'conception' or 'perception', which would be too abstract to be quantified with questionnaire. Furthermore, semi-structured interview can help to enhance the interview dynamics (Arksey and Knight, 1999), and to ensure the coverage rate of main points through approximately equivalent question and time distribution to each interviewee with proper listening and prompt techniques. Therefore, the semi-structured interview was adopted as the

key method of data collection in this study. All the participants were individually interviewed, and the interviews were carried out in Chinese, aiming to encourage informants to express themselves in an open and flexible way (Yang, 1999; Rao, 2002). Each interview was then transcribed in Chinese at first and summarized in English, aiming to facilitate the data coding with rough categories. In the following part of this section, I would like to provide the structuring of the interview questions adopted in the pilot study. Slight changes were made to the interview questions for the main study and the adjustment will be mentioned afterwards. Only two informants were interviewed before the observations due to a change of time arrangement in the main study, and the rest interviews (including those in the pilot study) were all carried out after the observations.

Rationale of interview questions

Pre-observation interview questions

Questions 1 to 3 are warm-up questions, aiming to establish the acquaintance between the researcher and the informant as well as to create a detailed profile of the respondents.

1. How long have you been teaching English? How long have you been working at this university? Did you teach English at other institutions before?

2. What sort of overseas experience of teacher education do you have?

3. How would you evaluate your overseas learning experience?

Questions 4 to 9 are derived from research question 1 **'What are the conceptions of CLT held by Chinese tertiary teachers of English with overseas experience of teacher education?'**

4. In your view, what is good language teaching?

(Preliminary question -- for the main study but not the pilot study; see 3.5.)

5. When did you first know about CLT? (If before going abroad, the follow-up question would be 'did your overseas learning experience actually change your perception of CLT? How do you understand it? If after going abroad, the follow-up question would be 'how do you understand CLT now?)

6. Could you briefly describe one or two typical activities in a CLT classroom?

7. What roles do you think teachers and learners should play respectively in a CLT classroom?

8. What sort of teaching techniques do you think are related to CLT?

9. Suppose you are asked by your colleagues to talk about CLT based on your experience of teacher education overseas, how would you convey your interpretation of CLT?

Question 4 is a transitional question, aiming to explore the extent to which the informant's overseas background changes one's interpretation of CLT. Questions 5 to 9 intend to investigate the informant's conception of CLT by looking into their understanding of the general features of CLT in terms of roles of teacher and learner, the employment of specific activities, teaching techniques and classroom management skills.

Questions 10 to 13 are derived from research question 2 '**To what extent do these teachers perceive CLT as appropriate in the Chinese EFL context?'**

10. To what extent do you think your classroom is CLT-oriented?

11. Have you made any particular efforts to make your classroom CLT-oriented?

12. Do you think those efforts are helpful?

13. Do you think it is appropriate for Chinese tertiary teachers of English to be able to teach communicatively?

Questions 10 and 11 aim to find out the extent to which CLT is considered to be adaptable to the Chinese learning culture by looking into the particular ways the approach is adopted, whereas questions 12 and 13 make further probes into the extent to which CLT is reckoned to be

effective and helpful. By investigating the particular efforts made to elevate the effectiveness and appropriateness of the approach, I felt I would be able to get a general picture of any perceived mismatch between CLT principles and Chinese perception of appropriate methodology, which would serve as a basis for establishing a Chinese-culture-oriented CLT model subsequently.

The final series of questions are derived from research question 3 '**Do Chinese tertiary teachers of English with overseas experience of teacher education attempt to enhance learner's competence in English via CLT adoption and adaptation? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?'**

14. Do you think you have changed your way of teaching with your overseas teacher education?

15. In what ways did you find you had to adapt things you learned overseas in the Chinese context?

16. How do you describe your overall teaching approach?

17. How do you decide on your way of teaching?

18. In your opinion, what are the main challenges faced by Chinese ELT profession at tertiary level? How would you attempt to take these challenges with your overseas teacher education background in terms of

teaching methodology?

19. What aspects of CLT have you adopted and adapted in your practice?

20. What sort of suggestions would you like to give to the Chinese teachers who would like to adopt CLT in the Chinese context at tertiary level?

21. Compared with expatriate teachers and your local counterparts with no intercultural experience in English speaking countries, what are the main advantages do you think you have?

The data generated from these questions were intended to reflect the particular ways that the CLT principles are applied to Chinese EFL contexts by local teachers with intercultural experience. Questions 14 to 19 intended to investigate the extent to which the informant considers him or herself to be able to teach communicatively. By looking into one's particular way of teaching and the reason of adopting such a way of teaching, I felt I would be able to develop an in-depth understanding of any fundamental reasons of incompatibility between CLT and Chinese learning culture as well as to see whether CLT matches the learning needs of Chinese university students. I also aimed to get to know the effectiveness of the specific strategies formulated by the informant to cope with any such mismatch. Question 20 is a suggestive question, aiming to

explore the informant's general attitude towards the implementation and adaptation of CLT in Chinese EFL context at tertiary level. Question 21 aims to find out the extent to which the informant considers one's intercultural background enables them to teach effectively from a more general perspective.

Post-observation interview questions

The following questions aimed to make further clarifications or prompts based on data collected from classroom observation (in a kind of 'stimulated recall' procedure).

1. I've watched one (or two) lessons of your class. Taking the lesson as a whole, what areas were your satisfied with? And what areas were your less satisfied with?

2. How satisfied were you with the students' performance?

3. Do you think my presence as an observer somewhat effected the lessons?

4. When I observed your class, I noticed that you did (…e.g. activities / techniques, etc) happened, why did you do this? What would happen if you did it differently?

5. In what ways is your lesson related to CLT?

6. Do you teach some other courses? Could you briefly describe your

way of teaching these courses? How do you describe your teaching

approach of these courses?

7.   In your view, what should be the overall goal of teaching English in

higher education?

3.3.2. Classroom observation

Open observation was adopted as a supplementary method in this research

for the purpose of triangulation, aiming to maximize reliability of the data

obtained from the interview. As argued by Tuckman (1988), respondents

might deliberately chime in with the researcher by providing the

anticipated answers to their questions, which can in fact deviate from their

real teaching practice (Cohen and Manion, 1989).

There were nineteen observations carried out in this research, with three

for the pilot study and sixteen for the main study. Only one participant was

observed twice (in the pilot study) and the rest were all observed once. All

of the observations were permitted to be audio recorded, and they covered

a wide range of course modules open to either English majors (hereafter

referred to as 'E') or non-English majors (hereafter referred to as 'NE').

Most observed lessons lasted around 100 minutes in length. All the lessons

were observed openly, and each time I sat in the back row, aiming to

minimize the effects caused by my presence as stranger. A descriptive system was adopted as observation instrument, with the preset categories of date and time, school, year level, major, teacher, class size, coursebook and page number, complementary material, observation number, topic and classroom lay-out. Fieldnotes were jotted down during the observations based on the categories of time, activity and notes. After each observation, I listened to the recording as soon as possible and combined the data with the fieldnotes to make a full description followed up by a short summary. This process helped me to reorganize my thoughts and recall what happened in the observed lessons. It should be noted that one observed lesson in the main survey was a linguistic course at MA level, with student presentations (on Code Switching and Bilingualism) throughout the session. Given that there was no teaching activity in this class, the gathered data will not be analyzed.

3.3.3. Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed based on the interview questions (see appendix 1) and therefore contained lots of open-ended questions. It worked as a backup just in case some participants were reluctant to be interviewed. 4 copies were distributed in the main study and 1 was returned. The returned questionnaire contained answers which were rather

simple and superficial, so the questionnaire will not be analyzed. Nevertheless, the observation data gathered from this participant will still be used in data analysis.

3.4. The pilot study

The pilot study was carried out in early March, 2007 at Yangzhou University, located in the Jiangsu province in China. Two teachers participated in the pilot study. Both of them were interviewed and observed, and one was observed twice. Data were collected within a week (from 5 March to 10 March).

(Participants: 2;   Interviews: 2;   Observations: 3)

3.4.1. Research setting for pilot study

Yangzhou University (hereafter referred to as 'YZU') was founded in 1902. It is a key comprehensive public university at provincial level, with 35,000 full-time registered students and 2000 faculty members. The university has 24 schools. YZU emphasizes the practical application of knowledge. Great efforts have been made to develop students' social, moral, culture and intercultural sensitivity as well as to take care of their individuality. The school of Foreign Languages embrace a wide variety of programmes and courses, and the programmes such as English Language and Literature,

Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics, Curriculum and Methodology, and English language Teaching are provided at Master's level. The English-major graduates are expected to be cultivated as people with 'solid acquisition of basic language skill and rational reinforcement of knowledge structure'. The department of College English adopts a multimedia teaching pattern of 'online teaching + classroom teaching' (2+2+X). The total teaching hours per weeks are 4, including 2 hours for a big class (around 120 students) with the teaching emphasis on reading, and 2 hours for a small class (around 25 students) with the teaching focus on listening and speaking. 'X' stands for learners' self-study hours (with no less than 4 hours) by using the online teaching platform and resources after class. The curriculum offered by College English Department is divided into three types, namely, Integrated English, Applied Linguistics and Language and Culture, among which the Integrated English (including individual courses of reaching, writing, listening and speaking, and translation) is a compulsory course open to all the non-English-major undergraduates whereas Applied Linguistics and Language and Culture are optional courses.

3.4.2. Informants and data collection

Data collection lasted from 5 March to 10 March, 2007. According to the

original research plan, each participant was intended to be interviewed first before the observations (2 times), followed by a post-observation interview to end up the data collection. Nevertheless, it turned out in the pilot study that this plan was unrealistic as the participants were very reluctant to be observed and interviewed twice. For that reason, the interview was conducted after the observation, and the interview questions were combined, which then served as the standard procedure of data collection in the main study as well. The following diagram shows the profile of the informants as well as the details of the data collection in the pilot study.

Participants / countries where they got OETE / Years after Return / Years of Teaching	Level of OETE	Date of observation (O) / Interview (I)		Course observed Major / Level / Class Size	Couresebook
Tony AU / 3 / 25	8-week immersion program in; 2004	O	5 March (14:00-15:45)	College English NE / 1st / 75	College English – Integrated Course
			9 March (8:00 – 9:55)		
		I	6 March (10:30)	Listening and Speaking NE / 1st / 38	CollegeEnglish –Listening and Speaking Course
			N/A		
Ben UK / 3 / 17	6-month visiting scholar in 2003	O	9 March (14:00 – 15:45)	College English NE / 1st/ 33	Experience English – Extended Book
		I	9 March (16:30)		

Key: OETE = Overseas English Teacher Education; AU = Australia;

3.5. Initial data analysis and adjustment of instruments

When I finished the pilot study, I went back to UK and stayed for three weeks to transcribe and translate the two interviews. Based on the interview transcripts and observation summaries, I was advised by my supervisor to make the interview more open-ended, since, as inferred from

the transcripts, the interviews were more like structured interviews than semi-structured ones. This change was intended to leave more room for the informants to explore their thinking on the posed questions rather than restricting them with leading questions. Specifically, I was advised to add a question 'In your view, what is good language teaching?' before question 5. The reason for this adjustment was because in the pilot study, I found out there existed the tendency that the participants seemed not to have much to talk about the perception of CLT despite the efforts of making probes. This phenomenon made me aware of the danger of failing to gather sufficient data for research question one in the main study, which might lead to a superficial and loose understanding of the results. After the discussion with my supervisor, we decided to place an ice-breaking question (see question 4) before looking into the informants' perception of CLT in the main study. This aimed to broaden the informants' thoughts on the interpretation of CLT and perception of appropriate methodology so as to see the extent to which the good language teaching on one's mind matches the general principles and features of CLT. Given that the pilot study did not result in big alterations of the instruments, the gathered data in the pilot study will be used and analyzed in detail along with those collected in the main survey.

3.6. The main study

The main study was conducted at four universities, namely, YZU, Fudan University (hereafter referred to as 'FDU'), Sun, Yat-Sen University (hereafter referred to as 'SYSU') and Peking University (hereafter referred to as 'PKU'). There were 21 participants in the main survey, with 5 in YZU, 4 in FDU, 9 in SYSU and 3 in PKU. 10 of them were both interviewed and observed, and the observations covered a wide range of courses. All the participants were observed and interviewed once. Two participants were interviewed before the observation (1 in FDU, 1 in SYSU) due to a sudden change of time arrangement, and the rest were interviewed after the observation. Pre-observation interview questions (see 3.3.1) were posed to the informants who were interviewed first. Most interviews were carried out right after the observations. The data collection lasted from early April to early June of 2007. Nevertheless, I was unable to stay in each research setting for more than two weeks due to the tight travel schedule (the four universities are located in different parts of China) and the budget, which could be the biggest limitation of this study.

Quick facts (pilot study included)

University	YZU	FDU	SYSU	PKU	TOTAL
Participants	5 + 2 (*PS)	4	9	3	21 + 2 (PS)
Interviews	5 + 2 (PS)	3	6	2	16 + 2 (PS)
Observations	3 + 3 (PS)	2	8 (1 at MA level)	3	16 + 3 (PS)

Both interviewed and observed participants	3 + 2 (PS)	1	5	2	11 + 2 (PS)
Questionnaire	0	1	0	0	1
Countries where participants got OETE	US	2	3	2	2	9
	UK	1+1 (PS)	1	6	0	8 +1 (PS)
	AU	2+1 (PS)	0	1	1	4 + 1(PS)
Level of OETE	*VS	2+1 (PS)	2	5	2	11+1 (PS)
	*DS	3	2	4	1	10
	*P	1 (PS)	0	0	0	1 (PS)
Years after return	*FB	2+1(PS)	0	4	2	8+1 (PS) (DS 4; P 1; VS 4)
	4-10 Y	2	1	3	1	7 (DS 2; VS 5)
	11 Y ↗	2	3	2	0	7 (DS 4; VS 3)
Years of Teaching	1-3 Y	0	0	2	0	2
	4-10Y	1	1	1	1	4
	11 Y ↗	4+2(PS)	3	6	2	15+2 (PS)
Courses taught by the observed participants (E/NE)	College English 2 (PS) NE Listening and Speaking 2 + 1(PS) NE Reading 1 E	Reading 2 E	College English 1 NE Listening and Speaking 2 NE Reading 1 E Writing 1 E Listening 1E Interpretation 1 E Applied Linguistics (MA) 1 E (excluded – see 3.3.2./3.6.3.)	Advanced Reading and Writing 2 NE Listening and Speaking 1 NE	NE: 8 + 3(PS) (courses include: College English 1+2(PS) Listening and Speaking 5+1(PS) Advanced Reading and Writing 2 E: 8 (courses include: Listening 1 Reading 4 Writing 1 Interpretation 1 Applied Linguistics (MA) 1

* PS: Pilot Study;   VS: Visiting Scholar;   DS: Degree Study;   P: Programme

* FB: Fresh-back (1-3 years);   4-10: 4-10 years;   11↗: 11 years and above

* E: English major;   NE: Non-English major

3.6.1. Research settings

1. **YZU**

This setting has already been described above (see 3.4.1.).

2. FDU

Founded in 1905, FDU is known as one of the most prestigious comprehensive universities in Shanghai, with over 2300 faculty members, 25,000 full-time degree candidates, 1650 overseas students and 11,000 students studying at the schools of Continuing Education and Online Education. FDU has 17 schools and 4 independent departments. The university has long been reputed for being actively involved in international academia through academic exchanges, and has signed exchange and cooperation agreements of different levels and disciplines with more than 140 overseas universities in 24 countries and regions. Currently, the College of Foreign Languages and Literature consists of eight departments (namely English, College English, Translation and Interpretation, French, German, Russian, Japanese and Korean), and three research institutions (namely, Modern English, Foreign Literature, and Shakespeare). The Department of English was established in 1905 and has been one of the nation's strongest both in teaching and research so far. College English Center grew out of the General English Group established in 1957 (which subsequently graduated into the Public English Teaching and Research Section between 1960 and 1985), and is responsible for

English teaching for all non-English-major undergraduates, postgraduates and doctorial students. The Center has cooperated with Sydney University of Australia on a gradate program in English Language Teaching with the approval of the Ministry of Education and the State Council's Academic Degree Committee. The Department of Translation and Interpretation was established in 2004, aiming to cultivating translators and interpreters who are practical proficiency oriented. The university has long been achieving a high passing rate and excellence rate in College English Tests (CET) Band 4 and Band 6, as well as in Tests for English Majors (TEM) Band 4 and Band 8.

3. SYSU

Founded in 1924 by Dr. Sun, Yat-sen – a great leader of the 20th century, SYSU is known as a vibrant leading university in Guangdong Province, at the forefront of reform and of opening, neighboring Hongkong and Macao. The university has 76,487 full-time registered students, among whom 46,263 are degree candidates and 1327 are overseas students. The total number of faculty amounts to over 7600. The university has 25 schools and colleges. SYSUB has long been active in international exchanges, and has partnership with more than 100 well-known universities and academic institutes in different countries and regions. The university is expanding

rapidly at present, and has 4 campuses sited respectively on both sides of the Pearl River or facing the South China Sea. The Guangzhou East Campus is now under construction. The School of Foreign Languages is composed of Department of English, Department of French, German and Japanese, Center of College English, Center of Graduate English, Guangzhou English Training Center, Center of Chinese Language Training, and Center of Australian Studies. The BA program for English Language and Literature is accredited the best in Guangdong Province by the Guangdong Educational Authorities. English Language and Literature is the only program offered at doctoral level in the school. The school has established cooperated with Hong Kong University, Hong Kong Baptist University, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, City University of Hong Kong, Jean Moulin University-Lyon 3, France on different programmes. The school of Translation of Interpretation is a newly founded independent school with the teaching staff of 45 and 1100 undergraduate students. English is provided by the school as an undergraduate program.

4. PKU

Founded in 1898, PKU is known as one of the most prestigious Chinese comprehensive universities at national level both at home and abroad. It

has a glorious revolutionary tradition and has long striven to develop students' aptitude while respecting their individuality at the same time. The university consists of 30 colleges and 12 departments, with over 4574 teaching faculty and 46, 074 registered students, among whom 27,076 are degree candidates and 1776 are overseas students. PKU has made reforms in its teaching, aiming to strengthen students' practical ability and creativity simultaneously. The university has long been active in international academic exchange. Great efforts have been made to encourage cross-disciplinary interaction in teaching and research work. The Department of English was established in 1919, but its actual origin traces back to 1862, when Jingshi Tongwenguan, a precursor of Peking University, was first set up by the government of the Qing Dynasty. Since its establishment, the department has paid great attention to balance the acquisition of basic language skills and the development of learners' critical perspective on language, literature and culture through foreign language learning. The Division of College English Teaching and Researching in the English Department plays an important role in the teaching and research of College English. A wide variety of English courses has been introduced, aiming to reinforce learners' English proficiency in an all round way. The division serves around 5000 students each semester, providing nearly 6500 classroom-teaching hours. Efforts

are made by the teachers to tailor their teaching to the needs of students by adopting a multilevel teaching system. Students are divided into four levels and a group leader is assigned to each level to be in charge of detailed teaching matters. The division tries to allocate 30-35 students to each of 150 classes and encourages teachers to diversify teaching methods and activities.

3.6.2. Informants

There were 21 teachers who participated in the main survey, with 5 in YZU, 4 in FDU, 9 in SYSU and 3 in PKU respectively. The following diagrams provide the profiles of the informants.

University	Participants	Countries where participants get OETE	Level of OETE	Years after Return	Years of Teaching
YZU	Judy	AU	MA in Higher Education and TESOL between 2005 and 2006.	1	7
	Daisy	AU	MA in TESOL between 2001 and2002	4	13 years at tertiary level (94 – 07); 8 years at secondary level (87 – 94)
	John	US	1 year as visiting scholar between 1993 and 1994	12	31 years at tertiary level (1976 – 2007); 2 years at secondary level (71 – 73)
	Tom (no longer teaching since 2003)	US	MA in TESOL in early 1990s and stayed for 3 years	More than 10 years	20 (10 years at tertiary level)
	Peter	UK	1 year visiting scholar between 1997 and 1998	8	11
FDU	Lucy	UK	PhD in Literature in the early 1990s	Over 10 years.	Over 10 years
	Gerry	US	1 year visiting scholar couple of years	Less	Less than 10 years

				than 10 years	
	Patrick	US	1 year visiting scholar in late 1990s	Over 10 years	Over 17 years
	Sam	US	MA in ESL between 1981 and 1988	18	Over 20 years
SYSU	**Mary**	AU	MA in TESOL between 2002 and 2003 / went back to China in 2006	Less than 1 year	7 months (since October, 06)
	Diana	UK	MED in TESOL between 2005 and 2006	Less than 1 year	Over 3 years (just starting teaching at SYSU this year)
	Helen	UK	MA in Education between 2005 and 2006	Less than 1 year	7 months (start teaching at SYSU in February, 07, before that she taught at a local private institute)
	Lily	UK	6-month visiting scholar in 2002	5	11 (start teaching at SYSU in 2000)
	Jacky	UK	1 year visiting scholar between 1999 and 2000	7	16
	Sara	UK	1 year visiting scholar between 2004 and 2005	2	Over 20 years
	Laura	US	6-month visiting scholar in early 2000s	6	Over 10 years
	George	US	1 year visiting scholar in 1990s	More than 10 years	Over 15 years
	Michael	UK	PhD in Applied Linguistics in 1990s	More than 10 years	Over 20 years
PKU	**Susan**	AU	MA in Literature in early 2000s	Around 5 years	Over 15 years
	Jane	US	Visiting scholar between 2000 – 2001, 2005 and 2006	1	Over 17 years
	Wendy	US	1 year visiting scholar between 2004 and 2005	2	Over 9 years

3.6.3. Data collection

The main study was conducted from 9 April, 2007 to 7 June, 2007. Two

participants were interviewed before the observation due to the sudden

change of the observation dates, and the rest of the observations were carried out before the interviews. Pre-observation questions (see 3.3.1.) were posed to those who were interviewed first. I tried to adopt a more flexible and open style when conducting the interview based on the advice given to me after the pilot study. Four copies of questionnaires were emailed to those who declined to be interviewed, and one was returned. As related above (see 3.3.3), this questionnaire will not be analyzed. In addition, the observed lesson at MA level (see 3.3.2) will be not analyzed either. Therefore, the subsequent data analysis will be based on 18 interviews (including 2 from the pilot study) and 18 observations (including 3 from the pilot study). Data collection conducted at SYSU was carried out at 3 different campuses, namely, Guangzhou South Campus ('GSC'), the North Campus ('NC'), Zhuhai Campus ('ZHC'). The following diagrams show the details of data collection in each research setting.

University	Participants	Date of observation	Date of Interview	Course observed	Major	Level	Class Size	Couresbook
YZU (9 April – 14 April, 07)	Judy	12 April 8:00-9:50	12 April 10:30	Listening and Speaking	NE	1st	37	Experience English – Listening and Speaking
	Daisy	12 April 14:00-15:45	12 April 16:00	Listening and Speaking	NE	1st	40	Experience English – Listening and Speaking
	John	13 April 10:55-12:30	13 April 13:00	Reading	E	3rd	27	English Book6 – Intensive Reading

	Tom	N/A	13 April 9:30	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Peter	N/A	13 April 16:00	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
FDU (25 April – 9 May, 07)	***Lucy** (interviewed before observation)	8 May 9:55 – 11:40	* 28 April 14:00	Reading	E	2nd	18	Closing Reading
	Gerry	28 April 9:55 – 11:35	**Questionnaire returned on 6 May**	Reading	E	3rd	15	Advanced English
	Patrick	N/A	26 April 12:30	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Sam	N/A	26 April 16:00	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
SYSU (14 May – 24, May, 07)	**Mary (NC)**	16 May 10:35– 12:00	16 May 13:00	College English	NE	1st	46	College English-Integrated Course
	Diana (ZHC)	22 May 14:30– 15:55	22 May 20:00	Listening and Speaking	NE	1st	48	College English – Listening and Speaking
	Helen (NC)	21 May 10:35– 12:00	21 May 13:30	Listening and Speaking	NE	1st	35	College English – Listening and Speaking
	Lily (ZHC)	23 May 16:10– 17:30	23 May 19:00	Writing	E	1st	20	Extracts from Willie Stone, by R.L. Duffus.
* Interviewed before the observation	**Jacky (ZHC)**	22 May 8:00 – 9:30	* 21 May 21:00	Listening	E	1st	35	Advanced Listening
	Sara (ZHC)	N/A	21 May 19:00	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Laura (ZHC)	23 May 14:30 –15:55	Questionnaire not returned	Reading	E	1st	30	Intensive Reading
	George (GSU)	18 May 9:45 – 11:15	Questionnaire not returned	Interpretation	E	3rd	28	Advanced Interpretation
	Michael (GSU)	17 May 14:30– 15:55	Questionnaire not returned	Applied Linguistics	E	1st MA	23	Handout
PKU (1 June – 7 June, 07)	**Susan**	5 June 8:00 - 9:40	N/A (quick talk after class)	Advanced Reading and Writing	NE	1st & 2nd	10	Advanced Reading and Writing
	Jane	6 June 8:00 – 9:50	6 June 13:30	Listening and Speaking	NE	1st	48	College English – Listening and Speaking
	Wendy	5 June 10:30 – 12:00	5 June 14:00	Advanced Reading and Writing	NE	1st & 2nd	20	Advanced Reading and Writing

3.7. Procedure for qualitative analysis

Qualitative analysis was interpreted by Taylor and Bogdan (1998) as a dynamic process of inductive reasoning, realized through coding as well as the process of analyzing the generated data by classifying, reducing and summarizing. Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue that data coding can be conducive to generating theory, concepts and themes as well as testing a hypothesis rather than proving it. As an analytic process, coding is used to describe the particular activities in data analysis involving inference or explanation which allow certain ideas or theories to emerge (Miles and Huberman, 1994).

In this study, open coding and axial coding are applied to interview analysis. All the interviews were first transcribed and then coded in Chinese. 3 interviews (2 from pilot and 1 from main survey) were translated into English as samples (see appendix 2) for discussion with my supervisor, aiming to avoid subjectivity during the coding process. Attached to each Chinese interview transcript was the interview summary in English, serving as a guide in identifying answers to the research questions. This enabled me to trace back the original data easily provided by different informants when doing the data analysis. I started coding the interviews by reading through the Chinese transcripts, and then highlighted

the parts related to individual research questions and wrote down the

research question numbers, together with key words or phrases in Chinese

(see appendices 2 - 3). I then found out the regularities and patterns that

emerged as themes and classified them into categories in relation to

individual research questions within a framework influenced by Grounded

Theory (Strauss, and Corbin, 2000). These themes and categories were

then organized and translated into English (see appendix 6). In terms of the

analysis of the observational data, as mentioned before (see 3.3.2.), I

listened to the recording of the observed class after each observation and

wrote up a full description based on the recordings and fieldnotes (see

appendix 4 - 5). I then coded the observational descriptions in the same

way as I coded the interview transcripts (see appendix 7). In the rest of this

section, I will present an overview of the themes and categories that

emerged from the data analysis.

Overview of themes and categories

1. Themes and categories emerging for RQ1

Categories	Overall perceptions of CLT		Contributions of CLT to good language teaching
	Shared perceptions	Particular perceptions	

Themes	There is a general perception that CLT is a vague yet practical approach, laying the focus on language function, with the features of being learner-centered, interactive and loose with regard to grammar. CLT – oriented activities take a great variety of forms.	1.Misconception of CLT; 2.Seeming-communicative approach; 3. CLT is harmonious with Chinese Confucianism	CLT can to some extent contribute to facilitating the process of achieving the expectations of good language teaching, through cramming teaching still plays important roles in China.

2. Themes and categories emerging for RQ2

Categories	Challenges and constraints on CLT adoption in the Chinese EFL context	Overseas experience of teacher education and CLT implementation	Different views on the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context
Themes	CLT poses great challenges to both practitioners and learners in terms of language proficiency, teaching techniques and procedures	OE experience can be conductive to enhancing practitioners' CC, IC and critical thinking in general, the elements that are considered as essential to implement CLT effectively. However, participants with different background hold different views on the effectiveness of OE experience in terms of CLT implementation.	A. Positive It is important and relevant appropriate for Chinese EFL practitioners to teach communicatively. B. Negative CLT is inappropriate in the Chinese EFL context. C. Eclectic Practitioners should be able to adjust their ways of teaching in accordance with the changing needs of teaching context.

3.   Themes and categories emerging for RQ3

Categories	Ways of teaching which reflect CLT as reported	Classroom practice as observed
Themes	Learners are paid great attention to according to participants' report.	A. Shared teaching practices and classroom activities -- The observed teaching practices and classroom activities reflect 'communicative ideas' in a general way. -- There are similarities across all the participants in terms of their ways of teaching, while there are also differences between groups of different institutional backgrounds. B. Complexity reflected in various teaching practices -- Some of the observed teaching practices reflect the phenomenon of 'seeming-communicative' and 'pluralistic teaching'. -- What is CLT in the participants' mind does not mean CLT in China.

In this chapter, I have discussed the advantages of adopting case study method for this research. I then rationalized the instruments and procedure of data collection for both the pilot study and the main survey. I mentioned the problems encountered in the pilot study and specified the reasons for the change made to the interview questions. I then explained how the data were analyzed and presented an overview of the categories emerging from the data analysis. In the next three chapters, I will present the findings for the three research questions, presenting them in terms of the emerging categories and subcategories, and provide some initial discussion relating

to how the findings seem to echo the relevant CLT theories appearing in

the literature. This aims to provide general basis for the overall discussion

carried out later (in chapter 7).

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND INITIAL DISCUSSION FOR RESEARCH QUESTION ONE

Question: What are the conceptions of CLT held by Chinese tertiary teachers of English with overseas experience of teacher education?

Findings for this question will be presented from two perspectives, namely, perceptions of CLT (4.1.) and contributions of CLT (4.2.).The aim of presenting the data relating to the second category is to contextualize participants' conceptions of CLT within a more holistic perspective. This is because in the pilot study interviews, the participants claimed that their understanding of CLT might be insufficient and superficial. I subsequently asked all participants about their conceptions of good language teaching in the main study in order to broaden the conversations through in-depth probes. By looking into the extent to which 'communicative ideas' are reflected in the participants' criteria of good language teaching, I aimed to find out how CLT has contributed or can possibly contribute to Chinese EFL profession in a general way. This can also serve as a basis for considering the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context, to be discussed in Chapter 5.

Under each sub-heading within sections 4.1 and 4.2 I summarize overall perceptions in relation to the themes and categories (and, where relevant, sub-categories) which emerged from data analysis, as explained at the end of Chapter 3. Quotes from participants are translated by myself from Chinese, unless otherwise indicated.

4.1. Overall perceptions of CLT

Based on the data analysis (see appendix (6)-A), it seems that the overall perceptions of CLT held by most participants are quite unified although different voices can be heard. Taking account of this fact, findings will be presented from two perspectives in order to reflect these tendencies. These two perspectives are 'shared perceptions of CLT' and 'particular perceptions of CLT'. In the rest of this section, I will elaborate on each perspective in detail based on the areas that were mostly touched upon by participants during the interviews.

4.1.1. Shared perceptions of CLT

CLT is widely identified by participants as a vague yet practical approach, laying the major focus on language function, with the features of being learner-centered, interactive and loose with regard to grammar. It is commonly agreed by participants that CLT-oriented activities take a great

variety of forms. In the following parts of this section, these points will be explained in detail.

4.1.1.1. Nature of CLT

CLT is widely considered to possess the nature of being vague. During the interviews, it was noted that despite the efforts made to pin down the CLT concept, the majority of the participants expressed their uncertainty in CLT by using expressions such as 'I am unsure about my interpretation', 'my knowledge on this [CLT] is limited' or 'perhaps it [CLT] means…' when they were asked to convey their interpretations of CLT. For instance, Peter argued that, 'CLT was introduced to us as a vague conception, as there was no demonstration of what the approach was exactly like and how to teach in a communicative way.' This opinion was also conveyed by the following participant:

> it seems to me that CLT is quite vague and superficial due to various ways of interpreting CC and different versions of definition of CC […] but how to quantify these definitions? How to set up particular criteria of assessing CC? These are the areas remain unclear. […] CLT does not tell teachers how to teach, as it does not provide teachers with any kinds of concrete or systematic procedures or methods in terms of implementation.

(Tom, 13th April, 2007, YZU)

Tom further argued that the vague nature of CLT can be the result of the fact that many Chinese EFL practitioners failed to distinguish between approach and method due to their conventional teaching practices. As he declared:

> most Chinese EFL practitioners work like craftsmen, who tend to follow the way they were taught rather than teaching under the guidelines of a particular approach. Therefore, many of them fail to distinguish ideology and method so that they fail to understand CLT is an approach rather than method. I personally consider CLT as ideology.
>
> (Tom, 13th April, 2007, YZU)

This vague nature is labeled by Wendy as 'nihilistic', who tended to convey her interpretation of CLT from a philosophical perspective. As she said:

> my teacher used to teach by creating communication between teacher and learner, and we were told that was CLT. I just felt this [CLT was][nihilistic, not down-to-earth at all […] it is true that she tried hard to build up sort of communicative environment, but is this truly communicative? It seems to me that true communication is interaction of thoughts rather than information exchange merely […] so what does 'CLT' mean exactly? It has no particular instructions or specific teaching procedures or methods for teachers to follow.
>
> (Wendy, 5th June, 2007, PKU)

It can be seen that the above informants' interpretations of CLT identify it as an umbrella approach with the nature of being open and flexible. The lack of tangible teaching procedures corresponds well to such nature. The statements made by Tom and Wendy reflect the argument made by Savignon (2002) that CLT originated not only from the domains of linguistics and psycholinguistics but from sociology and philosophy, resulting in the difficulty of pinning down the conception in a precise way. Nevertheless, CLT is still widely recognized as a 'practical' approach despite the vagueness identified in its nature. For instance, Tony claimed that 'the approach mainly emphasizes the practical aspect of language learning […] CLT aims to empower learners with the ability to be able to use target language for social use'. Tom reported that CLT can be 'conducive to enhancing learners' CC and help to train them to become idiomatic users of English', as the approach 'focuses on language appropriateness and can be helpful in improving language users' ability in perceiving culture difference'. Judy pointed out:

> CLT emphasizes a lot on practicability [sic] (of language) […] it emphasizes more on the use of language rather than on the language itself merely […] the meaning of 'communicative' goes beyond the scope of oral communication with target language, it might also infer to the 'thoughts communication' or idea interchange […] or the information you can get with the assistance of internet technology, and to what extent you can absorb

the information and to what extent you can output them based on your understanding.

<div align="center">(Judy, 12th April, 2007, YZU)</div>

I remembered the CLT coursebooks that I used when I was student was designed by topic, and each unit consisted of three parts. Part one was sort of background introduction based on the theme of unit, part two was the game related to part one, and part three was a kind of situational exercise which enabled you to apply what learnt to practice in particular situation. I think this is a good way of designing coursebook as there is a process from learning to assessing how well you have learnt […] this is practical as normally the situational exercise in part three are relevant to our daily life.

<div align="center">(Helen, 21st May, 2007, SYSU)</div>

These quotations show that the practical nature of CLT is perceived by the informants from three perspectives, namely, the perspectives of the aim of CLT, CLT focus and material design. These perspectives touch upon two levels of the theoretical model of communicative language teaching proposed by Richards and Rogers (1986), namely, the approach level and the design level. At the approach level, both the theories of language and learning are touched upon. In relation to theory of language, the standpoint of developing learners' CC as the central aim of CLT is identified, and Tom's argument about the enhancement of learner's ability in perceiving cultural differences reflects the features of the concept of IC, the fifth

aspect of CC specified by Cortazzi and Jin (1999). At the same time, the aim of training learners towards idiomatic use of English mentioned by Tom reflects the communication and meaning principles of CLT practice in its underlying theory of learning, which focuses on authenticity of activities and the learning process being facilitated by authentic and meaningful activities respectively (Littlewood, 1981; Johnson, 1982). Helen's recall of the design of CLT-oriented coursebooks touches upon the design level of the CLT model. It indicates that CLT is considered as practical due to its text-based teaching materials are relevant to daily life. Therefore, it can be inferred that practicability and authenticity can serve as two crucial criteria for material selection of CLT at design level of the CLT model. The point emerging at this point mirrors the viewpoint held by Brown (1994) who asserted that CLT is a practical approach. In addition, it also reflects the viewpoint held by the theorists such as Larsen-Freeman, 1986, Dublin, 1995, Widdowson, 1996, Canale and Swain, 1980 that it is important for CLT practitioners to adopt authentic materials or classroom activities in order to familiarize learners with contexts of real-life communication as well as the idiomatic use of target language.

Another point emerging from the participants' perceptions of CLT is the viewpoint raised by Judy that CLT emphasizes language function rather

than language form. This point might explain why CLT is considered by another participant, Lucy, as to be easily mixed up with a functional approach. It seems that both the perceptions conveyed by Judy and Lucy reflect the tendency towards vagueness in terms of CLT interpretation. It can be inferred that in Lucy's version of interpretation, she fails to understand that CLT is also known as functional approach (or the notional-functional approach) in the early days of its emergence (Richards and Rogers, 1986) (see 2.1.1.) whereas in Judy's interpretation, it can be found out she seems to lack the awareness of the viewpoint proposed by Littlewood (1981), who stated that CLT actually emphasizes both functional and structural aspects of language.

4.1.1.2. Features of CLT

Being learner-centered, interactive and 'loose' with regard to grammar are widely recognized as the most distinct features of CLT. Nearly all the participants described CLT as 'learner-centered' and 'interactive' when they conveyed their interpretations of the approach. Nearly two thirds of the participants pointed out that it was not necessarily important for teachers to correct grammatical mistakes in learners' oral English. Other identified features include 'English only', small classroom and 'no cramming teaching'. For instance, Lucy considered CLT as a kind of

approach that is 'easily mixed up with functional approach. In her view, the purpose of the approach is to 'enable learners communicate freely', and CLT might be 'not that strict in grammar'. This viewpoint is also shared by Jacky and Sara who both identified the unnecessariness of correcting learners' grammatical mistakes too often. As argued by Sara, CLT is a flexible approach that 'pays little attention to grammar'. In her view, CLT focuses on listening and speaking rather than on reading and writing. In addition, Sara and Jacky both mentioned the importance for learners' participation in a CLT-oriented classroom. Sara argued that a CLT classroom should be dynamic and interactive, and Jacky declared that unlike cramming teaching, CLT is a 'way of teaching to keep learners motivated and curious during learning process, which calls for interaction between teachers and learners'. The evidence of CLT's 'learner-centered' feature can also be found in the following claims.

> The [CLT] classroom should be student-centered […] teachers should create opportunities for learners to practice what they learnt by encouraging them to speak English as much as they can […] teachers should initiate learners' motivation by assigning tasks like questions and answers […] learners are expected to be self-motivated and be able to study independently I think.
>
> (Judy, 12th April, 2007, YZU)

CLT is learner-centered, a learnt by doing approach
[…] in a CLT language classroom, teachers should
provide learner with the chance to use English in class,
and help to deepen learners' understanding of
language through practice […] keep learners'
motivated in learning English[…] maybe teachers
should pay less attention to the grammatical mistakes
in learners' oral English.

(Diana, 22nd May, 2007, SYSU)

In a CLT-oriented classrooms, teachers should try
their best to let learners talk, maybe organize different
kinds of activities to motivate learners to participate
[…] they should enable learners to learn by doing
rather than listening to what is said by teacher […] I
remembered when I was taught by CLT, it was a small
class with less than 30 students […] learners did the
talking for most of the time […] the teacher used to
participate in the group discussion, but most of the
time she just listened […] she wouldn't let us use
Chinese and forced us to talk in English all the time.

(Helen, 21st May, 2007, SYSU)

It can be seen that the identified features of being learner-centered,

involving 'learning by doing' and being interactive correspond well with

the opinions held by theorists such as Johnson and Porter (1983), Richard

and Roger (1986), Hilgard and Bower (1996), and Savignon (2002) (see

2.1.3.). However, the common view of the feature of being loose with

regard to grammar reflects one of the misunderstandings of CLT pointed

out by Thompson (1996), namely, that the approach over-emphases

developing learners' competence in listening and speaking at the expense of reading and writing (Faersch, Haastrup and Phillipson, 1984:170). In addition, it seems that attention has been paid to the learning process as the participants such as Judy, Jacky and Diana all pointed out that in a CLT classroom learners are supposed to be kept motivated during the learning process. This point happens to correspond with the argument proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1984) that CLT should be 'learning-centered' rather than 'learner-centered' by taking contextual factors into consideration. Helen's memory of how she was taught by CLT recalls the procedure of the CLT model proposed by Richards and Rogers (1986), as she identifies some techniques in terms of CLT implementation which are teachers' participation in group discussion, 'English only', and learners take turns to answer questions so that everyone has the chance to talk in class. It can be seen that Helen's statement not only identifies the interactive feature of CLT, but the mentioned 'English only' technique also reflects the principle proposed by Mitchell (1988), who claimed that the target language should be the only medium for communication in a communicative language classroom.

4.1.1.3. Classroom activities

There is a wide variety of activities recognized by participants as

CLT-oriented. Discussion, presentation and question and answer (Q-A) are reported to be the most frequently mentioned activities adopted by the participants in their own teaching practice, aiming to make the teaching interactive. However, the way of organizing these activities varies among the participants. For instance, group discussion is, they claim, adopted more frequently than pair discussion, and most participants stated that they called for a main speaker from each group to report results of the discussion afterwards. Most participants preferred their students to prepare presentations based on the given topic before class rather than asking them to talk freely or make an impromptu speech in class. The presentation is normally followed by questions for discussion by learners, and the questions were posed either by the teacher to learners and vice versa, or by learner to learner. Others mentioned activities including situational conversation (dialogue), role-play, retelling, debate, game, in-class writing, brainstorming, peer-teaching (demo-teaching), and mock interpretation. One participant, Jane, particularly mentioned that the design of teaching activities should be based on an understanding of learning needs.

The findings in this part still focus on the design level of the CLT model. They indicate that participants mention activities which seem to reflect major features of communicative language teaching, including being

interactional, task-based and learner-generated (Richards and Rogers (1986). Taking participants' words at face value, it seems that the adopted activities can be categorized into the two activity types proposed by Littlewood (1981), namely functional communication activities (such as Q-A, retelling, brainstorming, games, in-class writing, etc) and social interaction activities (such as presentation, role play, debate, demo-teaching, mock interpretation, discussion, and so on). Jane's argument about learners' needs being taken into account before activity design reflects one of the standard CLT principles proposed by Mitchell (1988) at design level as well.

4.1.2. Particular perceptions of CLT

Apart from the shared perceptions of CLT mentioned above, different voices can be heard among participants. These particular perceptions of CLT shed light on the complexity of the interpretation of CLT as appropriate methodology in the Chinese EFL context from a more holistic perspective. For instance, Ben stated that:

> Communicative competence is only a part of one's overall language proficiency, it is not the only criterion to measure one's proficiency level […] task-based approach has been introduced to China due to the failure of CLT […] CLT does not emphasize too much on the correctness of language form, it pays

more attention to the content of communication […]
CLT lays the particular emphasis on speaking and
listening rather than reading and writing.

(Ben, 9th March, 2007, YZU)

It can be seen that Ben's interpretation of CLT not only reflects his lack of

awareness of the interrelation between CLT and task-based language

teaching but also mirrors one of the misconceptions of CLT pointed out by

Thompson (1996) that CLT de-emphasizes the importance of developing

learners' competence in writing and reading. This misconception, however,

has been shown as a widely shared viewpoint of CLT held by the majority

of participants (see 4.1.1.2.). In my view, Ben's interpretation of CLT can

be attributed to his narrow understanding of CC. Although, he did not

indicate clearly what CC is, it can be inferred from his statement that CC

in his mind is closely related to the competence in listening and speaking.

He fails to show his knowledge on the deep connotation of CC, such as its

linguistic and socio-cultural dimensions (proposed by Hymes, 1972), or

the   four   embedded   interdependent   dimensions   (grammatical,

sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse competences) proposed by Canale

and Swain (1989), or the socio-cultural competence broadened from

sociolinguistic competence by Savignon (2002).

If Ben's misconception of CLT mainly lies in the approach level of the CLT model proposed by Richards and Rogers (1986), another participant, Tom identified that there exists the phenomenon among Chinese practitioners that teachers were attempting to label improvements of the traditional teaching methods as 'CLT'. As he stated:

> Most Chinese EFL practitioners work like craftsmen, who tend to follow the way they were taught rather than teaching under the guidelines of a particular approach [...] the 'craftsman' teaching pattern requires specific rules or methods to be provided to practitioners to guide them carry out creative work based on imitation, but CLT does not provide such roles for teachers to follow, which leads to teachers' confusion regarding the connotation of 'communicative'. This confusion results in the phenomenon that the CLT-oriented activities [which they adopt] are still based on rote-learning, as teachers just change what learners are expected to memorize rather than reinforcing learners' language proficiency through communicative activities [...] the so-called pedagogic adjustments made by most teachers are actually the traditional teaching methods with a CLT label [...] CLT-oriented activities are still based on rote-learning, as teachers just change what to memorize.
>
> (Tom, 13th April, 2007, YZU)

Tom's statement identifies that some Chinese teachers tend to adopt what might be termed a 'seeming-communicative' approach by asking learners to memorize the content of communication rather than expecting them to

improve their English through communication activities. This phenomenon, seeming to correspond to an epistemic[8] model of knowledge transmission (Hu, 2002), is still deep-rooted in Chinese teaching culture, and such a 'learn to use' teaching philosophy to some extent reflects the 'practice of language use' feature of Howatt's (1984) weak version of CLT model. This practice reflects their misconceptions of CLT due to the vague understanding of the word 'communication'. In addition, Tom's argument reflects one of the challenges faced by CLT implementation in the Chinese EFL context – the recognition of the importance of recitation and text memorization as fundamental strategies for Chinese EFL learners in general. This means teachers tend to interpret language learning as memorization reinforcement and the process of such reinforcement might be labeled with a modern or fashion-sounding label such as CLT. This point will be discussed in detail in the next section (see 4.2.), as recitation and memorization are particularly emphasized by some participants as the learning strategies of fundamental significance for good language teaching.

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[8] 'Mimetic' or 'epistemic' model of learning refers to the transmission of knowledge principally through an imitative and repetitive process (Paine, 1992; Tang & Absalom, 1998). Teaching methods are largely expository and the teaching process is teacher-dominated (Biggs, 1996b). The teacher selects points of knowledge from authoritative source (usually textbooks and classics), interprets, analyses and elaborates on these points for the students, helps them connect the new points of knowledge with old knowledge, and delivers a carefully sequenced and optimally mediated does of knowledge for the students to memorize, repeat, and understand. (Hu, 2002:98).

Another interesting perspective on CLT interpretation is the viewpoint proposed by Sam who argues that CLT is actually cross-disciplinary and is fundamentally harmonious with Confucianism. As he said,

> The adoption of CLT actually goes beyond the domain of ELT; it has been applied to teaching other subjects. […] Being 'communicative' has long been advocated by Chinese educators, since Confucianism stands for the concept that teaching benefits teacher and student alike, and Lunyu[9] (or The Analects of Confucius) was actually written in the form of communicative interaction. (Sam, 26th April, 2007, FDU)

Sam's interpretation of CLT is in contradiction with the argument made by Hu (2002) that CLT is inappropriate in the Chinese EFL context in terms of adaptability and effectiveness due to its being incompatible with the nature of Chinese learning culture dominated by Confucian philosophy. Although Sam's voicing this individual opinion offers inadequate grounds for a 'challenge' to Hu's position, nevertheless his viewpoint to some extent reinforces this study's rationale of reinterpreting the CLT concept and Chinese culture from a critical and anti-essentialist perspective.

Up to this point, I have presented the findings for perceptions of CLT

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[9] Lunyu (The Analects of Confucius) was compiled by the disciples of Confucius after his death. The book recorded the words and deeds of Confucius and his disciples, and had a wide coverage of subjects, including philosophy, politics, literature, education, art and moral cultivation.

according to the commonalities and dissimilarities existing among participants. In the next section, I will present the findings for the contributions of CLT to good language teaching based on the informants' perceptions of good language teaching beyond CLT.

4.2. Contributions of CLT to good language teaching

The findings suggest that CLT can be conductive to facilitating the process of achieving the expected aims of good language teaching. This is because the mentioned aims of good language teaching are found out to be in accordance with what is expected within CLT. For instance, Peter emphasized that good language education aims to develop learners' individuality to a great extent. Both Judy and Ben considered the development of learners' competence in independent learning as an important aim of good language teaching. As Judy claimed:

> It is important to develop learners' competence in independent learning […] I think independent learning has become a trend already […] a teacher's job is to encourage learners to think independently and creatively. I guess this is exactly what the majority Chinese learners need to learn […] learners should learn for learning's own sake.

> (Judy, 12th April, 2007, YZU)

Judy further declared that good language teachers should encourage learners to be orally active in class. However, she also mentioned a phenomenon that she termed as 'weird'. As she said:

> It seems that high-score students are usually very quiet in the classroom. It's always those who are not very academic-outshined students that seem to be more cooperative and active in the class, and they seem to be more open-minded than high-score students […] each time when I introduced a new teaching method, they seem to be more interested in trying that and those high-score students are not enthusiastic about this.

(Judy, 12th April, 2007, YZU)

It can be seen that the emergence of the concept of independent learning and the development of learners' individuality touched upon by Judy, Ben and Peter shows that Chinese learners are expected to play a more active and equal role with good sense of cooperation in the process of language learning, which is identical with the 'learner-centered' feature of CLT. The idea that learners should be orally active in class reflects the 'interactive' feature of CLT. However, the phenomenon pointed out by Judy regarding the different learning attitudes among students indicates that some Chinese learners are still used to the thinking pattern of being mentally active and tend to show more conservative attitude towards new teaching methods. This can be considered as one of the constraints of CLT implementation in

the Chinese EFL context, which will be further explored in the next chapter.

In addition, although few participants except Mary directly mentioned CLT as an effective approach that can maximize teaching effectiveness, 'communicative ideas' can be found to be reflected in other teaching approaches or methods identified as contributing to good language teaching. For instance, Judy argued that good language teaching 'called for diversified teaching approaches'. Lucy considered edutainment as effective, as in her view, the majority of her learners preferred 'vivid ways of teaching' rather than doing mechanical drills all the time. Ben argued that a task-based approach works well in the Chinese EFL context, and that it should be widely adopted and implemented. Daisy put forward the concept of 'spontaneous teaching', in which she stressed teachers' competence in teaching flexibly, critically and creatively with the power of repartee during the teaching process. As she said:

> I won't follow a particular approach, as I tend to teach spontaneously in different situations, sometimes you need to adjust your ways of teaching if the situation changes […] being spontaneous means you teach based on the understanding of your learners and their learning needs […] pay attention to emotional communication with learners […] be supportive and encouraging […] teach more flexibly and creatively,

> […] be able to cope with unexpected questions […]
> let learners express themselves freely […] teachers
> should dare to admit their mistakes and overcome the
> sense of humiliation by admitting what they don't
> know about before learners. Teachers should be
> critical not only to learners but to themselves as well.

(Daisy, 12th, April, 2007)

Daisy's viewpoints on good language teaching is shared, as the major points emerging from her arguments are touched upon by other informants as well. For instance, Diana and Helen also pointed out that good language teaching required teachers' thorough understanding of the teaching context and learners' level so that he or she would be able to make adjustments easily under different circumstances during the teaching process. Tony argued that good language teaching involves an endeavor to extend the textbook by analyzing learning needs. Jacky argued that good language teachers should pay attention to teaching pace based on learners' feedback and expectations.

It can be seen that the perceptions of good language teaching conveyed by the above participants reflect two major tendencies, namely, the tendencies of teaching eclectically, and teaching according to the changing needs of teaching context based on the understanding of learners' needs and feedback. According to these informants, good language teaching calls for

diversity in the adoption of teaching approaches and methods. The emergence of 'spontaneous teaching' indicates that teachers are expected by some participants to be able to be adaptable to different teaching circumstances and respond swiftly by making appropriate adjustments. More importantly, it shows that learners' contributions are expected, and their voice has been listened to and considered by some teachers as criteria for adopting and adjusting their ways of teaching. This fact actually mirrors the 'learner-centered' and 'context-dependent' features of CLT as well as echoed in Savignon's (2006) viewpoint of CLT's goal as dependent on learner needs in a given context. Ben's recognition of the effectiveness of task-based approach implies the strong version of CLT can be more effectively implemented in the Chinese EFL context although he fails to perceive the interrelation between CLT and task-based language teaching. However, it should be noted that Daisy's argument also emphasizes the equal relationship between teachers and learners. The awareness of a teacher's role as 'negotiator' challenges the traditional image of the Chinese teacher as authoritative knowledge transmitter with a profound body of knowledge as well as the hierarchical teacher-learner relationship that has long existed in Chinese learning culture. This point is pinpointed by Hu (2002) as one of the cultural resistance to CLT import in China (see 2.3.), and it is indeed perceived by some participants as one of the major

constraints of CLT implementation in the local context. This point will be extended and discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Compared with the above participants who recognized the positive contributions of CLT to good language teaching, other participants consider CLT plays a limited role in good language teaching, as they perceive other teaching approaches and methods more effective in the Chinese EFL context. For instance, Tom argued that the importance of Inductive and Analogical approach had not been well perceived by many language teachers. In Tom's view, this approach can help to enhance language accuracy through categorization, conceptualization and internalization. As he said:

> The approach [inductive and analogical approach] is very useful, as it enables learners to find out the language symmetry through categorization based on the understanding of the inner relation between words, and the accumulation of word categories can be interpreted as the process of conceptualization and internalization.
>
> (Sam, 26th April, 2007, FUD)

In addition, some participants particularly pinpointed the significance of recitation and memorization as very basic but most useful learning

strategies for foreign language learning. John argued that:

> I might be a conventional teacher but I always ask my students to read a lot and recite a lot, and many of the passages are from the text. I always tell students that language can't be truly mastered without learning by heart. To learn a foreign language requires more reciting work whatever level you've reached, and this is what I have been emphasizing all along in my teaching practice […] a good teacher should make learner aware of the importance of recitation. I always wrote on the blackboard that 'no recitation, no composition, no presentation' […] language learning is text memorization at bottom […] recitation is not just rote memorization, it can be imitation as well.
>
> (John, 13th April, 2007, YZU)

John's viewpoint is shared by Daisy, Sam and Peter who all emphasized that good language teachers should be aware of the importance of recitation. Daisy and Sam both considered lexical chunking as effective memory strategy for Chinese EFL learners. Peter reported:

> I tend to take the approach which combines the traditional and popular ones such as CLT, but still I attach great importance to recitation […] Text memorization is the essence of Chinese way of language teaching, which can't be totally denied. Imitation depends on accumulation.
>
> (Peter, 13th April, 2007, YZU)

The recognition of the effectiveness of the learning strategies of recitation

and memorization explains for the reason why the traditional cramming teaching still takes up an important role in the Chinese EFL profession, as Lily put forward, 'the traditional cramming method of teaching can be more effective to some extent as it enable learners to have more solid knowledge foundation'. Diana also pointed out this issue from learner's perspective, as she felt frustrated when her learners blamed her for not providing knowledge input via communicative activities. As she reported:

> Students (normally those with low English proficiency) always blame teachers for not doing knowledge input rather than blaming themselves for their poor understanding and preparation for the tasks assigned to them as homework […] they get used to cramming teaching.
>
> (Diana, 22nd May, 2007, SYSU)

In addition, the recognition of the significance of recitation and memorization also accounts for the 'seeming-communicative' phenomenon identified by Tom in terms of CLT implementation (see 4.1.2.), as some practitioners may intend to achieve a balance between traditional cramming teaching and communicative teaching given that CLT used to be greatly promoted by the government. However, it is the teaching approach / method relating to recitation and memorization reinforcement that is considered more productive in their minds. Therefore,

it can be inferred that the reason for the emergence of what I termed a 'seeming-communicative approach' can be multi-fold. Firstly, as argued by Tom, this may be related to Chinese practitioners' misconceptions of CLT (such as vague understanding of the word 'communication'). Secondly, it can be because of Chinese practitioners' persistence in sticking to the 'learn to use' teaching philosophy or the preference of the way of teaching they consider useful by ignoring the features and advantages of other approaches (practitioners may have some knowledge of these features and advantages or not), as represented by Lily's view. Thirdly, the adoption of the seeming-communicative approach can be interpreted as a sort of attempt made to facilitate CLT as a 'learn by using' approach based on teachers' understanding of local context and the features of CLT (as represented by Diana's view). Nevertheless, which of the above reasons are more likely to explain the problems of CLT implementation in the Chinese EFL context at tertiary level depends on the findings for the third research question, in which I looked into the informants' actual teaching practice as well as the teaching philosophies underlying their practices. However, whichever explanation serves as a basic ground for generalization, the mentioned three rationales all reflect the possible restrictions of CLT implementation in China. For instance, the dominance of traditional cramming teaching serves as a restriction and the

reasons underneath such dominance serve as other constraints (such as learners' proficiency in English as identified by Diana, and teacher-learner relationship mentioned by Daisy). These issues will be touched upon in detail in the next chapter.

4.3. Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the findings for the research question concerning conceptions of CLT held by Chinese tertiary teachers of English with experience of teacher education overseas. In general, the findings for this question touch upon two aspects, namely, the informants' overall perceptions of CLT and their conceptions of good language teaching beyond CLT. I also attempted to identify the extent to which 'communicative ideas' are reflected in their criteria of good language teaching. Attention has been paid to those with different voices and efforts were made to look into the rationales underlying these viewpoints.

In terms of overall perceptions of CLT, data were presented through emerging themes and categorizations based on the areas commonly touched upon by the majority of the informants and those individually possessed. The findings suggested that the shared perceptions of CLT mainly lie in three aspects, namely, the nature and features of CLT, and the

typical CLT-oriented classroom activities. The informants' knowledge of CLT in relation to these areas largely corresponds to the relevant CLT theories in the literature. What emerged differently are the voices raised by three participants, Ben, Tom and Sam whose perceptions of CLT shed light on the complexity of the ways of interpreting the approach. As discussed, Ben's interpretation of CLT reflects one of the common misconceptions of CLT that the approach de-emphasizes the importance of reading and writing but focuses on the reinforcement of speaking and listening competence. Tom's identification of what might be termed 'seeming-communicative approach' triggered a subsequent exploration of the rationale underlying such a phenomenon based on an understanding of informants' interpretation of good language teaching (see 4.2.). Sam's argument on the nature of CLT as being harmonious with Confucianism challenges the idea that the approach is culturally inappropriate in China. However, to what extent his argument reflects the reality of the current situation of Chinese EFL profession needs to be viewed in relation to the findings for the second and third research questions in relation to the constraints on CLT adoption at tertiary level in China as well as the particular ways of teaching conducted by the informants in real teaching contexts.

In addition, the informants also conveyed their understandings of good language teaching in general. The findings suggested that the conceptions of good language teaching conveyed by informants such as Peter, Judy, Ben, Diana, Helen, Lucy, Daisy, Mary and Jacky reflect two tendencies, namely, the tendencies of teaching eclectically and teaching flexibly by taking account of learners' needs. It shows that CLT features such as 'learner-centered', 'being interactive' and 'context-sensitive' are well reflected in the interpretations of good language teaching conveyed by these informants. Nevertheless, the traditional cramming teaching and the learning strategies such as recitation and memorization are still considered by the informants such as John, Peter, Lily and Diana as of fundamental significance to good language teaching in China. The arguments they made to express this standpoint also relate to the possible constraints on CLT implementation in the Chinese EFL context. In the next chapter, I turn to the findings for research question two.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND INITIAL DISCUSSION FOR RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

Question: To what extent do Chinese tertiary teachers of English with overseas experience of teacher education perceive CLT as appropriate in the Chinese EFL context?

Findings for this question will be presented based on the three major categories which emerged from data analysis, namely, challenges and constraints on CLT adoption in the Chinese EFL context (5.1.), influence of overseas experience of teacher education in terms of CLT implementation (5.2.), and different views on the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context (5.3.). The aim of presenting the findings for the challenges and constraints on CLT implementation is to provide a general picture of the current situation and dilemmas of CLT adoption in the Chinese EFL context at tertiary level from a holistic perspective. The aim of presenting the findings for the influence of overseas experience of teacher education is to look into the extent to which intercultural experience is considered by informants as conducive to tackle the identified challenges and constraints on CLT implementation. The findings for these two parts (5.1., 5.2.) serve as a general grounding for the

subsequent discussion in relation to the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese teaching context. The results are expected to cast light on the extent to which CLT is considered as effective in the Chinese EFL context as well as the reasons, if any, for perceived inappropriateness of the approach.

5.1. Challenges and constraints on CLT adoption in the Chinese EFL context

As already mentioned in the previous chapter (see 4.2.), some informants' interpretations of the relation between CLT and good language teaching touch upon the possible restrictions of CLT implementation in China, such as the dominance of traditional cramming teaching and teachers' insistence on the usefulness of the traditional learning strategies such as recitation and memorization. In this section, I will take an in-depth look into these issues, as CLT is considered by many informants as highly demanding for both teachers and learners in terms of teaching proficiency and language capacity, and the adoption of the approach is seen as subject to constraints due to these challenges. The findings suggest that the challenges and restrictions on CLT implementation in the Chinese EFL context at tertiary level can be mainly reflected from six perspectives, namely, the perspectives of target language proficiency, teacher-learner relationship,

teaching proficiency, teaching philosophy, learning capacity, and materials and syllabus design. These perspectives, however, can be classified into three major categories: teachers and teaching, learners and learning, materials and syllabus design. In the following part of this section, I will present the findings in relation to the emerged perspectives based on these three categories.

5.1.1. Teachers and Teaching

5.1.1.1. Target language proficiency at linguistic and intercultural levels

Under the category of 'teacher and teaching', the first commonly identified challenge and the biggest obstacle to promoting CLT effectively in the Chinese EFL context is Chinese EFL practitioners' lack of target language proficiency, as more than two thirds of the informants mentioned in the interviews that CLT is highly demanding for teachers' language proficiency in target language. The most representative argument is Mary's recalling her experience of how linguistic incompetence hindered her in teaching communicatively. She claimed that she was afraid of carrying out activities such as presentation and discussion, as her students tended to consider the teacher as a 'walking dictionary' and challenged her use of vocabulary, and she was very uncomfortable with the experience of being cornered. As she recalled:

The biggest difficulty of teaching communicatively is that learners tend to treat you like walking dictionary, they expect teachers to know everything so that sometimes they do not even bother to use their brains, they just give you a Chinese word and want the translation. It is like constant surprise attacks, and such feeling makes me scared […] I felt humiliated when I failed to answer students' questions, it happened couple of times actually. I am not saying that teachers must have a sense of authority, I just hope the teacher is not underestimated by learners. Although each time I honestly admitted that I did not know the answers and promised to check after class, but I worry if this happens too often, students will lost confidence in me […] presentation is the most unpredictable part in my class, which makes me feel scared most.

(Mary, 16th May, 2007, SYSU)

Nevertheless, what we need to note is that although the 'target language proficiency' touched upon by the majority of informants is at a linguistic level, there is a small group of informants whose arguments indicate that the connotation of 'target language proficiency' can be at a socio-cultural level as well. For instance, Tom argued that 'CLT calls for idiomatic language use and the user's ability in perceiving culture difference'. Jane and Wendy both emphasized that language teachers are supposed to broaden learners' horizons through language teaching rather than merely placing the teaching focus on the linguistic level. As Jane argued:

Learners are supposed to understand eastern and western culture better through language learning […] they should have a broad attitude towards the outside world […] the aim of language teaching is to cultivate learners to be trans-national people.

(Jane, 6th June, 2007, PKU)

In addition, Lily also pointed out that Chinese teachers of English should be aware of the problems caused by cultural bias in general. As she said, 'Chinese teachers may do well in teaching the language, but in terms of cultural bias or misunderstanding or stereotypes, I guess all the EFL teachers need to be aware of what judgements pass from their lips'.

It seems that according to Tom, Jane, Lily and Wendy, it is no longer sufficient for qualified EFL teachers to be linguistically competent in the target language. They are supposed to be people with international vision and intercultural sensitivity, having a good understanding of the target culture and intuition regarding language use so as to produce language that is culturally appropriate and acceptable. This point actually reflects the intercultural dimension of CLT as well as its goal of authenticity reinforcement as argued by Richards and Rogers (1986), which poses the challenges to CLT practitioners of using idiomatic target language to build up an authentic classroom environment for communication purposes.

According to Tom, Jane, Lily and Wendy, it seems that CLT calls for Chinese EFL practitioners' intercultural competence to a great extent. This is because their standpoint not only touches upon the intercultural dimension of the CLT model but also reflects one of the CLT principles put forward by Berns (1990) that the acquired target language should be both linguistically and socioculturally acceptable (see 2.1.4.). In addition, Holliday (1994, 2005) argued that cultural sensitivity plays a decisive role in tailoring appropriate methodology in given contexts (see 2.2.1.). Whether or not the CLT practitioner is interculturally competent enough can to a great extent affect the implementation of the third communicative principle proposed by Holliday (2005), and this 'communicate with local exigencies' principle actually highlights CLT's cultural transferability. In this sense, it can be seen that there is relevance of intercultural competence to CLT. Given that practitioners' intercultural competence serves as an important prerequisite for adjusting CLT as a culturally appropriate methodology through localization, it can be seen that lack of intercultural competence might be problematic where teachers adopt a CLT approach in China even though the approach has been locally promoted.

5.1.1.2. Teacher-learner relationship

Teacher-learner relationship is another challenge facing CLT implementation in China, as an equal and harmonious teacher-learner relationship is valued highly within CLT, as reflected by the emphasis placed by some CLT authorities on raising learners' voices in class as negotiators. This point has already emerged from the arguments made by Daisy. As indicated in the previous chapter (see 4.2.), Daisy put forward the idea of 'spontaneous teaching' when conveying her interpretation of good language teaching, in which she touched upon the teacher-learner relationship needing to be less hierarchical. It was then identified that this standpoint to some extent challenges the traditional role of the Chinese teacher as an authoritative knowledge transmitter. Hu (2002) argues that CLT is in conflict with the traditional Chinese model of teaching, as both Chinese teachers and learners may find it difficult to 'accept any pedagogical practice that tends to put teachers on a par with their students and detracts from teacher authority. In particular, it is against Chinese expectations to adopt a pedagogy that may put teachers at the risk of losing face'. (p. 99). Indeed, what is recalled by Mary in the previous section echoes Hu's argument. It can be seen that Mary was frustrated when she failed to answer learners' questions properly due to her insufficient language proficiency in English, and such frustration gradually

made her 'scared' of the 'unpredictable' activities such as presentation as well as triggered her worries about losing teacher's authority in her class (see 5.1.1.1.). It can be inferred that Chinese EFL practitioners' insufficient target language competence can be one of the main reasons for a preference for sticking to teacher-dominant classroom routines in order to obtain a sense of security.

5.1.1.3. Teaching proficiency

The third area touched upon as the challenge of CLT implementation in China is due to the restriction of teaching proficiency. A few informants actually mentioned this issue and took an in-depth look into it. For instance, Sam expressed his worries about practitioners' capability and techniques of controlling the process of interaction between teacher and learner by judging the appropriateness of the content of communication when implementing CLT. As he said:

> How can we exercise a sort of control over the process of communication between teacher and learner? [How do we know] whether the responses from the students as the result of communication will turn out to be desirable? […] it is troublesome and extremely time-consuming if you [the teacher] can't judge whether the answer is right or wrong. If you cannot control the process of communication, learners' response might be unexpected or weird, which leads to at least two problems: it being time-consuming and unsureness about given answer.

Apart from the control problem, CLT is considered by Judy and Patrick as an approach posing great challenge to practitioners' teaching technique in relation to question-posing skill, although they had different focuses in terms of technique adoption. Judy tended to focus on question-posing style as she thought an appropriate way of posing questions could significantly build up learners' confidence. As she declared:

> Questions are of course important, but the way you ask questions is of the same importance […] asking questions is a sort of art […] you shouldn't let learner feel you are superior to them, or those who know the answers are superior to those who don't know […] how to ask questions is a sort of art […] sometimes learners' reluctance to the posed questions is not because they do not know the answer, but they do not appreciate the way you ask it […]   [you should] let learners know it is their confidence in raising their voice that is appreciated.

(Judy, 12th April, 2007, YZU)

Compared with Judy, who emphasizes how to ask, Patrick's concern is what to ask, as in his view, the posed question itself should be heuristic. As he claimed:

> CLT poses a great challenge to the teacher's technique

of asking questions […] questions can't be like 'what do you think of something or why something?' Questions are supposed to be thought-provoking, which can help to develop learner's logical and critical thinking to a great extent.

(Patrick, 26th April, 2007, FDU)

In addition, Judy and Daisy both identified that CLT calls for teachers' competence in integrating the development of five basic language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking, translation and interpretation) for practice by learners. They argued that comparing with the traditional ways of teaching that lay the emphasis on developing learners' competence in reading and writing, CLT practitioners should pay more attention to enhancing learners' overall competence in the use of target language.

It can be seen that the identified challenges and constraints in relation to teaching proficiency mainly focus on the procedure level of the CLT model proposed by Richards and Rogers (1986). Sam's argument reflects his concern over the control problems during CLT implementation, including control of time management, appropriateness of the content of communication, as well as teachers' flexibility in dealing with unexpected situations in class. The issue of question-posing skill mentioned by Judy and Patrick indicates two problems, namely, teaching manner and depth of

the posed question. Patrick's viewpoint also reflects that CLT attaches great attention to develop learners' critical thinking through communicative practice, and according to Jacky, Chinese EFL learners' lack of critical thinking (especially the English majors' poor critical and logical thinking) has not yet drawn enough attention of the majority of Chinese EFL practitioners. The arguments made by Judy and Daisy regarding the application of integrating skills during CLT implementation reflects what has previously been written about CLT highlighting 'procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication' (Richards and Rogers, 1986:66). However, it needs to be noted that whether or not the practitioner decides to apply integrating skills to one's teaching can be subject to his or her teaching philosophy, which in my view serves as the fourth constraint on CLT implementation.

5.1.1.4. Teacher beliefs

As indicated previously (see 2.3.), teacher beliefs can greatly influence one's way of teaching, as argued by Canagarajah (1999), teaching methods are not 'value-free'. Pajares also claimed that 'beliefs are far more influential than knowledge in determining how individuals organize and define tasks and problems and are stronger predictors of behavior'

(1992:311). Therefore, apart from the constraints on CLT implementation identified above which are more like at a technical level (such as lack of target language proficiency and teaching proficiency), teaching philosophy can serve as the constraint at a cognitive level. For instance, in Tom's view, most Chinese teachers of English have a fixed teaching philosophy as they are more inclined to 'work like craftsmen' and 'follow the way they were taught' rather than reflecting seriously and critically about how to maximize their teaching effectiveness by gearing their ways of teaching to the changing needs of teaching context. This sort of passive teaching style is then considered by Tom as in conflict with the open nature of CLT. In addition, the dominance of traditional cramming method of teaching is another reflection of the teaching philosophy restricting CLT implementation. For instance, Lily argued that cramming teaching can be more effective in enhancing learners' overall knowledge by being 'thankless but helpful'. Other participants such as John, Daisy, Sam and Peter all identify the usefulness of recitation and text memorization as the learning strategies of fundamental effectiveness, and it was prevopusly identified that this standpoint can serve as one of the general basis for the dominance of cramming teaching as well as the emergence of what was termed as 'seeming-communicative approach' (see 4.2.).

5.1.2. Learners and learning

However, it should be noted that the development of teaching philosophy can be greatly influenced by learning capacity and attitudes, which may subsequently change practitioners' way of teaching. This point is well reflected by Diana's recalling why she found CLT is hard to carry out in her class. As she reported:

> Students (normally those with low English proficiency) always blame teachers for not doing knowledge input rather than blaming themselves for their poor understanding and preparation for the tasks assigned to them as homework […] they get used to cramming teaching.
>
> (Diana, 22nd May, 2007, SYSU)

In addition, she indentified that whether the communicative activities could be smoothly carried out depended on learners' proficiency level of English and their learning attitudes such as their preparation or different attitudes towards the communicative activities assigned as homework. As she said:

> High level learners have very good understanding of the task / topic assigned to them […] they have a sense of achievement and motivated when fulfilling the tasks […] low level students feel a great sense of insecurity and worry about the communicative activities offer them nothing […] they seldom blame themselves for not making good preparation, instead, they blame teacher not fulfilling teaching responsibility […] average level students do not care too much, they are

neither enthusiastic nor negative.

<div align="center">(Diana, 22nd May, 2007, SYSU)</div>

Diana's viewpoint is shared by other informants such as Tony, Helen, Lily, Patrick and Jane, as they all pointed out that learners and their learning culture can be a restriction on CLT implementation in China. For instance, Helen and Tony both declared that teaching low level learners with CLT could easily make the teacher frustrated due to learners' insufficient language proficiency in English. Tony also suggested that teachers should teach based on their understandings of the general features of learners majoring in different courses (for instance, Art majors were normally more active than Science majors, etc). Lily pointed out that learners' motivation, preparation, expectation and devotion play important roles in the process of CLT implementation, and factors can affect learners' cooperation during a CLT-oriented lesson. Patrick argued that very few students were actually keen on communicative activities based on his observation. As he said:

> We are required to observe some teachers' classes, and I found out few students were interested in the communicative activities, they did not devote to the practice at all, or can I say they did not get used to this practice […] if teacher did not have specific requirement, learners just sat there, listened and then said something in a perfunctory and self-hearted manner.

In addition, Jane pointed out that the insufficient implementation of CLT was largely due to the exam-oriented learning style, whereby learners tend to pay relatively little attention to language use. This problem actually draws the attention of a few informants. For instance, Ben identified that the exam-oriented learning culture restricts teachers' adoption of communicative activities, as he said, 'the adoption of CLT might to some extent affect learners' pass rate of CET (College English Test) exam. Diana considered the biggest challenge of CLT adoption was how to make learners aware that communicative activities did not contradict the exam. She then expressed her perplexity about the proper way to balance the strategies of passing exams and enhancing learners' language ability in practice. Jacky also argued that the exam pressure to some extent encouraged both teachers and learners to be eager for instant success and quick profits. According to Tom, the counteracting influence of exams related to an exam-oriented teaching culture based on quantitative standard of assessment. He reported that in order to implement CLT as required by the government, teachers tend to adjust communicative activities to be quantitatively assessable, aiming to help learners achieve high scores in exam. The adoption of what termed as a

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'seeming-communicative approach' was the reflection of such attempts. In Tom's view, the difficulty in quantifying communicative competence in the Chinese exam system is an important reason that restricts Chinese teachers' adoption of CLT practice as perceived by westerners.

5.1.3. Materials and syllabus design

CLT poses challenges to materials and syllabus design, as according to some informants, material selection is an important step for assisting the effective implementation of the approach. This issue is touched upon by a few participants. For instance, Tom and Helen pointed out that CLT requires authentic and situational teaching materials with the aim to improve learners' skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking. They both suggested that authenticity and practicability serve as crucial criteria for text-based CLT materials adoption, as CLT-oriented materials are supposed to be able to create situations relating to daily-life topics for learners' practice. However, according to other informants, the major problem identified as a constraint on CLT implementation in China in relation to materials and syllabus design is that most coursebooks currently used are inappropriate and unidiomatic. For instance, Sam argued that teaching materials should be more strictly selected and edited by native speakers of English who are familiar with Chinese culture and

have professional knowledge of applied linguistics and ELT. He then showed me in the interview a few of examples of unidiomatic English expressions in the coursebooks he was now using, saying that, in his view, very few coursebooks currently adopted at tertiary level actually reflected the requirement set up by the national curriculum to develop learners' competence in listening and speaking. Patrick expressed the same concern by saying that one of his practices in his translation course was to ask learners to correct the errors found in coursebooks or other published materials. Jacky argued that most coursebooks at tertiary level are not as practical as those edited by cramming schools, as the former 'tend to lay the focus on the levels of lexis and syntax, whereas the latter seem to pay more attention to pragmatics, such as language appropriateness and tactfulness'.

5.1.4. Summary

Up to this point, I have reported the findings for the challenges and constraints on CLT implementation in China from the six emerging perspectives, namely, the perspectives of target language proficiency, teacher-learner relationship, teaching proficiency, teaching philosophy, learning capacity, and materials and syllabus design. As indicated above, it can be seen that the constraints in relation to these aspects are interrelated

to each other (see 5.1.1., 5.1.2.), and teachers' particular ways of teaching can be subject to the influencing factors of these aspects.

It seems the continuing dominance of traditional teaching may reflect Chinese teachers' reluctance to seek pedagogic breakthroughs due to a sense of insecurity mainly caused by their lack of linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language. And practitioners' insufficient proficiency in target language is commonly identified as the fundamental restriction on CLT implementation in China. This interpretation echoes Hu's (2002) declaration, who argues the reason why CLT is considered 'highly threatening' is that the approach calls for teachers to have a high level of linguistic and sociolinguistic proficiency in the target language. Moreover, the success of CLT also depends on how teachers and learners position themselves during the implementation process of the approach, as CLT calls for good cooperation between language teachers and learners, and the contribution from both sides is seen as highly valued in a CLT-oriented classroom. Nevertheless, it should be noted that some Chinese learners, especially those with low English proficiency are comfortable with the hierarchical relationship between teachers and learners, positioning themselves as passive knowledge receiver. The fluctuation in learners' proficiency level of target language

greatly challenges teachers' competence in balancing the communicative and non-communicative input in lessons through appropriate task design and classroom management. The findings also give rise to concerns about how to maximize teaching effectiveness by enhancing learners' motivation to be involved in communicative activities in a more positive way. Given that Chinese learning culture is still exam-oriented, it might be more realistic to develop learners' extrinsic motivation by making them aware of the contributions that CLT could possibly make to improve their performance in exams. However, the findings suggest that this seems to be a paradoxical issue, as the potential effectiveness of CLT regarding improving learners' exam scores is not yet widely accepted by either practitioners or learners. The paradox corresponds to important dilemmas regarding the application of CLT in the Chinese EFL context – whether it is being adopted as a truly 'learner-centered' approach or merely as a pedagogic variation of cramming teaching with the label of 'learner-centreness', and whether so-called communicative activities are being designed as interactive on the surface only or as truly communicative in nature. Both questions are expected to be somewhat clarified based on the findings for RQ3.

In addition, the findings suggest that the currently adopted coursebooks

and syllabus design seem to fail to meet the identified basic criteria of practicability and authenticity for CLT-oriented materials at design level of the CLT model (see 4.1.1.1.). It seems that this constraint poses challenge to CLT practitioners' competence not only in choosing appropriate materials as supplementary materials but also in balancing the fulfillment of course requirement and the input of complementary materials. This is because coursebook design or materials editing is a thorny issue in China; as Jacky pointed out, not many teachers were interested in editing coursebooks because it was hard to achieve a balance between their suitableness for undergraduate education and the maintenance of theoretical value. In the next section, I will report the findings for the influence of the experience of teacher education overseas. This aims to find out the extent to which the intercultural experience is considered by informants as effective in tackling the identified constraints on CLT implementation and in what ways their intercultural experiences actually change their actual teaching practices.

5.2. Overseas experience of teacher education and CLT implementation

Overseas experience of teacher education was identified as effective in enhancing the overall quality of Chinese EFL practitioners at five

particular levels, namely, the academic level, the practical level, the ideological level, the sociocultural level and the linguistic level. The findings suggest a consensus that overseas experience is conducive to enhancing practitioners' IC and critical thinking in general, whereas the identified effectiveness of overseas education at the remaining four levels (academic, practical, ideological and linguistic) rather emerged as opinions from individuals and small groups. The findings also suggest that participants with different backgrounds hold different views on the effectiveness of such intercultural experience in terms of CLT implementation.

At the academic level, it is identified that the intercultural experience familiarized participants with the theories in applied linguistics and ELT. Diana claimed that her MA education in the UK largely made up for her lack of theoretical background. She said this experience strengthened her confidence in carrying out listening and speaking activities in her class when she was back in China, as she was more acquainted with the relevant theories behind the activities than before. Nevertheless, she also reported the overexposure to theory made her a bit disappointed about her overseas education, and she felt overseas education can be more effective if more attention is paid to professional practice in terms of the application of

various teaching techniques or skills. Helen considered her overseas education provided her with the chance to have a thorough understanding of western theories in relation to ELT, and this experience helped to facilitate the implementation of imported theories during her teaching practices when she was back to teach in China afterwards. Judy, Mary and Ben also mentioned that overseas education enabled them to update their professional knowledge mostly in theory, but Mary found most theories quite hard to apply in the Chinese EFL context. Both Judy and Ben considered their teaching proficiency to have been enhanced by familiarizing themselves with teaching theories.

At a practical level, it is identified that intercultural experience casts influence on practitioners' teaching proficiency from a pedagogic perspective. A few informants claimed that overseas experience of teacher education to some extent enables them to organize their lessons in a more communicative way, and the skills or techniques they acquired overseas can be partly applied to the local teaching context to make lessons interactive. For instance, Tony stated that the application of a picture description (with or without cue-cards) activity he learned from Australia had worked out quite well in his listening and speaking class. As he said, 'learners find the activity interesting and tend to spend more time doing

the online searching to prepare for the assignments such as presentation and dialogue performance'. Judy found the skills of online teaching she learnt overseas was extremely helpful, as, when she was back from Australia, she found the university actually placed a lot of emphasis on online teaching, aiming to encourage communication between teachers and learners via internet. She also pointed out that her overseas experience prompted her to tailor her teaching style to be more learner-centered, reflected in her adoption of activities such as use of movie clips, presentation and discussion, as well as attempts to make her writing course communicative by adopting activities such as brainstorming and peer-correction. She considered the courses such as online teaching and curriculum design had been extremely helpful in improving her teaching performance, as she found out the EFL in China was developing swiftly and lots of courses were taught in line with international practice. She finally concluded that the overseas study changed her way of teaching a lot and she was now more able to 'perceive learners' difficulties and 'less wedded to a traditional teaching approach'. Mary considered peer observation and cooperative teaching the most impressive activities of all her overseas modules although she identified that such practice were quite hard to carry out in the Chinese context. Helen claimed that her efforts made to apply what she had learnt overseas had proven effective in her

teaching practice, such as question posing techniques (e.g. probing skill) and classroom management skills (e.g. group discussion).

At an ideological level, it is identified by some informants that overseas education to some extent changes their teaching concepts. For instance, Ben argued that overseas experience enables him to 'think a bit more about how to develop learners' aptitude in independent learning'. Daisy argued that being able to think independently was what she benefitted from most in her overseas education, as she realized Chinese EFL learners should be more strictly trained on how to think rather than what to think. However, she further reported that she had tried hard to teach innovatively when she was fresh back from Australia, but after a year or two, she considered her way of teaching gradually tuned back to the traditional style due to the constraint of learners' level. Wendy considered her visiting scholar experience as a 'landmark' in her teaching career. As she reported:

> The experience had a chemical response to me […] it indeed influenced my way of teaching […] I was more open when I was back to teach in China […] it is not just how to communicate with learners, since EFL is affiliated to general education, my overseas experience enables me to think more seriously about 'what is education? What does it mean by education?' My understanding of the connotation of education is that people tend to be towards fullnism [sic] (achieve a satisfactory life) through education.

Wendy further claimed that her overseas education made her aware of the importance of exploring learners' potential through language education as well as guiding learners to be harmonious with themselves, as in her view, harmony was the key to success.

At a sociocultural level, the majority of the informants mentioned directly that the overseas education largely broadened their horizons as well as enhanced their intercultural awareness and sensitivity. For instance, Tony, Daisy and Helen and Jane all identified that overseas education enabled them to gain more direct insights into western culture so that they could teach by using vivid examples based on their personal experience in class. Jane further added that the overseas experience made her aware the information gained from the media was not always believable, and she now tended to see things from a less judgemental but critical perspective. She said her intercultural experience enabled her to enrich the teaching content by supplementing coursebook cultural knowledge with what she experienced overseas. Tom pointed out that overseas education enabled him to guide learners to develop an objective understanding of the western culture in a more efficient way. As he said:

By being exposed to the alien society, the overseas experience is extremely helpful in enhancing one's intercultural sensitivity and the competence in language use due to the inseparable relation between language and culture. Since language is embedded in culture and culture is reflected by language, the overseas experience enables people to have a better understanding of the target language.

(Tom, 13th April, 2007, YZU)

Tom further reported that based on his own experience, he felt teachers with overseas experience might be more able to 'organize in-depth discussions through effective communicative skills to direct learners to understand both western and eastern cultures by creating vivid situations for communicative practice in a critical way'. In his view, Chinese teachers with no overseas experience might feel hard to create an 'authentic discussion atmosphere in language classroom' and tend to 'limit themselves to Chinese way of thinking or see things from a Chinese perspective only when carrying out discussion activity'.

At a linguistic level, not too many participants considered the overseas education as effective in terms of the enhancement of their overall English language competence. Jacky argued that teachers with overseas experience might be more familiar with 'colloquial expressions of English', so that

they would be able to tell the difference between words in particular contexts due to their better knowledge of idiomatic English. She further added that her overseas experience made her aware of the importance of being able to speak colloquial English, so that she would now always 'ask students to recite some useful colloquial expression in order to make them be able to respond quickly, correctly and appropriately in natural communication settings'. Daisy and Mary both considered writing was the mostly improved skill as a result of their studies. Jane considered her overall proficiency in English improved to some extent due to her intercultural experience.

The findings suggest that the overseas experience of teacher education is widely perceived as a genuinely usefully opportunity for professional development although the interpretations of its usefulness vary greatly among informants. In general, according the majority of informants, the enhancement of one's intercultural competence and critical thinking is the core value of experience of teacher education overseas, as it is commonly agreed that overseas education is extremely helpful in reinforcing practitioners' intercultural competence so that they can achieve a more objective and critical understanding of both target and native cultures. Therefore, it can be inferred that the effectiveness of overseas education at

sociocultural level can be interpreted as the biggest advantage possessed by teachers with intercultural experience in terms of CLT implementation. There are three major reasons that can account for this point. Firstly, this is because it was previously identified that practitioners' lack of intercultural competence and critical thinking serves as a fundamental constraint (which is included in the constraint 'insufficient target language proficiency') on CLT implementation in China. It was then suggested that intercultural competence plays a vital role in the process of CLT localization in the Chinese EFL context (see 5.1.1.). Secondly, whether or not a practitioner is interculturally competent to some extent casts influence on his or her way of teaching, as EFL teachers' cultural values can affect their pedagogic decisions. Practitioners' conservative attitudes towards the target culture may result in their reluctance on accepting the teaching concepts, approaches or materials imported and represented by that culture. Importantly, this can be one of the reasons for the prevalence of cramming teaching in China (which is identified as one of the constraints on CLT implementation (see 5.1.1.)) as well as the emergence of what was termed as 'seeming-communicative approach' identified in the previous chapter (see 4.1.2.). Thirdly, EFL teachers are expected to assume the responsibility of developing learners' intercultural competence and critical thinking ability, as argued by Kramsch:

ELT teachers are encouraged to help students not only become acceptable and listened to users of English by adopting the culturally sanctioned genres, styles, and rhetorical conventions of the English speaking world, but how to gain a profit of distinction by using English in ways that are unique to their multilingual and multicultural sensibilities.

(Kramsch, 2001:16)

This standpoint is actually in line with one of the emerging contributions of CLT to good language teaching (see 4.2.), which according to Patrick, also serves as the aim of CLT (see 5.1.1.). In addition, as identified by Jacky, Chinese EFL learners' lack of critical thinking is actually an important issue that has long been neglected by their teachers (see 5.1.1.). In this sense, it can be seen that an interculturally competent EFL practitioner might be more efficient in helping learners achieve the expected goals of CLT and good language teaching. Being interculturally sensitive and critical in thinking for themselves, about how they teach and what they teach, demonstrate what is expected from a competent non-native speaker of English. Their attitudes towards 'home' and target culture can not only affect the formation of learners' worldview, but also might be one of the channels for reinforcing misinterpretation or distortion of both cultures. Nevertheless, apart from the effectiveness of overseas

education at sociocultural level, its usefulness at other levels also reflects how intercultural experience can help to tackle the constraints on CLT implementation in China in terms of the enhancement of teaching proficiency, both technically and linguistically. Moreover, the findings indicate the tendency that the pre-experience degree obtainers tend to consider themselves to have benefited more from their overseas education than the majority of the post-experience degree obtainers and visiting scholars in terms of way of teaching. In the interviews, a group of learners (including John, Tom, Peter, Lucy, Patrick, Sam, Lily, Sara and Jane) claimed that the experience of being overseas barely changed their ways of teaching, and none of these informants is a pre-experience degree obtainer. In their view, overseas education is more conducive to reinforcing their research and project management skills. Comparatively, as for those who acknowledge the effectiveness of overseas education, although few of them explicitly indentified the attempts they made to change their way of teaching as 'adopting CLT', it can be inferred from the nature of the activities or skills they highlighted that they are actually CLT-oriented. (see the reported findings for the effectiveness of overseas experience at practical level) Moreover, the effectiveness of overseas experience at other levels (academically, ideologically and linguistically) also shows the sign of the potential usefulness of intercultural experience in tackling the

identified constrains on CLT implementation in China via the reinforcement of the professionalism of Chinese EFL practitioners in general.

Nevertheless, it should also be noted that except for Diana, Helen and Wendy, the rest of the informants did not consider overseas education as a 'must-have' experience in one's teaching career. It was widely agreed that overseas educational background is conducive rather than essential in relation to professional development, as it is not the criterion for judging one's teaching competence due to the various ways for professional development. As Tony argued, 'self-improvement can be achieved in many was, such as watching TV, reading English newspaper or articles online; even writing teaching plans is a good way for self-reflection'.

Up to this point, I have demonstrated how overseas experience of teacher education is considered by informants as effective in enhancing practitioners' comprehensive capacity for teaching English from both a holistic and CLT perspective. I also showed that such experience could be an efficient way of coping with the identified challenges and constraints on CLT implementation in the Chinese EFL context in a general way. In the next section, I will report the informants' attitudes towards the

appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context at tertiary level.

5.3. Different views on the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context

The findings suggest that there are three different overall views on the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context, namely, positive perceptions, negative perceptions and eclectic perception. The informants assuming positive attitudes share the idea that it is important and relevantly appropriate for Chinese EFL practitioners to teach communicatively by taking account of the degree to which CLT matches with the national curriculum. The informants assuming negative attitudes mainly build their arguments on their understandings of ineffectiveness of CLT. The informants assuming eclectic perceptions argued that practitioners should be able to adjust their ways of teaching in accordance with the changing needs of teaching contexts.

5.3.1. Positive perceptions

The findings suggest that nearly all the informants acknowledge the importance of teachers' competence to teach communicatively at tertiary level, as it is widely agreed that CLT can to some extent facilitate the language learning process by increasing learners' motivation as well as

enhancing learners' competence in using target language for practical purposes. For instance, Lucy argued that 'it is necessary to teach communicatively as language is a practical technique after all'. This viewpoint is shared by other informants such Mary, Lucy, Helen and Jacky who all mentioned that CLT can enable practitioners to raise learners' awareness of the importance of the practicability of language use, and the approach could be particularly conducive to enhancing learners' competence in listening and speaking. This viewpoint is shared by Tony as well. As he argued:

> it is crucial for learners to realize language is used for social communication […] rather than simply consider language learning as a process of knowledge acquisition […] CLT is maybe not the best or the only way of teaching, it can be an important way to enhance learners' overall competence in English.
>
> (Tony, 6th March, 2007, YZU)

John claimed that the adoption of CLT can strengthen the interaction between teachers and learners, although he placed a lot of emphasis on the significance of recitation and text memorization (see 4.2.). Diana and Lily also recognized the importance of teaching communicatively, yet they both identify the dominance and potential usefulness of the traditional way of cramming teaching. As argued by Lily:

It is unnecessary to give CLT a high priority since the traditional cramming teaching is more effective in enhancing learners' knowledge structure, but by taking learners' interest into account, it is still necessary to teach communicatively.

(Lily, 23rd May, 2007, SYSU)

Helen and Sara tend to differentiate between English and non-English majors in terms of communicative teaching, as, in their view, classes for English majors are more easily designed to be communicative than those for non-English majors due to factors such as English level of non-English majors, non-English-major teachers' teaching proficiency, exam pressure and large class size. In their view, it was definitely necessary to teach communicatively to English majors, whereas non-English majors could be more efficiently taught by non-English methods. Tom argued that CLT had created a huge impact on the Chinese EFL profession. As he said:

It can not be denied that CLT created revolutionary impact on EFL in China […] it challenges the traditional grammar-translation approach in terms of teaching process (from one-way input of grammar knowledge to the development of communicative competence) and the selection of teaching material (from pattern-drill exercise to situational / topic-based exercises).

(Tom, 13th April, 2007, YZU)

Daisy also agreed that CLT had its place in China by claiming that the promotion of the approach has greatly changed the 'mute English' phenomenon among Chinese college students.

In addition, according to other informants, the adoption of CLT is consistent with the guidelines of the national curriculum. Evidence can be found in the following statements:

> The education reform has been carried out since 2004, and one important aspect of the reform is to reinforce learners' competence in speaking and listening.
>
> (Tony, 6th March, 2007, YZU)

> It is not just appropriate but important for teachers to teach communicatively […] this has long been emphasized since the national curriculum has been amended to develop learners' competence in independent learning by utilizing the media and network resources.
>
> (Judy, 12th April, 2007, YZU)

> Since the aim of Chinese tertiary EFL has been defined by the national curriculum as to enhance learners' ability in listening and speaking, it gives rise to the phenomenon that teachers nowadays tend to rely heavily on the activities such as playing movie clips or audio recording programmes with follow-up questions, but according to my observation, very few learners are actually interested in these activities, and they just listen and say something in a perfunctory manner. This also result in learners' negligence in improving one's writing skills, which reflects in one's poor performance in dissertation writing.

It can be seen that according to some informants, CLT does have an important place in China given that the national curriculum now places much emphasis on developing learners' competence in listening and speaking. Judy's statement above implies that CLT can to some extent contribute to enhancing learners' ability in independent learning. Patrick's argument indicates that many teachers have actively responded to the requirement set up by the national curriculum by employing communicative activities in their classrooms, but he questions the effectiveness of these seeming-communicative activities and points out the problem caused by this tendency. His viewpoint highlights the danger of equating CLT with the enhancement of learners' listening and speaking skills. Moreover, it seems that the mentioned requirement of the national curriculum challenges the viewpoint held by Helen and Sara, who have reservations about teaching communicatively to non-English majors.

5.3.2. Negative and eclectic perceptions

Ben is the only informant who directly indicated that CLT was incompatible with Chinese EFL context in the interview. As he declared:

Pure CLT is inappropriate in the Chinese EFL context, as the approach is demanding for both learner and teacher […] the adoption of CLT might to some extent exert negative impact on learners' competence in reading and writing, particular in writing […] communicative competence is only a part of one's overall language proficiency, it is not the only criterion to measure one's proficiency level […] the overemphasis on CLT affects the pass rate of CET exam […] task-based approach has been introduced to China due to the failure of CLT […] CLT is more appropriate to implement in contexts where English is taught as second language rather than as foreign language.

(Ben, 9th March, 2007, YZU)

As indicated previously, Ben's negative attitude towards CLT is mainly caused by his misinterpretation of CLT due to his narrow understanding of CC and the unawareness of the interrelation between CLT and task-based language teaching (see 4.1.2.). His viewpoint reflects the fundamental misconceptions regarding CLT such as the idea that the approach overlooks the development of learners' ability in reading and writing. However, Ben's argument also implies the perceived restrictions on CLT implementation in China, such as examination pressure and the demanding requests for both teachers and learners (see 5.1.1., 5.1.2).

Apart from the positive and negative perspectives emerging from the findings, there is a small group of informants whose arguments reflect eclectic and postmethod perspectives towards the issue. For instance, Judy

declared that, 'it is no use arguing whether a certain theory or approach is good or not; what really matters is the practitioners' understanding of their teaching context as well as the adjustments made to adapt certain approaches to be suitable in the context'. In her view, good language teaching 'called for diversified teaching approaches'. Both Jane and Wendy emphasized that there was no need to follow a particular approach or method as this may cause pressure between teachers and learners or among learners themselves as both sides may have different preferences for different ways of teaching. Wendy particularly pointed out that teachers' approach should be pluralistic / eclectic. Daisy proposed the concept of 'spontaneous teaching', which emphasized teachers' competence in teaching flexibly according to the changing needs of teaching contexts.

It can be seen that the arguments made by Judy, Jane, Wendy, and Daisy reflect the kind of postmethod perspective on ELT of Kumaravadivelu (2003). What they understand by 'being eclectic' indicates that some informants at least are well aware of the shift in major trends of TESOL methods from method-based pedagogy to postmethod pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). The standpoints represented by Judy and Daisy show their understandings of the need to develop what is called by

Kumaravadivelu (2006) 'a context-sensitive postmethod pedagogy', and their statements reflect one of the parameters of the construction of such pedagogy – particularity, which stresses the teachers' genuine understanding of their teaching context during the process of developing a teaching approach. This point of view echoes Holliday's (1994) argument as well, who claims that cultural sensitivity is a prerequisite of appropriate methodology. In addition, it can be seen that the viewpoint held by Jane and Wendy is in tune with that of Prabhu (1990) who asserts that there is no best method and calls for teachers' sense of plausibility to defend and rationalize one's way of teaching. This argument to some extent reflects another parameter of the construction of postmethod pedagogy – practicality, which emphasizes teachers' capability to 'theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize' (Kumaravadivelu, 2006:69).

5.4. Summary

In this chapter, I reported on informants' perceptions of the general challenges and constraints on CLT implementation in China, the contribution of the experience of teacher education overseas to CLT implementation, as well as the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context. The findings for this research question suggest that in general, the complexity of CLT adoption in the Chinese EFL context is well perceived

by all of the informants. The reported challenges and constraints on CLT implementation touch upon six perspectives, namely, target language proficiency, teacher-learner relationship, teaching proficiency, teaching philosophy, learning capacity, and materials and syllabus design. It shows that the constraints on CLT adoption are not merely at cultural level but at technical and ideological levels as well. It needs to be emphasized that although factors such as exam pressure, learners' proficiency level, motivation and big class size tangibly exist, it might be too sweeping to claim that CLT is culturally ill-fitting in China as has been claimed by Hu (2002, 2005). On the contrary, informants have commonly recognized the effectiveness and potential usefulness of the approach. On the surface, what is suggested by the findings seems to be that those who perceive CLT as appropriate in China tend to see CLT as filling a particular 'slot' in Chinese EFL – 1. to enhance learners' overall competence in using English for practical purposes, which is seen as matching well with the identified goal of Chinese EFL set up by the national curriculum, that is, to develop learners' competence in language use through the reinforcement of listening and speaking skills; 2. to enhance learners' motivation in learning English; 3. to build up an interactive classroom atmosphere. Nevertheless, based on the insights into the challenges and restrictions on CLT adoption as well as the identified contributions of experience of teacher education

overseas to CLT implementation in China, we can see that the appropriateness of CLT can also be reflected upon from other perspectives. For instance, the adoption of CLT might to some extent make up for the weakness of the current adopted coursebook, which is identified by certain participants as 'impractical' and 'unidiomatic', given that the approach tends to focus on practicality of language use. In addition, the adoption of CLT can provide teachers with the opportunity to reinforce their teaching proficiency through the enhancement of intercultural competence and critical thinking ability (commonly identified as the core value of one's intercultural experience). This can subsequently cast influence on their learners via EFL teaching given that the importance of developing learners' competence in these two particular aspects is seen as one of the goals of CLT and good language teaching. These facts add weight to the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context at tertiary level, though informants did not touch upon these aspects explicitly. Moreover, the emergent eclectic perspective on the appropriateness of CLT echoes what emerged as perceptions of good language teaching, namely, the tendencies of teaching eclectically, and teaching according to the changing needs of teaching context based on the understanding of learners' needs and feedback (see 4.2.). This shows that some Chinese EFL practitioners are aware of the significance of maximizing teaching effectiveness via the

articulation of their teaching concepts and the changing needs of teaching contexts. In the next chapter, I will report the findings for the third research question, in which I take an in-depth look into the teaching practice of the informants with regard to CLT adoption and adaptation.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS AND INITIAL DISCUSSION FOR RESEARCH

QUESTION THREE

Research Question 3: Do Chinese tertiary teachers of English with overseas experience of teacher education attempt to adopt or adapt CLT? If so, in what ways? If not, why not?

In this chapter, I will present findings which relate to the above question, based on the two categories which emerged, namely, ways of teaching which reflect CLT as reported, and classroom practice as observed. The findings for these two categories will be presented on the basis of analysis of interview and observational data respectively in relation to informants' self-reported usual way of teaching as well as their observed teaching in practice. Here my aim is discover what practices are mostly adopted which are considered by the informants as featuring CLT, and in what ways their actual teaching practice may reflect these or other identified features of CLT.

6.1. Ways of teaching which reflect CLT as reported

In this section, I will present the findings for the informants' ways of

teaching based on the analysis of interview data. The major theme emerging from data analysis is that learners are paid great attention to according to participants' reports. These are based on the general teaching principles underneath their teaching practices as well as the adopted classroom activities and the provided rationale behind these activities. This fact largely echoes one of the most important CLT features as being learner / learning-centered.

6.1.1. General teaching principles in relation to CLT

The reported general teaching principles in relation to CLT mainly touch upon three stages of the teaching process, namely, the pre-teaching stage, the while-teaching stage and the post-teaching stage. In the rest of this section, I will explain these principles in detail.

6.1.1.1. The principles reported at pre-teaching stage

The principles adopted during the pre-teaching stage are mainly concerned with the preparation of lesson plans and assignments for learners to finish before sessions. Nearly all the informants who reported the principles at this stage tried to rationalize their efforts on planning their lessons by emphasizing that learners' needs and expectations are taken into consideration. For instance, Tony and Daisy both directly mentioned that it

was extremely important to 'take account of learners' needs and interests when preparing the lesson plan'. They said they sometimes spent time asking learners about their feedback on the lessons so that they could adjust their teaching plans by balancing course requirement and learner expectations. Helen claimed that she spent lots of time preparing teaching plans, as she always tried to 'make each session different'. In her view, the effort made to make lessons different serves as a stimulus which can help to trigger learners' curiosity and expectations, and otherwise learners would 'be easily bored with invariable teaching'. Judy's effort at making her writing class communicative is another example to support this point. As she said, apart from the adoption of brainstorming, she tried to elevate learners' interests in writing by introducing peer-correction activity as part of a communicative approach to writing. She reported that learners were asked to do peer correction of essay writing of other learners, and the revised writing would be handed in for her double-check afterwards. In her view, getting students involved in the process of writing correction could 'largely arouse learners' interests and enhance one's serious attitudes towards learning'. She said the idea originated from her overseas experience of peer teaching, which actually proved to work out quite well in her class. As she recalled,

what surprised me most is learners seriousness in

> correcting others' work […] they become very critical and strict, reflected in the comments they write to the author […] some students even correct the grammatical mistakes by putting the page number of the dictionary where the illustration of the right use of word could be found.
>
> (Judy, 12th April, 2007, YZU)

Jane claimed that her students were asked to self-study the text before the lesson so that she could 'save time in class and talk more outside the textbook, which might be of more interest to learners'. In Jane's view, teachers should be able to 'extend textbook knowledge and introduce something interesting outside the coursebook in relation to areas such as history, culture and literature to learners as language teaching was a good chance to broaden learners' horizons'. Jane's viewpoint is shared by Mary and Judy who both identified that practitioners should try to concentrate on authenticity and diversity when choosing teaching materials. The self-study practice was reported to be conducted by Tony and Judy as well, as they said they always asked learners to 'self-study vocabulary through e-learning facilities before each session' so that they could save time in class by focusing more on text paraphrase and extending textbook knowledge. Unlike Jane, Tony and Judy who emphasized practitioners' competence in extending textbook knowledge, Diana raised an issue regarding coursebook use, as in her view, making good use of coursebooks could help to enhance learners' motivation. As she reported:

I used to spend lots of time on preparing teaching plans by choosing many supplementary materials outside coursebook for presentation, discussion or debate. But gradually I found out learners complained about not fully using their coursebooks they paid for, and they felt their time and money both wasted […] I am now trying to find topics relevant to texts or directly from their coursebooks […] they seemed to be quite pleased with this change and tended to be more motivated than before.

(Diana, 22nd May, 2007, SYSU)

Ben reported that in order to train learners to be familiar with how to make good use of internet resources, the homework he assigned 'normally requires online searching'. Both he and Judy considered what they asked learners to do before class was conducive to developing learners' competence in independent learning. Patrick reported that he introduced the activity of 'retranslation' in his translation course in order to reinforce learners' competence in independent learning and critical thinking, as in his view, these two areas are what needs to be worked on hardest by most Chinese EFL learners in general. He said before each session, both he and learners were expected to collect some phrases or sentences found to be difficult to translate or those inappropriately translated from the sources such as textbooks, official newspaper websites, magazines and novels, etc. He then started the lesson by organizing discussion based on the collected

materials, and learners were expected to try to retranslate the given

materials (either from English to Chinese or vice versa) based on the result

of discussion. This would be followed by his own demonstration of how

the materials should be translated, and learners were then asked to

compare the version they worked out with the one he provided by

analyzing the pros and cons of both based on the relevant translation skills

introduced already. The retranslation activity normally took up 15-20

minutes of the whole session. In Patrick's view, although this practice laid

the extra burden on him in terms of teaching plan preparation as well as

posing potential challenges to his teaching proficiency, still he considered

this activity helpful. As he argued:

> Retranslation can develop learners' critical thinking by
> making them aware of the importance of challenging
> authority, as teachers should teach learner the way of
> thinking rather than just transmit knowledge.
> (Patrick, 26th April, 2009, FDU)

The above finding suggest that instead of sticking to published teachers'

guides, efforts are made by informants to prepare their teaching plans by

taking account of learning needs based on the given feedback in order to

make the lesson tailor-made. The ways they plan their lessons commonly

reflect a unified teaching philosophy -- to teach in accordance with learner

needs in a given context to a great extent, which is also one of the basic

goals of CLT (Savignon, 2006). In addition, some informants' (such as

Patrick, Ben and Judy) intention of developing learners' competence in

independent learning and critical thinking corresponds well with what was

previously identified as one of the major aims and contributions of CLT to

Chinese EFL profession (see 5.1.1., 5.3.1.). Moreover, Jane's efforts to

integrate target culture into her teaching practice by asking learners to

self-study text before lesson reflect that she tends to lay the teaching

emphasis on developing learners' intercultural competence through

language teaching rather than merely concentrating on improving language

at linguistic level. In this sense, it can be seen that Jane is an interculturally

sensitive EFL practitioner whose teaching philosophy and the reported

teaching practice largely mirror the intercultural dimension of the CLT

model. The principle regarding the choice of teaching materials touched

upon by Jane, Mary and Judy reflect one of the goals of a CLT classroom

that is to reinforce authenticity in language use for communication

purposes (Richards and Rogers, 1986; Brown, 1994) (see 2.1.3.).

6.1.1.2. The principles reported at while-teaching and post-teaching stages

The reported principles in relation to the stage of while-teaching reflect

two major perspectives of pedagogic consideration, namely, the perspective of specific teaching strategies and skills, and a broader perspective of teaching approach. The general principles in relation to the perspective of specific teaching strategies and skills mirror the informants' strategic concerns with how to maximize the effectiveness of their teaching practice by adopting appropriate teaching skills and creating a learning-friendly atmosphere in classroom. For instance, Judy and Daisy both reported that they were 'less strict with learners' grammatical mistakes in oral expression than in written work' in Listening and Speaking lessons. Daisy further added that she would not 'correct learners' pronunciation too often', as she pointed out that this practice could 'help to ease learners' anxiety in learning English'. She also pointed out that for the courses such as Reading or Comprehensive English, she would try to 'introduce some exam-taking strategies to learners in order to trigger their motivation in learning English'. Jacky reported a technique considered as very useful in enhancing learners' motivation in the Phonetics course, as she tried to familiarize learners with phonetic rules through pronunciation practice of what might be of interest to learners (e.g. names of famous brand, athletes or characters from ancient Greek Mythology, etc). John argued that using English as the only medium of instruction in class could be an effective way to improve learners' oral English by forcing them to

get used to thinking in English, whereas Judy and Daisy considered the use of mother tongue can to some extent help to ease learners' anxiety in practicing their oral English. Judy and Patrick both raised an issue regarding the technique of question initiation, and what they argued reflect different focus on question-posing technique. Patrick's concern is what to ask, as in his view, the posed questions should be heuristic. As he said, 'questions should be thought-provoking and aim to develop learners' competence in logical and critical thinking to a great extent'. Compared with Patrick, who emphasized the nature of the posed questions, Judy argued that more attention should be paid to improving the teaching manner of asking questions. As she claimed:

> How to ask question is a sort of art […] sometimes learners' reluctance to the posed question is not because they do not know the answer, but they do not appreciate the way you ask it […] it is important to let learners know it is their confidence in raising their voice that is appreciated most.
>
> (Judy, 12th April, 2007, YZU)

It can be seen that Judy's viewpoint also implies the potential usefulness of effective question-posing skills in building up a learning-friendly atmosphere in language classroom, which in her view, should be 'dynamic and interactive'. As she declared, 'teachers should avoid one man word

counts' (which means dominating the discourse and not allowing learners to express different viewpoints) in the classroom.

Compared with the above reported techniques that are quite individual-based, commonalities can be identified in the following adopted techniques in relation to the efforts made to activate a dynamic classroom atmosphere. For instance, Judy, Susan, Lucy and Peter all considered the adoption of diversifying activities could provide learners with more chance to talk in class. Susan further reported that she always started lessons by asking learners to raise questions for discussion based on text preview. Mary, Ben, Sara and Tony all mentioned that 'grading learners' in-class oral performance' and 'asking learners to answer questions by name' serve as two effective techniques conductive to stimulating learners to express themselves in English by forcing them to be mentally active given that very few Chinese learners were active in volunteering to answer questions. It was commonly reported that learners were informed beforehand that their in-class oral performance would take up 10% of the final grades so that being orally active in class could be a chance to maximize their final scores. Mary further added that in order to 'stimulate learners' motivation to a great extent', she would assign different points to the different questions posed to learners so that they could select questions to answer to

improve their average mark. She considered this practice very useful and said her class was more like an 'auction room' rather than a language classroom.

Apart from the perspective of teaching strategies and skills, some informants reported other general principles in a less specific way. These principles to a great extent reflect the reporters' general teaching philosophies towards the justification of the appropriateness of their ways of teaching in given contexts. For instance, Daisy put forward the idea of 'spontaneous teaching' by claiming that teachers should be able to teach flexibly and critically by being responsive to the changing needs of teaching contexts. In her view, her experience of changing her ways of teaching speaks for her teaching philosophy. As she reported, for the first two years when she was back from Australia, she tried so hard to apply what gained abroad into her teaching practice by organizing the interactive activities such as discussion and debate. She said she imitated the way she was taught in Australia by 'listing the ideas proposed by learners on the blackboard, and then tried to give critique and comments […] sometimes even debated with learners'. She recalled not many Chinese teachers were capable of doing this kind of practice at that time. However, she regretted that her effort was not appreciated by all the students, and after two years

when she was back to China, she was in a way forced to change back to teach in a more traditional way by playing the role of knowledge transmitter due to the constraints of her students' insufficiency in English. She said she now emphasized a lot the importance of recitation and memorization. Daisy's standpoint is quite similar to the viewpoints held by Jane and Wendy, who both emphasized that the recipe for developing appropriate methodology was to 'teach naturally' and 'do not follow particular models or approaches'. They identified that excessive unity of teaching approach might cause 'oppression for teachers' and 'peer pressure among learners'. Jane finally concluded that 'real teaching nowadays is neither teacher-centered nor learner-centered, but combines the two'. Jane's argument can be further backed up by what came up with by Lily who declared that teachers should be able to achieve a balance between teacher-dominance and learner-centerness. Their ways of teaching ought to be adjustable based on their understanding of course requirements and learners' feedback on their teaching practice. She thought it was 'unnecessary to give CLT a high priority' and teachers should take a more dominant role in Reading course than other courses, as detailed paraphrase of the given texts from the teacher was still important and necessary for enhancing learners' reading competence. Moreover, she added that considering teachers were expected by learners to teach effective reading

skills in order to maximize their scores in reading comprehension sections

of the examinations (such as CET-4/6), it might still be important for

Chinese EFL practitioners to play the role as knowledge transmitter in

Reading class sometimes. Learners might be highly motivated if their

teachers could introduce reading skills with clear instructions and

demonstrations, and asked them to practice such skills by doing reading

comprehension exercises as a part of examination preparation. Lily's

viewpoint is agreed with by Susan, who also acknowledged the importance

for teachers of taking leading roles in a Reading class. As she argued:

> reading ability serves as a decisive factor in one's overall development of language proficiency […] reading is the best way of knowledge transmission, with no concrete base on knowledge, one's speech or piece of writing is meaningless and worthless. What matters most is the knowledge itself rather than the modality of knowledge.
>
> (Susan, 5th June, 2007, PKU)

Susan further added that large amount of extra reading exercises should be

assigned to learners after class. In her view, this practice was not only an

effective way to improve learners' reading speed and accuracy but could

help to enhance learners' competence in writing through acquisition and

imitation by familiarizing themselves with the idiomatic use of English

and various writing style and techniques by reading different kinds of articles.

It can be seen that the above reported general teaching principles to a great extent reflect 'learner-centered' (Richards and Rogers, 1986) / 'learning-centered' (Hutchinson and Waters, 1984) features of CLT, as efforts are made by the informants to accommodate their teaching to learning needs and interests. (e.g. Jacky's attempt in enhancing learners' motivation in learning phonetic rules; Daisy and Lily's efforts on enriching Reading course with examination strategies) The strategies such as diversifying activities (mentioned by John, Susan, Lucy and Peter), grading (mentioned by Mary, Ben, Sara and Tony), deemphasizing grammatical and pronunciation mistakes (mentioned by Judy and Daisy), and the rule of 'English only' (mentioned by John) all give evidence of practitioners' efforts to provide learners with opportunities to practise their English by being both mentally and orally active. These facts largely mirror the 'learning to use English' feature of the weak version of CLT proposed by Howatt (1994). In addition, the rule of 'English only' reflects one of the CLT principles proposed by Mitchell (1988) at procedure level, that the target language should be the only medium for communication in a communicative language classroom.

Comparatively, the strategies such as allowing learners to use Chinese to assist learning process (mentioned by Judy and Daisy) and enhancing learners' reading competence by assigning different types of reading tasks (mentioned by Lily and Susan) reflect the 'using English to learn' feature of the strong version of CLT. Moreover, the principles regarding question-posing skills reflect the reporters' different focus in relation to CLT, as Patrick's argument that 'the posed questions should be heuristic, aiming to develop learners' competence in logical and critical thinking' is identical with what considered as one of the major aims and contributions of CLT to Chinese EFL profession (see 5.1.1., 5.3.1.). However, Judy tended to make her point by laying the emphasis on building up an equal and harmonious relationship between teachers and learners in order to stimulate interaction between the two parties. Her standpoint demonstrates her understanding of the important roles played by teachers and learners as joint-contributors in a CLT-oriented classroom. In addition, the 'spontaneous-teaching' principle proposed by Daisy corresponds well with the CLT principle proposed by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) that the approach encourages practitioners to adjust the classroom activities and teaching techniques to respond to learners' needs due to the changing needs of the given contexts. According to Savignon (2006), this also serves as one of the fundamental goals of CLT. Moreover, Daisy's reported

experience in changing from teaching innovatively to teaching traditionally after two years' back to China from Australia implies that she well recognizes the variables as what identified by Berns (1990) as linguistic and contextual diversity in the process of language acquisition in terms of CLT implementation. Her flexibility in adjusting her ways of teaching echoes the argument made by Holliday (1994) that the adoption and adaptation of methodology is an on-going and dynamic process which can be defined as 'becoming-appropriate methodology'. Holliday (1994) argues that teachers seeking what he defined as 'becoming-appropriate methodology' should be able to respond swiftly to the uncertainty and diversity of their classrooms through self-reflection so as to tailor their ways of teaching more acceptable and appropriate in their teaching contexts. What was reported by Daisy shows that she is a culture-sensitive teacher who tries hard to reconcile her teaching philosophy with the actual needs of local teaching contexts based on her genuine understanding of the students and the learning culture they bring with them to her classroom. In addition, her teaching experience suggests that the Chinese students from non-key universities seem to be more attached to the traditional 'top-down' way of teaching mainly due to their insufficiency in English. This result, however, can serve as a basic grounding for one of the possible reasons of the emergence of what was termed as 'seeming-communicative approach)

(see 4.1.2.) though a more in-depth look needs to be taken to disclose the complexity of the issue based on the findings for observational data to be presented subsequently.

Lastly, it should be noted that there is a small group of informants (Daisy, Jane, Wendy and Lily) whose viewpoints on the adoption of teaching approach reflect the tendency of eclecticism. This fact echoes the eclectic and postmethod perspective emerging from the overall evaluation of the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context (see 5.3.2.) that practitioners should develop a sense of contextual sensitivity when seeking pedagogic appropriateness in their teaching practice through trial and error. Certain informants' responses (those of Daisy, Jane, Wendy, Lily and Judy) particularly reflect the dimension of 'particularity' of the framework of postmethod pedagogy proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2003, 2006), emphasizing teachers' capability in developing a context-dependent and culturally-acceptable pedagogy based on the understanding of local linguistic, socio-cultural and political particularities. These participants' awareness that no 'best method' exists reflects their critical consciousness of the general inappropriateness of importing approaches into the Chinese teaching setting.

In short, it can be seen that the reported general principles in relation to the pre-teaching stage and while-teaching stage relate to all the three levels of the CLT model proposed by Richards and Rogers (1986), namely, the approach level, the design level and the procedure level. In addition, these principles well reflect the three communicative principles identified by Holliday (2005:143), namely, 'treat language as communication', 'capitalize on students' existing communication competence' and 'communicate with local exigencies'. Compared with the diversified facets manifested by the general principles of the pre-teaching and the while-teaching stages in relation to CLT, the reported principles regarding the post-teaching stage mainly reflect the participants' concern with how to strengthen the relationship between teachers and learners with a view to facilitating the learning process and maximizing teaching effectiveness. For instance, Daisy argued that teachers should have an 'emotional relationship' with learners, reflected in the principle of 'paying more attention to learners' reaction in class or feedback after class'. Judy claimed that she encouraged learners to communicate with her via email after class just in case they had any problems in study. Patrick also pointed out that teachers should reinforce the process of supervision by being 'approachable' after class. These principles help to tackle the hierarchical teacher-learner relationship identified previously as one of the major

challenges faced by CLT implementation in China (see 5.1.1.).

6.1.2. Classroom activities representing communicative ideas

Apart from the aspect of general teaching principles, another commonly touched upon area of self-reported teaching practices concerns classroom activities actually adopted. The findings suggest that there are a great variety of activities reported to be employed by the informants in their classroom practice which actually reflect communicative ideas. Among these activities, presentations, group discussion and Q-A seem to be the three most adopted ones, as nearly all the informants mentioned in the interviews that they adopted these activities in their lessons. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these activities are reported to be carried out differently. If we take presentations as an example, Judy claimed that she tried to 'promote learner autonomy by not restricting their ways of doing presentation, so that what to present and how to present totally depends on students'. Susan emphasized that presentations were not compulsory in her class, but she 'welcomes those who would like to present voluntarily either individually or as group work'. John pointed out that impromptu speeches could be very helpful, while Patrick argued that it was the thematic and unscripted presentations that were of the particular usefulness. As he said:

I know some teachers who always ask learners to do the activities such as morning speech, free talk or presentation in order to build up an interactive classroom atmosphere. However, in my view, what really helps is to guide learners to do the presentations relevant to the topics of each unit […] if learners can present unscripted, it will be the best. The oral practice that purely for the sake of warm-up does not help a lot.

(Patrick, 26th April, 2009, FDU)

Compared with the sweeping popularity of the above three activities, other reported activities are adopted either by individuals or by small groups of informants. These activities include text paraphrase (mainly through translation) and summary (12 people); making conversation (use of movie / news clips (normally followed up with questions / summary or retelling) (Helen); role-play (Daisy); debate (Wendy); dictation (5 people); in-class writing (2 people); picture description (with cue-cards) (Tony); brainstorming (3 people); game (e.g. word guessing) (Helen), workshop (Judy); peer-teaching (2 people); peer-correction (Judy); retranslation and creative writing (Patrick). It can be seen that text paraphrase and translation are still widely carried out in the lessons of many participants, whereas efforts are also made to diversify teaching patterns through the adoption of CLT-featured activities, as the majority of the reported activities are in accordance with those that can be identified as CLT-oriented (see 2.1.5.). According to the classification system put

forward by Littlewood (1981), these activities can be classified as functional communicative activities (such as Q-A, retelling, brainstorming) and social interaction activities (such as presentation, role-play, debate, peer-teaching, discussion).

Nevertheless, it seems that the attempts to promote innovation in teaching practice do not abandon the traditional way of teaching, as the traditional activities such as text paraphrase (mentioned as being adopted by 12 informants) still take a dominant role in the teaching practice of many informants. In addition, it is worth noticing that not all the activities categorized as 'CLT-oriented' as shown above are carried out in a communicative way (this point will be discussed in detail in the following section, and will be backed up by the findings for the observational data to be presented subsequently). On the contrary, an apparently non-communicative-oriented activity as reported (such as 'retranslation' in Patrick's translation course (see 6.1.1.)) can actually carried out communicatively. It can be seen that Patrick's way of carrying out 'retranslation' reflects his teaching philosophy of reinforcing learners' competence in independent and critical thinking, which corresponds well with one of the major aims and important contributions of CLT to Chinese EFL in general according to participants (see 5.1.1., 5.3.1.). In addition,

the 'learner / learning – centered' feature of CLT is mirrored as well. This fact suggests that unlike the argument made by Nunan (1987) that learners' oral / aural abilities serve as a key criterion for CLT, 'communicative' activities do not necessarily need to be oral or aural. It is the elements such as activity design and the actual way of carrying out activities that decide on the nature of the adopted activities within a given context. Indeed, the idea manifested in Nunan's argument echoes one of the fundamental misconceptions of CLT identified by Thompson (1996) that the approach over-emphasizes the development of learners' oral / aural competence.

In the next section, I will report the findings for informants' classroom practice as observed. I aim to find out the extent to which the observed teaching practices and classroom activities echo reported general principles and adopted activities, and in what ways the informants' actual teaching practice reflects communicative ideas.

6.2. Classroom practice as observed

In this section, I will report the findings for the observational data from two perspectives, namely, the perspective of shared teaching practices and classroom activities, as well as the perspective of the complexity reflected in various teaching practices. The findings suggest that the informants'

ways of teaching generally indicate the tendency of pluralistic teaching as well as the adoption of what I have previously termed as 'seeming-communicative approach' (see 4.1.2.). The discussion of the diversity demonstrated in different informants' actual teaching practice will be linked to their teaching philosophy in relation to CLT touched upon in the interviews, with a view to revealing the possible reasons underneath their choice of teaching methods or techniques from a pedagogic perspective.

6.2.1. Shared classroom activities and teaching practices

The findings suggest that there are some shared classroom activities and teaching practices reflecting 'communicative ideas' in a general way. As observed, presentation, group discussion and Q-A are the three most adopted activities carried out by the majority of informants. Other activities both mentioned in the interviews and conducted in the observations include text paraphrase and summary, making conversation, use of movie / news clips (normally followed up with questions / summary or retelling), role-play, debate, dictation, in-class writing, and sentence rewriting as error correction. The only activity found to be adopted in the observed lesson that was not mentioned in interviews is 'mock interpretation' (in George's lesson 'Advanced Interpretation').

Meanwhile, similarities can also be found across all the participants in terms of their ways of teaching. For instance, in most cases I observed, ICT (e.g. ppt or movie clips) was widely adopted in the lessons of teachers teaching General English courses. The presentations were done unscripted. The participants such as Judy, Diana and Wendy started the lesson with learners' presentations prepared beforehand, followed up with questions posed either by fellow students or teachers, or by comments made by the teacher. Participants including Judy, Daisy, Mary, Lily, Laura and Jane were found to facilitate group discussions, and in the lessons of Mary, Laura and Jane the discussions were followed up with general reports given by the representatives from each group. Participants such as Wendy, Laura and Jacky were all observed to come to the classroom a bit earlier before the lesson began and played the BBC news / movie clips as warm-up. The previously reported useful techniques such as 'grading learners' in-class oral performance', 'asking learners to answer questions', and 'using Chinese to assist language learning process' (see 6.1.1.) were all observed to be adopted by the informants. For instance, in Mary's lesson called College English - Integrated Course, it was observed that Mary assigned different points to the different questions posed to learners so that learners could select questions to answer just as she reported in the interview. This practice was observed to be adopted by Tony and Ben as

well, as they both graded learners' in-class oral performance and homework assigned to them before the lessons. The technique of 'asking learners to answer questions' was found to be adopted by nearly all the participants except Wendy, whose class was full of spontaneous oral activities such as debate and Q-A. The technique of 'using Chinese to assist language learning process' was found as very popular among many participants (such as Judy, Tony, Ben, Lucy, Daisy, Mary and Laura) when carrying out the activities such as Q-A and group discussion. It was observed that these participants allowed learners to use Chinese to express themselves whenever they found difficulty in expressing in English, and they then interpreted for those students.

In addition, it was noticed that during the observations the traditional teaching methods such as explanation and translation were still widely applied to the activity of text paraphrase, as nearly all the participants (except Diana whose lesson was about thematic presentation, see appendix 5-(10)) were observed to paraphrase the texts by using these two methods. Moreover, they are applied to other activities such as vocabulary learning, Q-A and making conversation. For instance, in the vocabulary learning session of Mary's lesson, she asked learners to make sentences with new words or phrases just learnt, or asked them to translate the given sentences

from Chinese to English and vice versa. Ben tried to carry out translation

practice through Q-A, as it was observed that he read the sentence in

Chinese first and then asked learner to translate it into English. He also

listed the key sentence and phrases for learners to make conversation to

fulfill the section of 'communicative task' in the coursebook. This practice

was found out to be adopted by Daisy as well.

In the next section of this chapter, I will try to unveil the complexity

reflected in various teaching practice as observed, and an in-depth look

will be taken into the phenomenon of the seeming-communicative practice.

By linking the practitioners' ways of teaching to their teaching

philosophies reported in the interviews, I shall attempt to reveal the

reasons underneath such practice.

6.2.2. Complexity reflected in various teaching practices

Apart from the shared classroom activities and teaching practices

mentioned above, the findings for the observational data demonstrate the

complexity reflected in various ways of teaching. It shows that different

participants tend to organize the same type of activities differently, and

there are differences between groups of different institutional background.

Some of the observed teaching practices also imply the identified

phenomenon of 'seeming-communicative' emerging from the findings for the interview data previously (see 4.1.2.).

As indicated, the findings suggest that different informants are inclined to apply different techniques to the implementation of the same activity in terms of its design and organization. For instance, for the activity of making conversation, while Tony and Ben just graded learners' oral performance when they demonstrated the conversation prepared with no follow-up activities, Daisy called the peer students to describe or retell the performed conversation to see how well the content had been understood. This retelling technique was observed to be adopted by Mary and Helen as well. In addition, after the presentation and conversation performance, Daisy listed learners' mispronounced words on the blackboard and asked students to correct them. Also, when Ben and Daisy asked students to make up a conversation based on the listed key sentence, phrases and vocabulary, Mary and Helen organized the activities of retelling and discussion differently. Although they provided students with tips by listing the useful phrases or words on the blackboard in order to narrow down the scope of preparation, however, learners were not required to strictly follow the provided clues but were allowed to organize their thoughts freely.

In addition, the observational data show that activities such as paraphrase and translation are still widely carried out in the lessons of many participants, and some of what are named as 'communicative tasks' in the coursebook were found to be carried out in a non-communicative way. For instance, in the Integrated Course given by Tony, it was discovered that very few learners were active in the discussion activity assigned to them, instead, most of them prepared the posed questions on their own by jotting down the answer, and then read it out if called by the teacher. This Q-A practice was discovered to be conducted in his Listening and Speaking Course as well. It was learnt that the questions were assigned for learners to be prepared as homework beforehand. Learners just read out the prepared answers in Tony's class if called and Tony commented on the given answers afterwards by displaying what he prepared in PPT and asked the whole class to read that out. In Ben's lesson called Experiencing English, it was noticed that he started the lesson by checking the assigned homework which was about introducing prestige universities, and all the called students just read out what they had prepared rather than actually saying it or speaking freely. This was followed by Ben's paraphrase of the passage he prepared as a demonstration, emphasizing the elements supposed to be included in a formal introduction of a university. In addition, it was discovered that he listed the key sentences and phrases for

learners to make up conversational practice with partners. This practice

was observed to be adopted by Daisy in the 'role-play' activity in her

Listening and Speaking lesson as well. Instead of empowering learners

with the autonomy to make up the dialogue freely, they listed the key

sentence structures and phrases that learners were required to use for

practice. Another 'seem-to-be' communicative activity is presentation. The

observational data show that presentation was a widely adopted activity by

many participants. However, nearly all the observed presentations were

meticulously prepared and delivered by the students either scripted or

unscripted, but few presenters actually showed the same proficiency level

in the follow-up Q-A as what they showed in the presentations. The

emergence of this practice in lessons I observed recalls the idea proposed

by Tom, who argued:

> many adjustments made to implement CLT are actually
> the traditional teaching methods with CLT label, as
> learners are still expected to master language rules first
> then develop CC [...] the teacher just changes what to
> memorize with the real focus on sentence structure and
> language form…the enhancement is not realized
> thorough CLT-oriented activity but rote learning instead.

(Tom, 13th April, 2007, YZU)

These facts add credence to the existence of what I have termed a

'seeming-communicative' approach in Chinese EFL at tertiary level (see 5.3.1.2.). At the same time, what seem to be the non-communicative activity (such as retranslation) are actually learner-centered, and can be seen as communicative in nature as discussed (see 6.1.2.). The evidence of the tendency of teaching 'seeming-communicatively' in the observations gives rise to the importance of comparing the practitioners' actual teaching practice with their teaching philosophies in relation to CLT as indicated in the interviews. This would be to find out the extent to which their ways of teaching can be justified by their teacher beliefs in terms of CLT interpretation and its appropriateness in China. I therefore choose three participants, namely, Tony, Ben and Daisy for studying in this respect. This is because apart from the activity of presentation that is widely adopted in a seeming-communicative way, the feature of 'seeming-communicative approach' can be mainly reflected in the teaching practices of these three participants as observed. In addition, these three participants' standpoints on the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context represent different opinions on the issue. An in-depth look into the interrelation between their teaching philosophies and actual teaching practices can help to reveal the possible reasons for the complexity of CLT implementation in China from a holistic perspective.

As shown and discussed in the previous two chapters, the findings suggest that Tony and Daisy both held positive attitudes towards the appropriateness of CLT in China. Tony recognized CLT as a practical approach that can facilitate the goal of reinforcing learners' competence in speaking and listening regulated by the guidelines of the national curriculum (see 4.1.1.1., 5.3.1.). He also emphasized that CLT can be an important way to enhance learners' overall competence in English (see 5.3.). Comparatively, Daisy conveyed her affirmative attitude towards the effectiveness of CLT from a more eclectic perspective. She emphasized teachers' competence in teaching according to the changing needs of teaching contexts by proposing the concept of 'spontaneous teaching' (see 4.2.), which echoes one of the basic goals of CLT known as 'depend on learner needs in a given context' proposed by Savignon (2006) (see 4.2.). Ben tended to negate the potential usefulness of the approach by showing a poor understanding of the interrelation between CLT and a task-based approach (see 5.3.2.). In his view, the core value of CLT lies in reinforcing learners' competence in listening and speaking, and the overemphasis on the adoption of CLT may exert negative impact on the development of learners' writing competence as well as the pass rate of CET examination (see 4.1.2.). Despite the divergence demonstrated in their viewpoints regarding the appropriateness of CLT in China, their ways of teaching

show the consensus of teaching in a seeming-communicative way, which is more task-based-oriented. The activities such as making conversation and Q-A are turned to mechanical drills calling for the learning strategies such as repetition, memorization and imitation.

It can be seen that Ben and Daisy's teaching practices can be justified by their teacher beliefs in relation to CLT. Ben did report in the follow-up interviews that he tried to follow the teaching procedure of a task-based approach which he identified as more effective than CLT. As he said:

> The approach I am now using to some extent can be described as task-based. I ask students to do the preview work by assigning them some tasks […] during the class I just check to see how well the tasks are fulfilled by asking questions or dictation […] the task assigned before class could be called 'pre-tasks' […] after class, new tasks will be assigned. There are two types of tasks available at this stage. Those based on the text just learnt could be labeled as 'post-task' whereas those relating to the new text they are going to learn are 'pre-tasks'.
>
> (Ben, 9th March, 2007, YZU)

It can be seen that Ben's teaching practice reflects his shallow understanding of both CLT and task-based approach. This is because the tasks he assigned to learners were observed to be fulfilled through the traditional paraphrase and pattern-drill practice, in which the focus was

mainly laid on developing learners' grammatical competence and discourse competence rather than on sociolinguistic, strategic competence or intercultural competence (another three important aspects of communicative competence). In other words, Ben's seeming-communicative practice is to a great extent due to his misinterpretation of CLT, as he fails to perceive the current task-based approach is very much a 'strong version' of CLT, aiming to enhance learners' communicative competence through text-based tasks with the principle of 'using English to learn'. If Ben's adoption of 'seeming-communicative approach' can be attributed to the reason of his misunderstanding of CLT, Daisy's seeming-communicative practice might be explained due to the reason at a technical level rather than at a cognitive level because of the pragmatic difficulties she perceived during the process of CLT implementation. As she reported in the interview, she was in a way forced to change back to teach in a more traditional way after two years when she was back from Australia due to the constraint of her students' insufficiency in English.

Tony also considered that it is learners' English proficiency rather than teaching proficiency that serves as a decisive factor on the extent to which a dynamic classroom atmosphere can be created. In my view, this can be a

convincing explanation for his seeming-communicative practice as observed. This is because on the one hand, he showed a quite good understanding of what CLT is in the interview (see 4.1.1.1.). On the other hand, his teaching practice leaves the impression that he may fail relate theory into practice in an effective way despite the efforts he made, as there exists the difference between what he reported and how he taught in deep sense. For instance, he described his seeming-communicative practice as observed as 'integrated' and 'bottom-up' in the interview. As he said:

> I think perhaps we should give learners more autonomy in terms of language learning [..] it might be a good idea to try the bottom-up methods […] we should provide learners with the opportunity to explore things on their own […] I tend to integrate five skills in my class (both in the Integrated Course and Listening and Speaking Course) so that students' overall competence could be improved […] for instance, I always ask the students to do the written summary of the text, and then ask them to orally present it in the class, so that learners could practice reading / writing / speaking at the same time. Surely it is impossible to combine the five skills in every exercise in that it still depends on what sort of topic you give your students. In my view, all these effort are conducive to not only improving their overall language proficiency but to developing their ability in independent learning as well.

> (Tony, 6th March, 2007, YZU)

Nevertheless, the observational data suggest that his lessons were very much teacher-centered, and many of the communicative-oriented activities were organized and carried out in a traditional way. Apart from the example given as above in his Listening and Speaking lesson, in his lesson called 'College English – Integrated Course' (see appendix 5-(1)), Q-A was the major form of classroom interaction. However, most of the posed questions were what I called as 'content question', which could be directly found out from the original text and did not require learners' creative or critical thinking at all. In addition, Tony failed to organize the group discussion activity, as when he asked students to discuss the answers to the posed questions with peers, the whole class was very quiet and students tried to find out the answers by working on their own. Tony seemed to be quite used to this situation and made no further efforts to encourage learners to be orally active. He then explained in the interview that considering all of his students were science majors who were very quiet, introvert and reluctant to speak English in class due to their poor pronunciation or grammatical accuracy, he had no choice but to ask them to read alone the text or the sample answers to the posed questions either in or after the class.

At the same time, an interesting phenomenon emerging from the

observations is that there is a contrast between the practices carried out by the practitioners from the different universities in terms of the application of techniques for conducting communicative tasks. For instance, in Wendy's class called Advanced Reading and Writing, it was observed that some activities can be identified 'truly communicative', such as spontaneous debate and the follow-up Q-A of presentation. In Lucy's Closing Reading class, it was noticed that spontaneous Q-A was carried out all the time during the whole session. Other teachers such as Judy, Mary, Helen and Jane were all observed to make efforts to make their lessons interactive by carrying out the activities such as group discussion and spontaneous Q-A. Compared with these practitioners working at top universities who do not require learners to organize their thoughts by strictly following the provided clues when carrying out the activities such as retelling, discussion and picture description, the participants from non-key universities (such as Tony, Ben and Daisy) tend to ask learners to perform what are named as 'communicative tasks' in the coursebooks via a traditional way of teaching through pattern-drill practice, repetition, memorization, imitation, and translation. Given that all the participants adopting the 'seeming-communicative' approach (Tony, Ben and Daisy) and the one who identified this phenomenon (Tom) are from the same university that is not high-ranking, it can be inferred that learners' English

level might serve as one of the important reasons for the emergence of such practice.

The findings suggest that although learning strategies such as repetition, memorization and imitation are still rooted in the Chinese EFL learning culture (reflected in the wide adoption of traditional techniques such as translation and explanation in the participants' teaching practices), great efforts are made by the participants to make language classrooms communicative or at least 'seeming-to-be-communicative'. It seems that the participants generally accept communicative ideas by encouraging learners to be both mentally and orally communicative. The major features of CLT (such as learner-centeredness and learning by doing) can be reflected in the most adopted activities and techniques in terms of activity design and implementation, classroom management and enhancement of learners' motivation in learning English. Moreover, the adopted activities and techniques reflect the basic features of both the weak and strong versions of CLT proposed by Howatt (1984). For instance, the technique of using mother tongue to assist language learning process and some traditional methods (such as explanation and translation) reflect the 'using English to learn' feature of the strong version of CLT that lays the emphasis on the discourse level. Comparatively, other techniques adopted

to build up communicative classroom atmosphere and encourage learners

to speak English (such as asking learners to make up conversations by

using the listed phrases and vocabulary; grading; asking learners to answer

questions, retelling, etc) reflect the 'learning to use English' feature of the

weak version of CLT, that stresses on the dynamic interaction between

people. Therefore, unlike the argument made by Nunan (1988) that it is the

weak version of CLT that is popular worldwide as standard practice, it is

hard and inappropriate to evaluate which version is more prevalent in the

Chinese EFL context at tertiary level due to the factors such as

geographical complexity and particularity of teaching contexts (such as

teaching proficiency and philosophy, learners' English proficiency,

learning interests, etc). More importantly, it should be noted that there

exists complexity in the participants' way of teaching, which gives

prominence to the inappropriateness of overgeneralizing or standardizing a

particular teaching style with a label. As shown above, the prevalence of

the communicative-oriented activities and the wide adoption of the

traditional teaching methods as observed in most of the lessons show that

nearly all the informants (except John[10]) are inclined to teach eclectically,

as their ways of teaching reflect the features of different methods and

approaches, such as grammar-translation, audio-lingual, communicative

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[10] John's lesson was a traditional, teacher-centered and G-T method-oriented language classroom. It was the structural aspect of language input that was particularly emphasized by the teacher. (See appendix 5-(6))

approach and task-based. This tendency of pluralistic teaching echoes the emerged eclectic perspective in relation to the appropriateness of CLT (see 5.3.2.), highlighting the importance for practitioners' competence in developing context-sensitivity when tailoring particular teaching methods or approaches appropriate in a given teaching context. In addition, the observational data implies the tendency of the adoption of what was termed as 'seeming-communicative approach', reflected in the common way of carrying out the activity of presentation across all the participants as well as in the teaching practices of Tony, Ben and Daisy as observed.

6.3. Summary

In this chapter, I reported the findings for the informants' application and adjustment of CLT based on the analysis of the data emerging from both interviews and observations. The findings suggest that generally speaking, communicative ideas are well reflected in the ways of teaching of the majority of the informants, demonstrated in the general teaching principles and many of the adopted classroom activities as reported and observed. It shows that learners are paid great attention to in the stages of pre-teaching, while-teaching and post-teaching respectively, and efforts are made to prompt language classrooms to be interactive. In general, the findings for the observational data correspond quite well with what emerged from the

interviews, and there exist two tendencies in the participants' teaching practices, namely, the tendency of eclecticism and the tendency of the adoption of what I termed a 'seeming-communicative approach' both as reported and as observed. The findings suggest that the majority of participants try to diversify their teaching methods by adopting different activities through a combination of communicative and traditional ways of teaching, as apart from the application of functional communication and social interaction activities, paraphrase and translation are still found to play a dominant role in the classrooms of most participants. Meanwhile, seeming-communicative practices are found to be centrally reflected in the way of carrying out presentation across all the participants as observed, and apart from this activity, it was noted that seeming-communicative practice can be more commonly identified among the participants from the same non-key university. By looking into the rationales of the seeming-communicative practice of these participants, it seems that their ways of teaching can be to a great extent be justified by their teaching philosophies in relation to CLT. Practitioners' misinterpretation of CLT and the pragmatic difficulties such as learners' insufficiency in English serve as major reasons for the emergence of the seeming-communicative practice. Both the emerging tendencies indicate that participants have developed awareness of tailoring their teaching methods to be appropriate in the

given teaching contexts in order to maximize teaching effectiveness, although the emergence of seeming-communicative practice implies the fact that what is CLT in the participants' mind does not mean CLT in China. In addition, this practice also gives rise to the question 'what does being truly communicative and learner / learning–centered mean?', as it shows that some activities which appear to be communicative are not 'in fact' communicative (such as making conversation and presentation), whereas the activitiy which appear to be non-communicative (such as retranslation) are carried out in a communicative way. In the next chapter, I will pick up this point again, and provide further overall discussion based on the findings in relation to all three findings chapters.

CHAPTER 7   OVERALL DISCUSSION

In this chapter, I will engage in overall discussion in relation to the key points emerging from findings and previous initial discussion of the three research questions, referring back also to the Literature Review chapter. I aim to explore to what extent the findings from this study shed light on problems identified in the Literature Review, and in what ways this study can fill the research gap identified there.

7.1. Summary of the findings and their contribution

In this study, I engaged in an in-depth exploration of the conceptions of CLT held by Chinese tertiary teachers of English with overseas experience of teacher education. I examined the extent to which these teachers perceive CLT as appropriate in the Chinese EFL context, and I tried to find out whether or not they attempted to enhance learners' competence in English via CLT adoption and adaptation, as well as exploring the reasons underlying their teaching practice. The findings suggested that the interpretations of CLT conveyed by the majority of the informants match well with the CLT theories appearing in the literature review (see 2.1). This is true in all the areas that emerged, such as nature of CLT, aims and features, roles of teacher and learner, classroom activities, atmosphere and

class size, general principles, teaching techniques and procedures, perceptions about materials and resources, misunderstandings, and expectations and requirements of CLT. In addition, 'communicative ideas' were found to be well reflected in most informants' criteria of good language teaching as well as in the actual teaching practice of the majority of the participants as observed.

However, the findings also suggest viewpoints different from those indicated in the literature review. The biggest difference lies in the new viewpoints presented on the possible mismatch between CLT and the Chinese EFL context. As indicated in the literature review (see 2.3), a basic reason for the inefficiency of CLT in China has been summarized by Hu (2002) as being that ideas advocated by CLT such as 'learning-by-doing' and equality between teacher and learner are in contradiction with Chinese teaching and learning culture, deeply influenced by Confucianism. But the findings showed that CLT is considered by certain participants as being fundamentally harmonious with the essence of Confucianism. In addition, unlike what was indicated in the literature review that the constraints of CLT are mainly at cultural level, the findings suggested that the major constraints of CLT seem to be more at technical and ideological levels instead. The technical level here refers

to identified constraints such as practitioners' lack of competence in English language and lack of intercultural competence, practitioners' insufficient teaching proficiency, learners' low level in English and low motivation, and big class size, etc. The ideological level here refers to reasons such as teaching philosophy and teacher beliefs that are reflected in the features of the traditional G-T method (such as the emphasis on recitation and lexical chunking memorization, and the preference for cramming teaching). The constraints at these two levels can be seen to explain the apparent restriction at cultural level – the traditional 'transmission-oriented' model of Chinese teaching culture.

These reported constraints reflect the complexity of CLT adoption in the Chinese EFL context, and the findings indicated that such complexity was well perceived by nearly all of the informants. In addition, the reported constraints to some extent account for the emergence of what I have termed a 'seeming-communicative approach', both as reported and observed. A 'seeming-communicative approach' involves the implementation of traditional pattern drill practice via communicative activities. Imitation and recitation play vital roles in such practice, as practitioners tend to ask learners to memorize the content of given models of communication rather than encourage them to practice English through

the creation of their own utterances. Given that the informants who pointed out the 'seeming-communcative' phenomenon and those who follow this way of teaching are from the same non-key university research setting, it can be inferred that CLT implementation may pose particularly great challenges to both teachers and learners in such settings, and that the 'seeming-communicative' phenomenon exists more commonly in the non-key universities rather than in those top universities. On the other hand, there was also the reported activity that seems to be non-communicative in form but is actually communicative in nature (see 6.1.2.). This fact reflects a dilemma in CLT implementation in China – what is claimed and adopted to be 'communicative' might be communicative merely in form rather than in nature, while there may be communicative teaching activity going on which is not immediately discernable as such.

Apart from the issue of complexity, the findings suggested that the effectiveness of CLT and the urgency of teaching communicatively were well acknowledged as important by the majority of the informants. Many claimed CLT was extremely helpful in developing the learners' CC, IC and critical thinking. The identified aims of CLT were found to fit in well with the general goals of Chinese EFL as set up by the national curriculum – to

enhance learners' competence in English through the reinforcement of listening and speaking skills. In addition, CLT's feature of being 'learner-centered' was considered as conducive to facilitating the learning process to be more autonomous-oriented.

While the majority of informants tend to understand the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context from either a positive or negative perspective, there is a small group of informants who expressed their eclectic attitudes towards this issue. They identified the importance of practitioners' competence in teaching pluralistically, spontaneously and flexibly, taking account of the changing needs of particular teaching contexts. The conveyed eclectic attitudes reflect the informants' sensitivity in the inseparable relationship between method and context. This happens to mirror one of the parameters of the post-method pedagogy model – 'particularity', as proposed by Kumaravadivelu (2003) as well as one of the basic aims of CLT identified by Savignon (2006), that is, being adjustable to changes of context.

The findings also indicated the high degree to which the informants consider their intercultural experience to have been conducive to improving their teaching performance when they went back to teach in

China from abroad in terms of CLT implementation and general teaching effectiveness. In general, the overseas experience of teacher education overseas was commonly agreed as effective in improving the overall quality of Chinese EFL practitioners academically, practically, ideologically, socioculturally and linguistically. The intercultural experience was identified as extremely helpful in reinforcing practitioners' intercultural awareness and sensitivity, which can to a great extent help to develop their critical thinking and thus enable them to critically review the current educational system in China. Given that Chinese EFL practitioners were generally considered by the informants as lacking in intercultural competence and critical thinking (which might be seen as two important factors for successful CLT implementation and adoption of a context-dependent approach), it can be inferred that intercultural experience can help to facilitate CLT implementation in China, as an inter-culturally competent EFL practitioner can be good at tailoring CLT to be more appropriate in a particular given context (see 5.2.). Nevertheless, the findings suggested that there was a tendency for the pre-experience degree obtainers to consider that they had benefited more from the intercultural experience than the post-experience degree obtainers and visiting scholars. In short, the experience of teacher education overseas was widely considered as conducive though not essential in terms of its

actual effectiveness.

The findings for this study answer well the research questions, and help to fill current research gaps as indicated in the literature review (see 2.4.). The research gaps included a need to seek clarification of an appropriate definition and model of CLT implementation in China, from teachers' perspectives, from the perspective of how CLT is implemented at tertiary level in China, and from the point of view of general teaching effectiveness of practitioners with intercultural experience. By systematically exploring participants' understandings of CLT as an appropriate approach in the Chinese EFL context via in-depth interviews and observations, this research focused, from a bottom-up and anti-essentialist perspective, on how and in what ways tertiary Chinese EFL practitioners tended to apply 'communicative ideas' in their actual practice, on the basis of professional knowledge gained from teacher education overseas. By studying the informants' philosophies of CLT and good language teaching, I specified the extent to which the aims of CLT corresponded with both the general goals of good language teaching as perceived by the informants and those set up for Chinese tertiary EFL by the national curriculum. Having revealed some major constraints on CLT implementation, from participants' perspectives, I proceeded to examine the extent to which the reported restrictions on CLT application were

compatible with those appearing in the literature review, how the difficulties were claimed to be tackled, and in what ways the intercultural experience could influence participants' ways of thinking and teaching. By observing the actual teaching practice of the participants, I tried to investigate the extent to which the observed teaching performances reflected general communicative principles and communicative ideas, and in what particular ways, and for what reasons, they attempted to facilitate learning overall.

In general, the findings for this study suggested positively that CLT plays an important role in Chinese EFL: CLT's contributions, effectiveness and potential usefulness were all widely and clearly identified by the majority of the informants. As mentioned above, the major constraints on CLT implementation were discovered to be at technical and ideological levels rather than at the cultural level. Efforts were found to be made by many informants (especially the pre-experience degree obtainers) to apply what they had learnt abroad in real practice, and adjustments were made as well to improve teaching effectiveness through localization based on teachers' critical self-reflection. Although the findings showed a great variety of ways of teaching and the teaching philosophies underneath seemed to vary dramatically as well, nevertheless, what remained consistent were the

'communicative ideas' advocated quite strongly by nearly all the informants. Different kinds of communicative activities were observed to be carried out in the classrooms of nearly all the participants, and the importance of teachers having competence in teaching communicatively was widely agreed. The findings also suggested that the informants were very responsive to learners' expectations nowadays. Learners' needs were widely taken into account during different phases of the teaching process (pre-teaching, while-teaching, and post-teaching). Efforts were made to balance learners' interests, course objectives and requirements of exams. However, apart from these positive contributions of CLT, the findings also suggested a few problems. In the remainder of this chapter, I will explain these problems in detail.

7.2. Emerging potential problems – essentialism and overgeneralization

7.2.1. The problem of essentialism

As the Literature Review identified, there exists a tendency of essentialism[11] in the perceptions of CLT held by some Chinese EFL theorists and practitioners, as represented by the work produced by Liao (2004) and Hu (2002, 2005) (see 2.4.). It was identified that both Hu and Liao failed to perceive that the flexible nature of CLT actually allows the

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[11] Essentialism is defined in Webster's Third New International Dictionary as 'subscribing to the idea that metaphysical essences really subsist and are intuitively accessible'.

approach to be adjusted and tailored to be accommodated to the needs of learners in a given context (Savignon, 2006). In addtion, it was identified that Hu and Liao's arguments on the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context to some extent stereotyped Chinese learning culture and Chinese learners, as they neglected the contextual factors and cultural diversity both at macro-level (the general cultural context) and at micro-level (the regional and classroom culture). These problems appear to have resulted in overgeneralization about the process of CLT implementation in China. The findings for the three research questions in the current study suggested that although most informants fully acknowledged the usefulness of CLT and were also well-aware of the complexity of its implementation, their interpretations of CLT as appropriate methodology to some extent reflected the tendencies of essentialism and overgeneralization which began to be revealed in the Literature Review. In the following part, I shall explain this issue in detail.

7.2.1.1. CLT as an appropriate approach in China

The findings suggested that a tendency towards essentialism was reflected in informants' individual interpretations regarding whether CLT is an appropriate approach in the Chinese EFL context. The findings for RQ1 showed that few informants individually demonstrated a full, holistic grasp

of CLT in all its complexity. Nevertheless, the composite picture of their interpretations of CLT corresponded well with the way CLT is viewed in the literature reviewed (see 2.1). The shared perceptions of CLT mainly touched upon the aspects of its nature and features as well as classroom activities, whereas there are different interpretations of CLT relating to the following aspects –misconceptions of CLT, the phenomenon of what can be termed as 'seeming-communicative approach', and whether CLT is fundamentally compatible with Chinese learning culture deeply influenced by Confucianism. From the findings it is possible to see that the informants interpret CLT mainly from four different perspectives, namely, an approach perspective, an ideology perspective, a culture perspective and a philosophy perspective (see 4.1.1., 4.1.2.). This diversity of possible interpretations not only reflects well the diversified origins of CLT (Savignon, 2002), but also challenges the tendency to stereotype CLT as a fixed concept which was indicated in the Literature Review and which is reflected by the understandings of some informants. Informants such as Wendy, Sara and Peter considered CLT too abstract and vague to be described precisely. This shows that unlike Liao (2004) and Hu (2002, 2005), whose arguments highlight the principles of 'treat language as communication' and 'communicate with local exigencies', Wendy, Sara, and Peter's attitudes towards CLT involve a tendency towards stereotyping

the approach as vague and abstract. In addition, some of the interpretations

provided by individuals reflected the rooted misunderstandings of CLT

identified by Thompson (1996), and this also demonstrates stereotyped

perceptions of CLT. For instance, Ben attributed the reason for the

increasing implementation of a task-based approach to the failure of CLT,

claiming that CLT had not succeeded in the Chinese EFL context at all. He

said the implementation of CLT would affect the development of learners'

competence in reading and writing as well as the pass rate of the CET

exam (see 5.3.2.). However, Ben's viewpoint fails to recognize the

relationship between CLT and task-based language teaching, and his

arguments to a great extent over-generalize regarding the effectiveness and

potential usefulness of CLT.

7.2.1.2. Contributions of CLT, 'seeming-communicative approach' and the Chinese culture of teaching and learning

The findings suggest that the positive contributions made by CLT in the

Chinese EFL context are acknowledged by nearly all the informants

despite there being different views on its effectiveness and appropriateness.

In short, the goals of CLT were reported to be in tune with the overall

goals of good language teaching and that of Chinese EFL as put forward

by the Education Ministry – namely, to enhance learners' competence in

using English through the reinforcement of listening and speaking skills. Nevertheless, this does not mean CLT has nothing to offer in enhancing learners' competence in reading, writing and translation. In fact, some of the observed Reading and Writing classes were organized in a communicative-oriented manner (see 6.2.2.). Comparatively, some activities such as Q-A, conversation, discussion and presentation were observed to be carried out in a non-communicative way, although these activities were classified as 'communicative' by the practitioners in the follow-up interviews (see 6.2.2.). I have designated such activities as 'seeming-communicative' activities (see 4.1.2.), and the term 'seeming-communicative' is used to describe the following phenomena that were either noted on the basis of interviews or observed:

1). Participants' actual practice of teaching in a non-communicative way when using communicative materials (e.g. the practice of 'making conversation' activity, see 4.1.2. , 6.2.2.).

2). Participants' misconception that their non-communicative teaching practice was communicative-oriented (e.g. Tony's case as discussed in 6.2.2.).

In other words, the term 'seeming-communicative' refers to the participants' judgements of their own practices.

In Chapter 4 (see 4.2.), I proposed three possible explanations that might account for the emergence of a 'seeming-communicative' phenomenon, on the basis of my understanding of the teaching philosophies reported by the informants. These explanations are:

1). Chinese practitioners have misconceptions regarding CLT.

2). Chinese practitioners persist in sticking to a 'learn to use' teaching philosophy, or a preference for the way of teaching they consider useful, which leads them to ignore the features and advantages of other approaches.

3). Chinese practitioners attempt to implement CLT as a 'learn by using' approach based on a realistic understanding of local context and the features of CLT.

It should be noted that these three explanations have different focuses. A deeper look at these three focuses can help to reveal the possible relation of 'seeming-communicative approach' with requirements for appropriate methodology.

The first explanation emphasizes the importance for teachers to have a precise and thorough understanding of new theories introduced and

applied in local teaching contexts. The second explanation highlights a need for teachers' to develop an attitude of openness towards imported teaching philosophy or approaches that may be in contradiction with the rooted teaching pedagogy or habits they are used to or generally consider useful. In addition, it highlights a need for teachers' willingness to change the way they used to teach through the process of adopting the new ideas or methods represented by such a philosophy or approach. The third explanation focuses on teachers' cultural awareness when adopting imported approaches in order to tailor them to be culturally appropriate and acceptable in their own teaching contexts. In other words, it calls for teachers' cultural sensitivity both at macro and micro levels, which could be seen as covering the aspects of the general social context, institutional and classroom culture, and teaching and learning culture.

The provision of the above explanations indicates that apart from the essential role played by practitioners' professional knowledge (such as their acquaintance with ELT theories), it is also important for EFL teachers to be culturally perceptive when adopting and adapting an unfamiliar approach. Such awareness and competence may serve as prerequisites for teachers to seek appropriate methodology in their own contexts in order to maximize teaching effectiveness through localization of an imported

approach. This kind of 'seeking' process reflects the features of what is termed by Holliday (1994) 'becoming-appropriate methodology'. Based on this notion, he conceptualizes 'appropriate methodology' by declaring that the adaptation of teaching methodology is an ongoing process which involves the incorporation of the procedures of 'how to teach' and 'what to teach' (1994:164). It is worth suggesting that administrators and curriculum makers in China may need to play active roles in facilitating this process by creating a more supportive environment (both at national and institutional levels) for Chinese EFL practitioners to teach in a more autonomous and free way in their own contexts.

Nevertheless, based on the findings in relation to the major constraints on CLT, the challenges faced by the Chinese EFL profession (see 5.1.), the general principles of different teaching stages (see 6.1.1.), and overall classroom practice (6.2.), it can be seen that none of these explanations should be overgeneralized. Although I pointed out that the emergence of the 'seeming-communicative' approach can be largely attributed to the practitioners and their learners' incompetence in English as Tony, Ben, Daisy, and Tom (who identifies this phenomenon) are from the same non-key university (see 6.2.2.), I realize that any sort of overgeneralization of the proposed explanations can lead to the problem of essentialism. This

is because the findings showed that teaching philosophy and ways of teaching actually varied dramatically among the informants from different universities (see 4.2., 6.2.). In addition, the findings for the observational data suggested that many informants tried to implement their stated teaching philosophies (e.g. being learner-centered, etc) in their actual teaching practice, and their ways of teaching showed a tendency towards eclecticism overall. However, the phenomenon of 'seeming-communicative approach' itself gives rise to the question – what sort of activities and teaching practices are truly 'communicative' and 'learner-centered'? This question is definitely far from new as inferred from the rich discussions in relation to 'communicative competence' and the confusion caused by the notion of 'learner-centered' (see 2.1.2.1., 2.2.2). Nevertheless, given the argument made by Savignon (2006) that CLT needs to take account of learners' needs in particular contexts, in my view, the 'seeming-communicative' teaching practice is more likely seen as a variation of CLT in the contexts of low-ranking universities. What needs to be noted at this point is the danger of stereotyping communicative activities, as communicative activity can actually take various forms and exist in different types. Based on these facts, it seems to be worth extending the discussion of essentialism by probing into the reasons behind this phenomenon.

On the one hand, the findings showed that Chinese EFL learners are paid great attention to by informants during the whole teaching process (see 6.1.1.). This to a great extent echoes the very core value of CLT of being learner-centered (Savignon, 2006) or learning-centered (Hutchinon and Waters, 1984). In addition, the importance of contextual factors and the development of awareness of cultural sensitivity were identified by some informants (such as Daisy, Diana, and Helen) (see 4.2.). The efforts they made to adjust their ways of teaching to accommodate the overall goals and challenges of Chinese EFL as well as the practical needs of Chinese EFL learners reflect their concerns about the appropriateness of the adopted teaching methods based on their understandings of the local teaching context. In addition, the tendency of eclecticism as shown in most informants' way of teaching and the emphasis on the importance of the teacher's competence in being able to teach spontaneously (see 6.2.) both indicate that Chinese EFL practitioners nowadays are inclined to pluralistic teaching. They no longer restrict themselves to follow a particular teaching approach or method. The active role they assume to gear the teaching style to the needs of learners in given contexts to some extent reflects the features of the model of post-method pedagogy proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1994, 2001, 2003, 2006), who particularly stresses the importance of practitioners' creativity in teaching and theory building in

terms of pedagogic innovation. In this sense, it appears that the informants are quite sensitive to the appropriateness of particular teaching approaches as reflected by the variety of classroom activities and teaching techniques observed. This seems to prove the inappropriateness of the second explanation --- that teachers are ignorant of the true nature of the communicative approach due to the persistence of a 'particular 'learn to use' teaching philosophy.

On the other hand, the reported findings in relation to the constraints of CLT indicated that the cramming teaching culture and the exam-oriented learning culture still play dominant roles in China, and the phenomenon of 'seeming-communicative approach' seems to suggest that recitation, memorization and imitation are still treated as basic and essential learning strategies in the Chinese EFL culture. However, it was also found that the reasons behind this dominance were practitioners' worries about the insufficient proficiency in English of their learners and themselves as well as their worries about their teaching proficiency (such as question-posing skills, time arrangement, ability in handling unexpected situations in the classroom, etc) (see 5.1.). More importantly, the emerging thoughts that CLT can be seen as fundamentally harmonious with Confucianism critically challenges the sweeping assessment presented by Hu (2002, 2005)

that cultural resistance has served as a key factor in hindering CLT promotion in the Chinese EFL setting. This means, according to insights provided by some informants (such as Sam, Mary, Daisy, Judy, and Patrick), that the constraints of CLT implementation in the Chinese tertiary EFL context are mainly at a technical level (namely, lack of proficiency in English) rather than at a broad cultural level. Meanwhile, it was noted that according to other informants (such as Peter, John, Daisy, and Sam), recitation and memorization are still seen as serving as the most fundamental and effective strategies in learning English for Chinese learners (see 4.2.). Therefore, the adoption of a 'seeming-communicative' approach can be seen as a sort of attempt made by some informants to facilitate the EFL learning process based on practitioners' understandings of Chinese learners' general feature of learning as well as their own teaching preference.

The facts related above to a great extent prove the inappropriateness of essentializing or overgeneralizing the proposed explanations of the emergence of 'seeming-communicative approach' due to the identified variables both at macro level (e.g. contextual / cultural factor) and at micro level (e.g. individual difference between practitioners caused by teaching philosophy, educational background, etc). The 'seeming-communicative'

phenomenon reflects the practitioners' uncertainty or confusion as to what truly communicative or CLT-oriented activities are, which implies another problem caused by essentialism – labeling, that can be seen as contributing to confusion both at a cognitive and a behavioural level as shown in the findings. Labeling can be interpreted as a kind of process of making what is represented distinguishable and transparent, which might underlie a tendency towards essentialism. Although it is undeniable that labeling is unavoidable due to the needs of identifying entities by specifying their possessed characteristics or properties, it is important for people to be able to develop a perceptive understanding of the connotations and essences represented by labels. This point echoes the first explanation of the emergence of 'seeming-communicative approach' -- Chinese practitioners' misconceptions of CLT due to their shallow understanding of what 'communicative' is.

7.2.2. The problem of overgeneralization

Although all of the informants participating have the experience of teacher education overseas, the divergence and diversity reflected in the findings in relation to the three research questions indicates the inappropriateness of generalizing what has been discovered and the underlying reasons for these differences. In my view, there are four major reasons that can

account for this point.

Firstly, in a qualitative inquiry like this study, it is hard and improper to quantify variables such as teacher belief, teaching philosophy, ways of teaching, etc, which are variable according to the changing needs of teaching contexts. For instance, Daisy reported in the interview that she tried hard to apply what she learnt overseas into her practice when she was fresh back from Australia. But after a year, she considered herself that she tended to teach in a more traditional way than how she taught before going abroad due to the constraint of learners' proficiency level in English (see 6.1.1.).

Secondly, it should be noted that the informants in this study are from different universities so that the variable of the difference between universities (such as academic levels of universities, learners' English level, teachers' expectations in EFL education, etc) should be taken into account as well. For instance, the findings showed that the 'seeming-communicative' approach was more likely to be adopted by the informants from the non-key university. In addition, the findings suggested that even at the level of top universities, the informants from different universities respond differently to the research questions and the findings

showed that their ways of teaching actually varied dramatically as well due to the different teaching philosophies possessed and different course objectives (see 4.2., 6.2.). Moreover, the findings indicated that the informants from the non-key university tended to show consistency in their teaching, and comparatively, the informants from the key universities showed variety in their ways of teaching as observed, and they seemed to enjoy more autonomy in deciding on what to teach and how to teach.

Thirdly, individual differences between the informants also explain why overgeneralizing in this area would be a mistake – variables such as years of teaching, years after return from overseas, years of being abroad, and level of teacher education overseas all play a part here. The findings seemed to indicate differences between pre-experience and post-experience informants as well as between degree obtainers and visiting scholars in terms of evaluations of the effectiveness of overseas experience of teacher education. In other words, the pre-experience and some of the post-experience degree obtainers seemed to benefit more from their overseas studies than the post-experience visiting scholars in terms of enhancement of teaching proficiency (see 5.2.). In addition, as indicated before, the findings suggested there existed the phenomenon that certain visiting scholars (such as Daisy) tended to change back to the traditional

cramming teaching as how she taught before studying overseas after one or two years of going back to China due to the restriction of learners' English proficiency.

Fourthly, since this research was conducted at four universities (three top universities and one non-key university) which are located in different cities of China (Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, and Yangzhou), it is inappropriate to overgeneralize the findings given the geographic complexity of China and the fact that Chinese tertiary education has been expanding dramatically.

Up to this point, I have discussed the problem of essentialism which has emerged from the findings in relation to perceptions of CLT as an appropriate approach in China, contributions of CLT, the emergence of a 'seeming-communicative approach' and the Chinese culture of teaching and learning. I took an in-depth look into the possible explanations and reasons for the 'seeming-communicative' phenomenon from a methodological perspective and then pointed out the danger of essentialism underlying this phenomenon and its explanations. This was followed by a discussion of another potential problem– overgeneralization that can be encountered during the process of interpretation of findings.

In this chapter, on the basis of a summary of the findings I discussed the main contributions of this study (7.1), and then highlighted two major problems which emerged (7.2), namely essentialism (7.2.1) and overgeneralization (7.2.2). I tried to identify the extent to which these emergent problems echo themes in previous research. In the next chapter, I conclude the thesis, discussing its major limitations, implications and possible directions for future research.

CHAPTER 8   CONCLUSION

8.1. Introduction

In this study, I have taken an in-depth look at the phenomenon of CLT adoption and adaption in Chinese universities by teachers with experience of teacher education overseas. I investigated how CLT was interpreted, as well as the extent to which the approach was considered compatible with the Chinese tertiary EFL context, taking into account possible constraints on its implementation. I explored how and in what ways CLT was actually adopted and adapted by the participants in practice, via interview and observation. In addition, I attempted to identify the extent to which the participants considered the experience of teacher education overseas to have been conducive to facilitating CLT implementation in their own contexts as well as to improving their teaching proficiency in a general way.

In chapter one, I introduced the background and motivation to establish this study. I also specified the research gaps currently existing and identified how the findings of this research were going to fill these gaps. I then briefly introduced the general organization of the whole thesis. In chapter two, I navigated through the relevant theories in relation to CLT and CLT as appropriate methodology. I then identified the current research

gaps from a theoretical perspective and emphasized the potential contributions of this study. I also justified the design of the research questions. In chapter three, I presented a detailed rationale for the research design, including the choice of research methods, instruments, procedure of data collection and model of data analysis. I also explained how to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, and I also considered ethical issues. In chapters four, five, and six, I presented the findings relating to the three research questions and engaged in some initial discussion. In chapter seven, I discussed the findings in further depth, on the basis of key points and issues emerging from the previous chapters, by referring back also to the Literature Review. I also identified in what ways the findings for this study can fill the research gaps specified. Nevertheless, it needs to be recognized that this study contains some limitations, and these will be discussed in the next section.

8.2. Major limitations of this study

One of the limitations of this study lies in the choice of universities as research settings and their locations. There were four universities chosen as research settings and three of them rank as top universities in China. This fact may to some extent affect the general relevance of the findings for this study, as, generally speaking, the top universities are reputed as

providers of high quality education with highly qualified professionals, and the teachers and learners' average level is supposed to be higher than those studying at non-key universities. Therefore, from a methodological perspective, what was considered by the key-university practitioners as effective in general may not work well in the teaching contexts of non-key universities. Another, related consideration concerns the geographical location of the chosen universities: generally, both students and teachers from the capital cities and coastal areas have higher proficiency in English than those from inland China and rural areas. Given that none of the chosen universities in this study were located in inland China / rural areas, it might be inappropriate to generalize the findings to such contexts. In any case, however, as I have emphasized in Chapter 7, teacher beliefs and teaching styles can be very individualized, and can vary dramatically among teachers or even within one teacher due to the changing needs of context. Thus, the limitations discussed here can be considered as weaknesses that commonly exist in studies of this kind.

Another limitation consists in the difficulty of making generalizations about the data in cases where there may have been insufficient evidence to back up claims in certain parts of the findings chapters (e.g. 6.1.2.). This weakness largely results from a problem I noticed during the process of

analyzing interview data – I was aware that some answers to the interview questions were quite simple and superficial because the participants did not offer detailed examples to support their arguments despite the efforts made to probe into answers they had given. This fact to some extent limits the presentation of data and contributes to a lack of strong link between argument and evidence at certain points. I therefore decided to present the data through a general framework of categorization, which in my view, is an effective way to alleviate the identified weakness by indicating the commonalities and dissimilarities existing in the findings so as to support or counter general points made. For instance, in section 6.1.2., I categorized the classroom activities reported as 'representing communicative ideas' according to the classification system proposed by Littlewood (1981), trying to make a distinction between functional communicative activities and social interaction activities. However, I was aware that many informants failed to describe how these activities were carried out in their teaching contexts, and the findings for the observational data suggested that not all the activities reported as 'communicative' were actually carried out in a communicative way. In this sense, I consider the way of categorizing the reported activities provides a general but solid basis for the subsequent discussion built around the concept of 'seeming-communicative-approach' which I have introduced.

A third limitation of this research may lie in the way I have presented findings generated from observational data. In chapter six, the findings for observational data were presented descriptively in a general way rather than through detailed description and analysis as individual case studies. Although the observed lessons covered a wide range of courses, which could provide a solid basis for in-depth case study analysis and follow-up discussion, during the data analysis, I noticed that the themes and categories emerging from the observational data were quite similar to those which emerged from the interview data. Therefore, I decided to present the findings for the observational data in the same way as I presented findings for interview data rather than analyzing each observed lesson as an individual case study. This practice might make this research appear more like an exploratory study rather than typical case study, as the analysis was not carried out based on selected cases and the focus was laid instead on certain fundamental issues. Nevertheless, Yin (1993) has argued that exploratory research can be categorized as case study. In addition, Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991) argue that case study itself calls for the researcher to develop holistic and in-depth thinking when carrying out the investigation, and case studies are multi-perspective analyses that require researchers' sensitivity not only to the voices of participants but also to relevant groups of participants and the interaction between individuals

within and across groups. Given that these criteria are met by this study, (I took an in-depth, holistic look at other relevant issues apart from CLT such as the participants' interpretations of good language teaching, and the effectiveness of their experience of teacher education overseas), I do not feel that the way of presenting the findings for observational data sacrifices the reliability and validity of the whole study.

8.3. Implications of the study

One of the major contributions of this study is to fill an identified research gap by examining the effectiveness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context from an anti-essentialist perspective. I pointed out the danger of the tendency of essentialism underlying the participants' interpretations of CLT and teaching practices which I termed 'seeming-communicative'. However, it should be clarified that this research has not been intended to advocate or defend any particular teaching approach or teaching philosophy. Instead, by identifying the problems existing in current studies on the appropriateness of CLT in China and by revealing how/whether the findings of this study support assertions made in previous work, it aims to highlight the complexity of the issue. This is because teaching methods and teacher beliefs are not static. Instead, they can greatly vary not only among practitioners from different educational and academic backgrounds

but within individuals as well, due to the changing needs of teaching contexts and learners given the dynamics of the language classroom.

This viewpoint actually mirrors Holliday's arguments on 'becoming-appropriate methodology' (see 2.3.1.), in which he stressed that seeking appropriate methodology is a continuous and dynamic process involving the steps of 'how to teach' and 'learning about how to teach' (1994:164). Importantly, however, it should be noted that how to activate this sort of dynamic cycle of teaching process poses great challenges to practitioners and their teaching proficiency. For instance, it calls for teachers' sensitivity to the changing culture of a particular given context as well as their initiative in self-exploration, self-reflection, and being critical and anti-essentialist. Encouragingly, this tendency is found to exist in the findings, in the post-method pedagogic perspectives (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) developed by some of the informants both in relation to their interpretations of appropriate methodology and as shown in their ways of teaching. For instance, Wendy and Jane both identified the importance of being able to decide on one's way of teaching independently and pointed out the inappropriateness of limiting oneself to a particular teaching approach or method without careful consideration. In Wendy's view, whether or not the adopted methodology is appropriate largely depends on

the extent to which practitioner considers the way he or she teaches is harmonious with oneself. Lucy reported that practitioners should have an in-depth understanding of the local teaching context when adopting an imported approach or theory in order to make it culturally acceptable and effective rather than spending time discussing whether the approach or theory itself is good or not. As indicated previously (see 5.3.2.), these particular informants' eclectic attitudes towards the appropriateness of CLT in the Chinese EFL context reflect the basic elements of the theoretical framework of post-method pedagogy put forward by Kumaravadivelu (2006), namely, particularity and possibility. These two elements reflect an emphasis on competence in adjusting one's way of teaching based on the understanding of one's learners and the learning culture they bring to the classroom. Lucy's arguments also echo Prabhu's declaration that there exists no best method, and Wendy's ideas about seeking the harmony between appropriate methodology and teachers themselves reflect the feature of another element of the post-method pedagogy framework – practicality, which calls for teacher's sense of plausibility to develop one's own way of teaching. In addition, the post-method pedagogic perspective can be seen as reflected in the tendency of eclecticism found to exist in the ways of teaching of many participants as observed (see 7.1.1.4.).

The second implication of this study is that the findings suggest the important role played by practitioners' intercultural competence and critical thinking ability in terms of CLT implementation and the development of context-sensitive methodology in the Chinese EFL context at tertiary level. These two aspects are widely considered as very important facets of professional development for Chinese EFL practitioners as well as the key criteria for a good English language speaker nowadays (see 5.2.). Indeed, it needs to be stressed that being open-minded and critical is of paramount importance for Chinese EFL practitioners, as these are the attitudes that can not only help them to develop a holistic and reflective thinking with regard to the problem of essentialism, but can also make them aware of the danger of the emergence of a kind of meta-essentialism – the pitfall of establishing a non-essentialist critical theory (Jang, 2002). As argued by Jang, attempts to counter essentialism can actually involve a different type of essentialism. By claiming that there is no essence, one can go to another extreme through negation of essentialism, which can seem meta-essentialist, but in practice be a new form of essentialism. In this sense, the notion of anti-essentialism ought to go beyond the limitations of the framework of non-essentialist critical theory. Instead, it might be better to serve as sort of reminder of the importance for people to develop less subjective and judemental attitudes but to think more deeply about

different issues as well as to reinforce one's competence in seeing through things, underneath what they seem to be.

Encouragingly, the findings show some evidence that this issue has drawn the attention of some informants (see 6.1.2., 6.1.3.), and it seems that most informants did reflect on their teaching philosophy and teaching practice critically and seriously, taking learners' needs into account, and then tailored their teaching plan and adjusted their way of teaching accordingly (see 6.2.). Nevertheless, there is still a lot that can be done. For instance, the findings suggest that the informants are not so enthusiastic about academic exchanges with peers, as none of the participants mentioned any sort of voluntary academic communication either with Chinese colleagues or expatriate practitioners except for organized classroom observations conducted by the university. Few contacts with expatriate colleagues can be attributed to Chinese practitioners' intercultural incompetence apart from the reasons such as linguistic incompetence, demotivation, heavy workload, etc. This fact indicates that perhaps more opportunities should be given to Chinese EFL practitioners for either offshore or in-service training to help them develop a more open attitude towards the academic exchange between colleagues to facilitate peer observation, as this can be a valuable chance for novice teachers to improve their teaching techniques

by learning from the seniors. Teachers themselves are expected to do more serious thinking about their teaching performance through self-reflection and exploration in order to train their ability in critical thinking as well.

A third implication of this study relates to the way the importance of immersion experience to professional development has been raised. As previously identified, overseas teacher education experience of teacher education can be effective in enhancing the overall teaching proficiency of pre-service EFL teachers, and it was widely agreed by the informants that the core value of such experience lay in enhancing practitioners' intercultural competence and critical thinking ability (see 5.2.). At the same time, it needs to be noted that the picture is mixed, as the findings also suggest that intercultural experience may just play a limited role in improving teachers' linguistic competence, and overseas educational background is commonly seen as productive rather than essential in relation to professional development. These facts, indeed, are a 'big wake-up call' for those who blindly worship an overseas education experience. Moreover, they may help to open up the pursuit of a variety of in-service teacher development training opportunities at home in order to enhance overall teaching quality in the Chinese tertiary EFL profession in general. In this connection, more attention should be paid to English

language proficiency development for Chinese teachers in particular in terms of reinforcement of authenticity in their use of English language. Efforts can also be made to improve the quality of current English textbooks by introducing more authentic and up-to-date materials.

8.4. Suggestions for directions of future research

In the present study, teachers' perspectives were focused upon, but one possibility for future research is to look into the appropriateness and effectiveness of CLT from *learners'* perspectives via in-depth interviews. Focus could be laid on investigating learners' preferred ways of teaching, the reasons underneath such preferences and the extent to which the preferred ways of teaching reflect communicative ideas. In addition, based on the approach adopted in the present study, studies could be launched to investigate what kind of teaching is considered by learners as effective, and the extent to which this way of teaching can be seen to relate to CLT. It might be worth looking also at ways in which Chinese learners consider teachers with intercultural experience to be distinguished from expatriate teachers and teachers with no intercultural experience. It would be interesting to see what learners' suggestions are for teachers in terms of maximizing teaching effectiveness. Another possibility is to take an in-depth look at the teaching philosophy of Chinese EFL practitioners who

have experienced the promotion of CLT. By using a life story approach, such a study could focus on the development and implementation of CLT in the Chinese EFL context at tertiary level from a historical perspective. A third possibility emerging from the present study would be to study the interrelation and crossover between CLT and Confucianism from a philosophical perspective. Overall, it can be argued that the present study, in revealing some of the complexity of perceptions and actual implementation of CLT in the Chinese tertiary context, has opened up avenues for further research which might continue to build a non-essentialist picture of EFL in China.

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