

## Chinese School Teachers' and Teacher Trainers' Perceptions of Culture Teaching in ELT: A Case Study in Xinjiang

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This paper investigates the perceptions of secondary school teachers and teacher trainers from Normal Universities and Teacher Training Colleges in Xinjiang Province of culture teaching in English language teaching (ELT): How they define culture; what they think the objectives of culture teaching are; and, how important they view culture teaching in ELT. The findings show that the teachers define culture in a very broad sense, such as traditions and beliefs, while the teacher trainers think that literature is a major channel to expose students to foreign cultures and tend to adopt an elevated form of Culture in the classroom (Culture with a big C). The study also reveals the teachers' and trainers' positive attitudes towards the integration of cultural information in their application, and their understanding of culture teaching objectives in the language classroom.

**Key words:** Culture teaching, English Language teaching, teachers' perceptions, cultural awareness, curriculum

**การรับรู้ด้านการสอนวัฒนธรรมในการสอนภาษาอังกฤษของครู(สอนภาษาอังกฤษ)และครูฝึกหัดในโรงเรียนในประเทศจีน: กรณีศึกษาในจังหวัดซินเจียง**

รายงานวิจัยฉบับนี้ศึกษาแนวคิดเกี่ยวกับการสอนวัฒนธรรมในการสอนภาษาอังกฤษของครูมัธยมศึกษาและผู้ฝึกอบรมครู จากวิทยาลัยครูและมหาวิทยาลัยต่างๆ ในจังหวัดซินเจียงประเด็นที่จะศึกษาคือความเข้าใจของครูและ นิยามของคำว่า “วัฒนธรรม” การสอนวัฒนธรรมในการสอนภาษาอังกฤษว่ามีเป้าหมายอย่างไร และการสอนเรื่องวัฒนธรรมเป็นสิ่งจำเป็นหรือไม่ ผลการศึกษาพบว่าครูให้คำจำกัดความคำว่าวัฒนธรรมไว้กว้างมาก เช่น ประเพณี และความเชื่อ ขณะที่ผู้ฝึกอบรมครูคิดว่าวรรณคดีเป็นช่องทางสำคัญในการส่งผ่านความรู้วัฒนธรรมต่างประเทศ และมุ่งเน้นวัฒนธรรมชั้นสูงของโลกตะวันตกมากกว่าครูเหล่านี้ นอกจากนั้นครูและผู้ฝึกอบรมครูยังมีทัศนคติในแง่ดีต่อการผสมผสานข้อมูลทางวัฒนธรรมและความเข้าใจในเรื่องเป้าหมายของการสอนวัฒนธรรมในชั้นเรียนภาษาอังกฤษอีกด้วย

**คำสำคัญ:** การสอนวัฒนธรรม การสอนภาษาอังกฤษ การรับรู้ของครู การตระหนักรู้ทางวัฒนธรรม หลักสูตร

## Introduction

In 1999, the Ministry of Education in China released an Action Plan for Rejuvenating Education in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. This is an overall guiding and operational plan for national educational development in China. Its implementation required a new round of reforms in the English curriculum for primary and secondary schools, and the implementation of these reforms commenced in 2001.

One of the goals in the renewed English curriculum for secondary education is to develop students' cultural/intercultural awareness and communicative competence. The new emphasis on a cultural dimension in language teaching is a demanding challenge for school teachers because this was the first time that cultural awareness was introduced as one of the language teaching and learning objects into the English curriculum. Within this new change, I will begin my discussion with previous research on this issue and then have a look at teachers' perceptions on this new dimension in language teaching.

## Previous research

The introduction of a cultural dimension into foreign language teaching has a long tradition in Europe but became an explicit focus in curriculum documents of the reforming processes in many countries in the 1990s. Because of this new emphasis, Byram & Risager (1999) explored teachers' views about cultural dimensions and their effect, as reported by teachers, on secondary school students' perceptions of other cultures. As one dimension of their investigation, these researchers used a questionnaire to elicit definitions of culture from teachers and analyzed their definitions using a grid with two dimensions: thematic (such as a way of life/objective structure/norms and values/art and literature) and societal level (such as international, national, group, individual) (Byram & Risager 1999: 105). Their findings showed that teachers' understandings of the concept 'culture' concentrated on *national culture* with little attention being paid to aspects of culture beyond those already found in textbooks. The definitions provided by teachers appeared to be lacking in the depth and complexity necessary for language teaching. When teachers were then interviewed the researchers were interested in interpretations of cultural dimensions in language teaching, and they concluded that teachers were often frustrated in their attempts to treat the cultural dimension seriously because of pressures to produce measurable results and to focus on linguistic competence.

In Mexico, Ryan (1994) also explored the relationship between foreign language teachers' perceptions of culture and their instructional behavior. Ryan categorized their culture definitions into six basic beliefs in accordance with Keesing's categories of meaning: (1) culture is knowledge gained through reading; (2) culture is institutions which should be analyzed; (3) culture is the daily way of life; (4) culture is transmitted from one generation to another; (5) culture means having a critical attitude toward the world; (6) culture is lived and experienced. During her observations, Ryan analyzed how teachers handled information about English-speaking cultures. Linguistic analysis and practice dominated instruction and culture aspects and linguistic practice were carefully distinguished (Ryan, 1994). She reported that insertion of information about the target culture was done in several ways. In addition to the three ways reported in Byram & Risager (1999) (culture anecdotes, facts and artifacts) Ryan identified another two forms: cross-cultural comparisons between native culture and foreign culture; and "brief, encapsulated cultural statements often seen as talking off the subject" (p. 231). On the basis of these findings Ryan drew the conclusion that there is "some degree of relation between teachers' filters [definitions] and corresponding teacher behavior" (p. 231). For example, if a teacher's filter was "culture is the daily way of life", he/she may instruct students with cultural anecdotes based on her/his own personal experiences. Ryan thus found that in general teachers are teaching culture as facts, rather than for cultural understanding and intercultural competence, a finding which is important in shedding light on how teachers are teaching about culture.

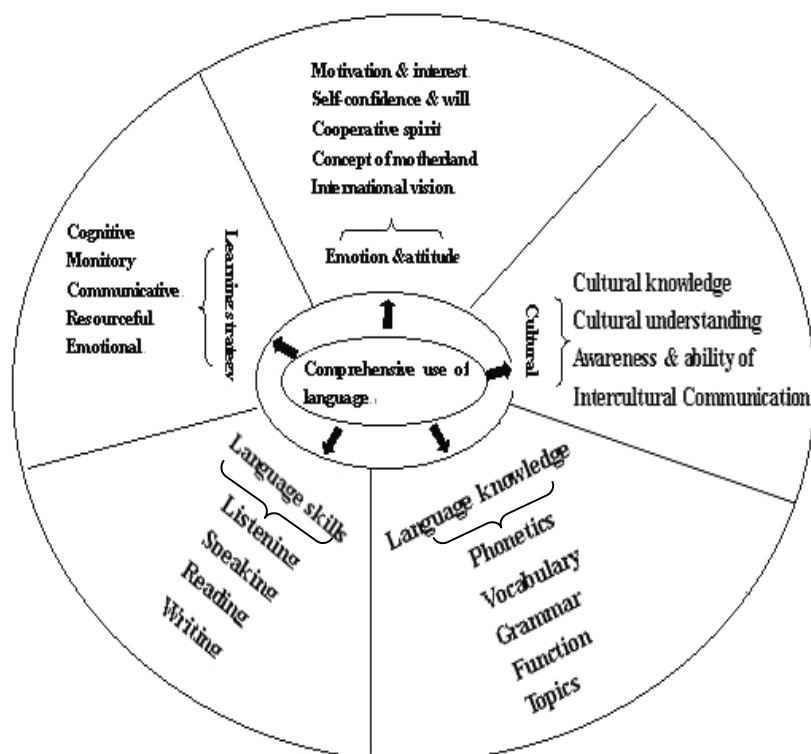
Another international survey of teachers' perceptions of cultural teaching in language teaching was conducted in 2001 by researchers of CULTNET (Sercu, et al, 2005), a network of researchers on intercultural competence in foreign language education, involving foreign language teachers in seven countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Poland, Mexico, Greece, Spain and Sweden. The aim was to define the mainstream of attitudes to the cultural dimension of language teaching among ordinary teachers. Their findings show that teachers think that 'teaching culture is as important as teaching foreign language' and they express their willingness to teach culture and intercultural dimensions. Most teachers agreed that the more students know about foreign cultures, the more students are tolerant, an idea which is closely linked to their interest in teaching culture but teachers from Bulgaria, German, and Mexico hesitated to take a clear stand on whether they thought language and culture could be taught in an integrated way.

In what seems to be the only study in China, Lessard-Clouston (1996a) conducted a case study of 16 Chinese EFL teachers' views of culture in both their EFL learning (during a summer intensive EFL teacher training programme) and teaching (at the lower secondary school level). The participating teachers/learners were interviewed towards the end of their programme. The study showed that teachers, when asked about culture and language, gave very broad definitions that included all aspects of daily life, and said they taught culture both explicitly and implicitly in their classes (ibid). The findings also revealed teachers' major support for the role of culture in their EFL learning and the need for a greater understanding of how to incorporate culture into their own EFL classes. Teachers think that more efforts should be made to have culture incorporated more explicitly into EFL curriculum.

This body of literature was based on investigations conducted in different countries where teachers' concepts about culture teaching varied. The amount of research is overall still small and except for the small scale study by Lessard-Clouston, there is no empirical research done on Chinese teachers' perceptions of culture teaching in ELT in China especially at the secondary education level. This present study serves as an empirical first step to investigate school teachers' beliefs concerning culture teaching in ELT in China in more detail with a different research methodology and complements Lessard-Clouston's study in terms of not only investigating teachers' perceptions of culture teaching but also their understanding of culture teaching objectives.

### **Cultural teaching: Concepts in the language curriculum in China**

The new English curriculum issued in 2001 has five parts concerning English educational goals structured in a circle to indicate the relationship of each to the others, to illustrate how they interconnect and suggest the richness embodied in human language. The five parts are: (1) Language knowledge which includes phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, functions and topics; (2) language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing; (3) cultural awareness which includes cultural knowledge, cultural understanding and awareness/ability in intercultural communication; (4) learning strategies which includes the following types: Cognitive, memory, communicative, and 'resourceful and emotional strategies'; (5) emotion and attitude, which includes motivation/interest, self-confidence, willpower, cooperation, concept of motherland and world vision. (See diagram indicating English language teaching objectives in China below).



As is clear from the diagram shown above, comprehensive language competence is the central part. The surrounding five instructional fields are to service this central purpose. Language skills and language knowledge are two basic instruction goals and no matter how different the curriculum is developed each time, these two always remain as essentials. Students can acquire knowledge of a foreign language through its vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, topic and etc.... Using them can help improve language knowledge. And listening, speaking, reading and writing are four basic language skills, in which effective communication occurs. Most communication takes place by this means. They are the solid foundation in basic linguistic competence.

The teaching objectives in culture first officially appeared in the written form in the new English Curriculum. The introduction of the section on cultural awareness explains the rationale in English teaching as follows:

The language contains abundant cultural contents. In foreign language teaching, culture teaching means to teach students history, geography, local customs, traditional custom, life style, literature art, norms of behaviour, concepts of values, etc. of a target language. Getting in touch with and understanding cultures of English speaking countries are beneficial to the

comprehension and usages of English; this is also helpful in acquiring a deeper understanding of our own cultures, and good for the development of learners' world view. In teaching, teachers should consider students' age and their cognitive abilities, expanding the contents and the scope of the cultural knowledge gradually. At the beginning stage of learning English, students should be made interested in the culture in which the language is being taught. Cultural knowledge in English teaching should be closely linked to students' daily life and what they have learnt about the similarities and differences existing in the culture will stimulate their interest in English learning. At the higher stage, the scope and coverage of cultures should be expanded so that students will broaden their view, and develop sensitivity to the similarities and difference of our own and others' culture with the aim of developing students' intercultural competence (*China's English Curriculum Standards* (CECS), 2001, p. 21, author's translation).

It is thus clear that the latest national curriculum accentuates the need to teach cultural knowledge and to raise students' awareness of English speaking cultures and that it takes the view that an awareness of target-language culture can help students compare their own and others' culture so as to develop students' intercultural competence. To achieve this goal, there are three attainments concerning cultural awareness linked to year level and age level. Attainment 2 is for pupils of primary school (ages 9-11). Attainment 5 (ages 12-15) and Attainment 8 (ages 16-18) are set respectively for the students of junior and senior secondary school.

As a consequence of these developments at national level, school teachers of English in Xinjiang, a culturally diverse region in the North-West of China, find themselves caught in a new situation. They are the actual figures that shape the possible positive/negative outcomes of including cultural information in their teaching. Therefore, against this background of curriculum reform, the purpose of this study is to investigate school teachers' perceptions of teaching culture and cultural awareness in ELT focusing on the following questions:

- How do teachers understand/define culture?
- What are teachers' understandings of the objectives of culture teaching in ELT?
- In teachers' views, is it necessary to integrate culture into ELT?

These three questions are to be investigated as the overriding and overall aim of this study with my intention to find out school teachers' perceptions of cultural teaching and their current practices in

English classroom so as to provide a general picture of the current situation in language teaching in Xinjiang, Northwest part of China.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted in Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, the most culturally diverse province in China. The participants in the study were full-time lower secondary school English teachers and teacher trainers who worked in Normal Universities and Teacher Training Colleges to train those who would become teachers in secondary schools. Most of them with at least 10 years of teaching experience on average. They were teaching 11-20 hours per week at the time they participated in the study. In terms of their education background, ninety percent of them had received a teaching certificate after teacher training from a college. Ten percent of the participants had BA degree and a teaching certificate.

Six hundred copies of the survey with consent form and official approval were distributed to school teachers and some teacher trainers in different parts of Xinjiang at the end of the 2007 academic year. Subjects were randomly chosen from 126 schools in five large prefectures in addition to the capital city of Xinjiang. 463 out of 600 possible participants completed the questionnaire with a return rate of 77%. The 463 participants included 400 school teachers from schools in Xinjiang and 63 teacher trainers from universities in the capital city, Urumuqi. The purpose of the survey of teacher trainers was to see if there would be any difference between trainers and teachers.

The survey which consisted of 27 questions was used with the intention of eliciting a wide range of information, and this article reports only a small part of the results, including comparisons of teachers' views with those of teacher trainers. Three types of information have been extracted: 1) How ELT teachers define culture, 2) teachers' attitudes towards the necessity of cultural teaching in ELT, and 3) teachers' perceptions of culture teaching objectives in ELT. As for the third question on culture teaching objectives, some items were borrowed from the CULTNET survey as will be indicated later in the discussion section.

## Findings and discussion

### *ELT Teachers' definitions of culture*

The teachers were given an open-ended question asking “Which part of the culture(s), do you think, is most interesting in teaching about English language countries, in other words, how do you perceive the concept of culture?” The answers provided by teachers cover a wide range of cultural aspects to include almost all aspect of the life of a people, and therefore the first stage was to group similar phrases or words of their answers together into certain categories expecting to get a general impression of teachers' understanding of culture; to see if there is any common ground in their views; to use this classification as a means of quantifying the responses for easy analytic reference later. Such a categorization does not suggest that the concept of culture can be divided into a number of categories on a theoretical level. The classification is simply an operational instrument to get an overview of some important dimensions which are being dealt with. Thus, each definition can be placed in a number of categories in order to present the richness of the data; rather than a reduction into one category, which would destroy the value of this kind of qualitative data as pointed out by Byram & Risager (1999). Based on respondents' answers, a total of nine categories were created:

1. Culture understood as a way of life or habits—daily life, life style, living conditions, routines, hobbies, etc.
2. Culture understood as tradition, folklore and customs—local conditions & customs and moral standards, communicative rites, social protocols, social conventions, popular practices, etc.
3. Culture understood as history, geography, —all cultural activities in human society, historical events, famous people, etc. and some references to the historical development of words, proverbs, idiomatic usages, slang
4. Culture understood as products of all kinds—literature, art, music, architecture, films, etc.
5. Culture understood as values, beliefs and behavior—behavior patterns, ways of talking/expressing oneself, interpersonal relationship, religious beliefs, etc.
6. Culture understood as education—British /American education
7. Culture understood as political and economic systems
8. Culture understood as science, technology, and environment
9. Others—irrelevant and uncertain responses.



Each answer from informants was attributed to one or more of these categories and, in this way, I have 738 definitions in my corpora from the school teachers, and 112 from the teacher trainers. The nine categories are presented on a horizontal dimension in Table 1. The figures are total responses for each category. The percentage figures are percentages of the total of responses in all categories 1-9.

Table 1: Categorization of teachers' definitions of culture

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	sum
School teachers	112 15.2%	215 29.1%	169 22.9%	31 4.2%	9 1.2%	52 7.1%	48 6.5%	12 1.6%	90 12.2%	738 100%
Teacher trainers	11 9.9%	25 22.4%	28 25.0%	14 12.5%		3 2.6%	9 8.0%	1 0.9%	21 18.7%	112 100%

It is evident from the table above that both school teachers and teacher trainers ranked culture as traditions and customs (29.1 and 22.4%) high as shown in category 2. 'History and geography' has a relatively high preference for both groups (22% and 25%) in Category 3, indicating their understanding that to know a culture of a country is first to know the geographical shape of this country and its history. Their understanding of culture as daily life, living habits in category 1 is presented by 15.2% and 9.9% respectively, and is the next main category for teachers but not for trainers. Culture is more literature-, art-, and music-oriented (12.5%) for teacher trainers than for school teachers (4.2%). This may be due to the fact that teacher trainers may think literature can serve as a major channel to get to know foreign cultures while school teachers may think this is not close to children's lives.

Surprisingly, only 9/1.2% of the school teachers and none of the teacher trainers defined culture as values and beliefs in category 5. The reason behind why neither group defines culture in this way is not certain. It may also indicate that the concepts of social norms, beliefs and values are too abstract to understand. Or it may be possibly speculated that they are not clear about what the purpose of acquiring a foreign language is, for examinations, or for communication. If they think in terms of communication, they may not understand what role values, norms and social behaviours play in the communication. They seem to believe the target language they are teaching should be linked with history, geography, traditions, customs, etc rather than the understanding of culture as values, norms and people's behaviors, which are the deepest part of culture (Prosser, 1978).

There are limited numbers of respondents from school teachers (7.1%) and even smaller numbers of teacher trainers (2.6%) who understand culture as the education system (in Category 6). As for understanding culture as a political system and economy in category 7, both groups of school teachers and teacher trainers comprise a quite low percentage 6.5% and 8%, which could be due to the possibility that both groups think 'culture' is more related to the traditions and history evolved or passed down from generation to generation and therefore more permanent, while politics and economy are more contemporary focused issues and more temporary.

Category 8 is about science, technology and environment to which both groups give hardly any attention as part of their understanding of culture: (1.6% and 0.9%). This is not surprising because this part of culture is not within traditional concepts of understanding culture among Chinese people. Furthermore this kind of cultural information doesn't appear in the textbooks. It is not likely to make any connection for teachers with 'culture'.

In summary, from the wide-ranging perceptions of 'culture' from teachers and teacher trainers it could be seen that the concepts of culture which popped into teacher's minds are first traditions and customs, second history and geography, third the way of people's daily life, which thus can be considered as leading concepts of their understanding of culture .

In addition, we should note that some teachers said they thought Anglo-American culture should be taught together with Chinese traditional culture, while others focused on cultural differences between our own and other cultures by a comparative approach in order to reach better understanding of our own culture through the viewpoint of others, as is indeed recommended in the curriculum document analysed above.

It is important to point out that some teachers failed to answer the question or misunderstood the question; some expressed their uncertainty and dilemma, and some felt very confused about what to say when they were asked to do so (these responses were placed in category 9). It must be admitted that to formulate a definition of culture is very difficult for teachers in a short time in a coherent way especially when they lack training on this aspect of language teaching, but in this way, like Byram and Risgaer (1999), it was hoped to analyse the unreflective perceptions on which teachers based their daily activities in the classroom.

### ***Teachers' attitudes towards importance of cultural teaching in ELT***

Teachers and teacher trainers were asked “Are your students interested in learning culture(s) of English speaking countries?” and “Are you interested in teaching culture(s) of English speaking countries?”. The first question, focusing again on teachers’ perspectives, gives us an indirect account of students’ curiosity towards cultural learning. The second question tells us about teachers themselves and their own attitudes towards cultural teaching. Responses were on a five-point scale: “very interested, interested, uncertain, less interested and not interested”. In the analysis “very interested” and “interested” were combined to show positive attitudes towards the culture teaching and “less interested” and “not interested” were combined to indicate the negative attitudes towards this issue, leaving “undecided” unchanged. The results obtained from these two questions are presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Students’ and teachers’ and teacher trainers’ interest in culture learning and teaching

Interest in		Teachers		Teacher trainers	
		F	P	F	P
Q1 learning	1	276	71.5	58	92.1
	2	73	18.7	5	7.9
	3	40	10.3		
Total		389	100	63	100
Q2 teaching	1	326	83.8	59	93.7
	2	45	11.6	3	4.8
	3	18	4.6	1	1.5
Total		389	100	63	100

**Notes:** 1=Very interested; 2=Undecided, 3=Not interested; F= Frequency; P=percentage

It can be seen that both from teachers’ and teacher trainers’ experience of teaching in the classroom, a large majority of teachers (276/71.5%) and trainers (58/92.1%) say that their students are interested in learning cultures of English speaking countries. Teachers (326/83.8%) and trainers (59/93.7%) themselves are also interested in teaching cultures in language teaching. For teachers themselves this may be due to the fact that teachers have received the new curriculum training, as indicated in another question from the survey. The concept of ‘cultural awareness’ was introduced as we said above for the first time into the English curriculum in 2001. As a result teachers are sure to have got some understanding of the integration of language teaching with cultural teaching and

gradually realized the importance of raising students' cultural awareness in language teaching. As for why students are curious about the foreign cultures and what is their motivation in learning language in terms of culture, it is very hard to speculate, but would be an interesting topic for further research.

The data also show that there are some teachers (73/18.7%) and trainers (5/7.9%) who are not sure whether their students have any interest in cultural learning or not, and about one in ten teachers—but not trainers—are not clear whether they themselves (40/10.3%) are interested in teaching foreign cultures. The uncertain and even negative opinion towards this new dimension of language teaching among a small minority of teachers could be regarded as normal and acceptable. Teachers can't be expected to digest the new concept just with a few training courses to reach a common ground of understanding towards this rather complicated issue of culture teaching.

In order to get further understanding of teachers'/trainers' general opinions about cultural teaching, another question was introduced (Q3) 'Do you think culture teaching is important in English teaching', again using a five-point scale: 'Very important, important, undecided, less important and not important.' 'Very important' and 'important' were combined to indicate teachers' positive attitude towards culture teaching and 'less important and not important' to indicate teachers' negative attitudes towards this issue. The neutral one 'undecided' was kept as it is. The results are shown in the Table 3 below.

Table 3: Teachers' trainers' opinion on the importance of culture teaching

Q3	Teachers		Teacher trainers	
	F	P	F	P
1	323	83	58	92
2	28	7.2	4	6.4
3	38	9.8	1	1.6
Total	389	100	63	100

**Notes:** 1= important; 2=Undecided; 3= Not important F=frequency; P=percentage

The results show that a high percentage of both teachers (323/83%) and trainers (58/92%) have positive opinions about the cultural dimension of language teaching and only less than one out

of ten feel uncertain about it and/or they think that it is not important. Therefore it is evident that teachers/trainers on the whole show great interest in teaching culture in language teaching as seen above, and as seen here they believe in the significance of the cultural dimension of language teaching. The concept of ‘cultural awareness’ which appeared in the curriculum seems to have exerted some influence on teachers’ thinking.

In the fourth question, the teachers/trainers were asked if it is necessary to integrate culture teaching into ELT, again using a five-point scale: ‘Very necessary, necessary, undecided, less necessary and not necessary.’ The same way is used combining ‘Very necessary and necessary’ together to indicate teachers’ positive attitudes towards the cultural teaching and ‘less necessary and not necessary’ to indicate teachers’ negative attitudes towards this issue. The result is presented as follows:

Table 4: Necessity of integrating culture teaching into ELT

Q4	Teachers		Teacher trainers	
	F	P	F	P
1	195	50.1	50	82.5
2	122	31.4	9	14.3
3	72	18.5	4	3.2
Total	389	100.0	63	100.

**Notes:** 1= necessary, 2=undecided, 3= not necessary, F=frequency, P=percentage

The results reveal that half of the teachers (195/50.1%) said that it is necessary to integrate culture into ELT while there is still another half who felt uncertain or disagreed if we combine the uncertainty and negative attitude together (194/49.9%). This implies that the idea of “integration” of culture teaching with language teaching seems difficult. Although the importance of teaching culture is clearly recognized as we saw in the previous section, the notion of integration is not. It can be speculated that they did not give the same strength to the notion of integration because they do not know how this is to be done, or because they believe this will have some detrimental effect on their language teaching. In fact, teachers still emphasise language knowledge and grammar and allocate only 10 percent of the time to culture teaching (data from elsewhere in the questionnaire). One reason for this has been that language teachers in general– and also in China– are more interested in the practical aspects of communication. Language teachers often treat culture as supplementary or incidental to “the real task” (Fantini, 1997). Another reason is that the cultural dimension is not

included much in the National University Entrance Examination and this is probably why teachers do not take the trouble to integrate what is not tested. Teachers' performance is evaluated mainly through the passing rate of National Entrance Examination.

As for teacher trainers, a substantial majority (50/82.5%) showed a positive attitude towards integration of culture and language teaching. The reason for this is probably that college teachers do not have the pressure of struggling for a pass rate of Entrance Examination compared with school teachers.

In short, from the results obtained from Q 3 and 4, it can be seen that most teachers/trainers are interested in teaching culture and their students are also interested in learning culture. The importance of teaching culture in language classroom is acknowledged by the majority of teachers. Referring to the integration of culture/language teaching, however, teachers and trainers held a variety of opinions.

### ***Teachers' perception of the objectives of culture teaching***

Another aspect of the questionnaire investigated teachers and trainers' thoughts about their teaching objectives. Since the majority of teachers/trainers think that it is important and necessary to teach culture in ELT, what objectives of culture teaching teachers perceive, needs to be investigated. A list of 11 items was suggested within the cultural dimension and teachers were invited to indicate ones which best represent their opinion. The first four items are borrowed from the CULTNET project (Sercu et al, 2005), and the last seven are taken from the new English Chinese curriculum (See appendix 1). The scale ranges from 'very important, important, undecided, and less important to not important.' The means for each statement were calculated with 'Very important' being scored as 1 and 'Not important' scored as 5. The lower the mean therefore the more importance was attached to the objective. Since all scores were below 3, it is clear that all the objectives were considered important to some degree. Our analysis therefore focuses on the degree of importance and not the fact that any objective was considered unimportant or even 'undecided'.

The list of 11 cultural teaching objectives appeared in the questionnaire in random order. The table below has been rearranged according to four aspects: General objectives, skills dimension, the knowledge dimension and attitudinal dimension. The analysis will follow the four dimensions:

Table 5: Culture teaching objectives in four dimensions

General objectives of cultural teaching
Q5h Make language teaching more interesting and motivating.
Q5i Widen students' horizons on the world.
Q5f Promote increased understanding of students' own culture
Skills dimension
Q5g Promote the ability to handle intercultural contact situations.
Q5j Promote students' ability to evaluate and their sensitivity to different cultures.
Q5k Promote students' awareness of similarities and differences between English speaking countries.
Knowledge dimension
Q5a Provide information about the history, geography and political system of the foreign culture(s).
Q5b Provide information about daily life and routines
Q5c Provide information about shared values and beliefs.
Q5d Provide experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theatre, film, etc.).
Attitudinal dimension
Q5e Develop attitudes of acceptance and tolerance towards other peoples and cultures.

Table 6: Result of Culture teaching objectives in four dimensions in rank order

School teachers (p = 389)				Teacher trainers (p = 63)			
	N	M	SD		N	M	SD
Q5-h	384	1.63	.744	Q5-h	61	1.59	.588
Q5-i	386	1.65	.648	Q5-i	61	1.72	.609
Q5-f	383	1.75	.802	Q5-g	60	1.72	.640
Q5-g	383	1.82	.870	Q5-f	60	1.73	.733
Q5-b	388	1.88	.805	Q5-d	61	1.85	.792
Q5-k	384	2.07	.945	Q5-k	61	1.89	.733
Q5-j	382	2.13	.941	Q5-e	59	1.90	.759
Q5e	383	2.16	.935	Q5-b	60	1.92	.829
Q5-d	386	2.17	.954	Q5-j	61	1.97	.795
Q5-a	387	2.36	1.04	Q5-a	59	1.97	.694
Q5-c	384	2.38		Q5-c	61	2.03	.802

*Notes:* N = Number including this objective in their response—some respondents did not categorise all objectives); M = Mean ranging between 0.00 and 5.00.; SD = Standard deviation

It is interesting to discover that both school teachers and teacher trainers shared very similar understanding about culture teaching objectives. They both ranked items h, i, f, the general objectives of culture teaching, at the top of the list. The belief that culture teaching can make language teaching more interesting and motivating and culture teaching can widen students' horizon on the world was supported by school teachers (M. 1.63 ; M.1.65,) and by teacher trainers (M.1.59; M.1.72). They also agree that learning about students' own culture is important (M.1.75; M.1.73). These three items (Q5-h, i, f) are taken from China's English Curriculum Standards (CECS). This shows that teachers/trainers give their preference to general culture teaching objectives.

As for the skill dimension of culture teaching, there are three regrouped skills related to culture teaching seen in Table 5. It can be seen that both school teachers and teacher trainers believed that a very important objective of culture teaching is to promote students' ability to handle intercultural contact situations: Q5-g borrowed from CULTNET was ranked nearly at the same place by both groups. The result is surprising because this idea 'intercultural' is fairly new in



secondary language education and also because students do not have much chance of intercultural contacts. Therefore, it may be that they think culture teaching could contribute to communication, could help students learn to communicate with people from different cultural background if they have opportunities for well-equipped preparation in their language education.

Another interesting finding is that school teachers and teacher trainers place the objective of promoting students' awareness of similarities and differences of English speaking countries (Q5-k) in the middle (M.2.07; M 1.89), then there is a gap to the next score on (Q5-j) for the teachers but not for the trainers. They thus seem to hold different views about promoting students' ability to be sensitive to different cultures (M.2.13, M.1.97). School teachers gave this a higher score, meaning that it was less important for them. The possible reason might be that school teachers may think their students have fewer chances of contact or first-hand experiences with foreign cultures. Students need their teachers's help to tell or to compare different cultures with their own in order to develop their sensitivity to other different cultures while trainers may think the ability to be sensitive to other cultures is more important. These two objectives (Q5-k, j) are already designated in the new curriculum.

Regarding the knowledge dimension, school teachers put a priority on 'provide information of daily life and routines' higher (Q5-b, M 1.88) while teacher trainers believed that 'to provide experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theatre and film etc.) (Q5-d, M1.85) is more important. The former is focusing on 'small c culture' while the latter is on 'big C culture' (Stern, 1992). The implications of this result could be threefold. First, teachers may be familiar with this part of culture and they may feel confident to teach it. Second, teachers would possibly link cultural information of daily life with something 'close to students' life,' 'something students may be interested in,' 'something which may be within student's cognitive domain' expressed by them when asked to define what culture is. Third, the contents concerning small c culture appear more often than big C culture in the textbook, which suggests the knowledge of small c culture could be possibly used more in daily communication with people of different cultures, especially in secondary language education. However, teacher trainers still think literature, music and art, etc. are the channels to learn culture in language teaching. This also implies that there is a disconnection between teacher training courses and teachers' practice in the classroom. It also suggests that teacher trainers may themselves lack the training on the new curriculum and there are many changes of teaching concepts they are not very clear about.

It is surprising to discover that both school teachers and teacher trainers put Q5-a and Q5-c at the bottom of the list concerning information about the history, geography, political system and values and beliefs. This suggests that teachers are not very interested in teaching the big C culture about foreign history and geography. This ranking is very interesting when looking at the definitions of culture above where teachers put history and geography quite high next to daily life and customs. Here, when they are asked to define the objectives of culture teaching, they seem to give less support to it. This shows clearly that the knowledge they favour in practice—despite their theoretical concepts of culture—is ‘providing information about daily life and routines’ rather more than big C culture, implying the objectives should be linked to the development of students’ ability in communication.

The knowledge of ‘providing shared values and beliefs’ (Q5-c) is placed last among the eleven culture teaching objectives, which corresponds to what respondents said when asked to define their understanding of the culture. It is difficult to speculate about the reason why teachers/trainers do not support this objective and this will be a topic to be investigated in future.

As far as the attitudinal dimension (Q5-e) is concerned, teachers and trainers agree on ranking and put it in the eighth and seventh places, respectively, which shows that they are becoming aware that developing students’ attitudes to accept and tolerate other peoples and cultures are highly important in language teaching. This attitude is considered the foundation of intercultural competence in language teaching aims, to develop learners as intercultural speakers or mediators (Byram, 2002), which is regrettably not designated in the new English curriculum. Therefore, it is reasonable for teachers/trainers not to strongly support this objective, which may be a bit far from their understanding of cultural teaching.

In summary, in this part, the teachers’ perceptions of cultural teaching objectives have been examined and we noticed that the teachers are, broadly speaking, inclined to emphasise the overall objectives of cultural teaching. Major interests are centered on students, and the purpose of teaching culture understood by teachers/trainers is to raise and maintain learners’ lasting interest and motivation in language education and to widen their world view through the language the students are learning. It is encouraging that the skills dimension is better supported than the knowledge dimension by teachers, which gives a hint of conceptualization changing from the traditionally knowledge-based, cultural information-input to skills-orientation at least theoretically.

However there are some divergences between teachers and teacher trainers which raises questions about cultural teaching objectives set in the curriculum for secondary education and the development of teacher training programmes in this aspect, i.e., that there seems to be some disparity between the two.

### **Conclusion**

Regarding teachers' understanding of culture, the study shows that teachers give a very extensive definition of culture but mainly focus on small c culture like 'traditions and customs,' and 'the way of people's life,' which may be close to students' lives and interest them. However, teacher trainers think that literature is a major channel to get to know foreign cultures because literature courses are offered at the university level. It also reveals that, in practice, both teachers and trainers are not much interested in teaching the big C culture about foreign history, geography and political systems although conceptually they regard this as a composition of culture. There clearly exists a gap between practice and theory in terms of culture teaching and culture understanding. Nevertheless, their attitudes towards cultural teaching are positive. They perceive the cultural teaching objectives more in terms of general teaching objectives: Promoting students' motivation and sustain their interest in learning English, widen students' horizon by means of cultural teaching.

This study was an effort to investigate teachers' and trainers perceptions of culture teaching in ELT in a Chinese context. However, although we have established a basic knowledge about teachers and trainers, it is in the nature of the research that it has triggered more questions. Considering the limitations of sample size and instrumentation of the current study, the researcher would like to suggest that a future study is needed to cover a large representation of the population including follow-up interviews which were not possible in this project. Future research can also be designed to explore how classroom teachers translate their objectives for cultural learning into practice and the nature of the relationship between teachers' instruction of culture in the foreign language classroom and students' development of intercultural competence. Given the limited number of cultural studies in China, there is an urgent need for future research in the Chinese context.

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## Appendix

Q3	What do you understand by 'culture teaching' in English teaching context? 在英语教学环境下, 你怎样理解文化教学?	Very important	important	undecided	less	Not
(1)	Promote the ability to handle intercultural contact situations. 提高处理跨文化交往的能力。					
(2)	Provide experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theatre, film, etc.). 体验丰富的英语文化表达方法 (文学、音乐、戏剧及影视等)。					
(3)	Provide information about shared values and beliefs. 了解共有的价值观和信仰。					
(4)	Develop attitudes of acceptance and tolerance towards other peoples and cultures. 培养学生对其他民族、文化的接收及宽容态度。					
(5)	Provide information about daily life and routines 了解日常生活和工作。					
(6)	Provide information about the history, geography and political system of the foreign culture(s). 了解英语国家的历史、地理和政治制度。					
(7)	Promote increased understanding of students' own culture. 促进学生对自己文化的了解					
(8)	Make language teaching more interesting and motivating. 使语言教学更有趣, 更有启发性。					
(9)	Widen students' horizons on the world. 拓展学生的视野。					
(10)	Promote students' ability to evaluate and their sensitivity to different cultures. 提高学生对不同文化的鉴别能力及敏感度。					
(11)	Promote students' awareness of similarities and differences of English speaking countries. 促使学生注意英语国家间文化的异同。					

## Biodata

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