AN ARMY CROSSING A ONE-LOG BRIDGE:

A STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

IN MIDDLE SCHOOLS IN CHINA

MIN MA

Thesis submitted for the degree of Master of Literature

Wolfson College

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies the place of English in middle school students' educational experiences in China by describing students' encounters with English and their experiences of English learning in both the formal and the informal situations. Observations, semi-structured oral and written interviews are conducted to investigate students' perceptions of English and their reflections on English learning. Open-ended surveys are used to explore the interactions between students' learning experiences and their life aspirations. The study seeks to identify important themes in English learning in China, and in particular, how students' reflections influence their learning and how their experiences shape their perceptions. It attempts to interpret the meaning of English learning at the public and private levels and to examine the convergence and conflict of learning needs and teaching agenda. To encourage the learner perspective in students' own voice in the discourse of English language teaching, the study heavily draws on students' personal statements. The study identified the quantification of education through examination and the mediation of English in changing ideas and shaping identity as two important themes in the learning of English language in China. While students' perception of English as a tool appears highly instrumental in nature, their motivation of learning for self-improvement reflects the dominant belief in science and technology in China. Such contradictions contribute to the situation in which formal learning organised according to the public agenda for national modernisation does not always meet students' individual needs for personal improvement. In addition, learner autonomy emerged as a crucial factor in making English learning a personally engaging and enriching experience. The study confirmed the importance of self-reflection on English learning by learners and all those concerned with English learning.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABC: American Born Chinese
BBC: The British Broadcasting Corporation
BC: The British Council
C1: Native culture, home culture
C2: New culture, target culture
CCCCP: Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party
CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency
CNN: Cable News Network
ELT: English language teaching
ESP: English for special purposes
GRE: Graduate Record Examination
IRF: Initiation-Response-Feedback
L1: First language, native language, mother tongue
L2: Second language, foreign language, new language, target language
LAC: Language across curriculum
MOE: Ministry of Education (formerly SEC until 1998)
MTV: Music television
NBA: National Basketball Association
(HK) SAR: (Hong Kong) Special Administrative Region
SEC: State Education Commission (replaced by MOE in 1998)
TESL/TEFL: Teaching English as a second/foreign language
TESOL: Teaching English to speakers of other languages
TOEFL: Test of English as a foreign language
UK: The United Kingdom
US(A): The United States (of America)
USSR: The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VCD: Video compact disc
VOA: The Voice of America
VSO: Voluntary Services Overseas
WWI: The First World War
WWII: The Second World War

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NOTES ON TRANSLATION

In this study, "English" is used to refer to the language, not the nationality. Thus "English songs" can mean songs from the US or the UK, Australia or Canada. When there is a need to distinguish the nationality, "American" and "British", etc., are used respectively.

In China, "foreigners" as a term to refer to people from outside of China can have the general meaning of people from foreign countries or the specific meaning of a type of foreigners perceived with special status and privileges. This applies in particular to North Americans or Western Europeans. In this study, "foreigners" have the specific meaning while "foreign teachers" mean those teachers who are native speakers of English and in particular, those who at the same time look foreign in the special sense.

"Foreign language" rather than "second language" is used to reflect the socio-lingual context in China where English is the dominant foreign language rather than a second language to Chinese language. Even though foreign language and second language learning involves different social power and cultural issues with different educational policies and teaching methodology, such differences are ignored as they are rendered insignificant to this study.

"Examination" and "exams' are both used but their meanings in this study are slightly different. While exams refer more often to the specific cases of exams students have to do, examination is used more for the general system of examination as a structure. The former is a practical term while the latter a systematic one. National exams are often used instead of National Higher Education Entrance Examinations, or *gaokao* (high exam) administered at the national level at the conclusion of secondary education.

The proper names in Chinese are translated according to *pinyin*, the Chinese Phonetic Symbols. Students and schools are identified with the initials of their names. All students reported in this study are confirmed to have graduated since the study and have subsequently left the schools.

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Introduction

I still remember the first time I spoke with foreigners. It was a summer evening in 1979, soon after diplomatic relations were established with the US. China was beginning to open up. I had been in college for a year training to be an English teacher. My friends and I were on a holiday trip in the ancient city of Xi'an. One day we came across a crowd of people in front of a department store. As we approached, we saw it was a group of foreigners. Many of us had not seen foreigners before. Curious and cautious, we made our way through the crowd. My heart raced. There they were with shopping bags, colourful garments and smelly perfumes. With a year of English behind me, I wanted to say something, but found myself speechless, far too excited and scared. Would I make myself a fool if they chose to ignore me? What about the police? As I inched forward, a lady stopped talking with her group and looked around. She seemed to have seen my excitement turning into fear.

"Hello," she said with a smile.

"Hello," I squeezed out a few words, "Welcome to China."

"Thank you. You speak well," her thumb was up.

"No," I murmured, with Chinese modesty. "I have a lot to learn." Then I knew what I had to ask. "Can American people understand me?"

"Oh yes, we understand you here in China. We will surely understand you in America." Pointing at me to her group, she said "He speaks!" I turned around to my friends, claiming victoriously "That was third person singular!" My heart rejoiced whenever I relived that first conversation. It was hard to believe we actually understood one another. It was like a step into the future, a touch with the world. English was no longer sentence patterns and text passages to memorise. It was a different way to express my self and to relate to others, a brand new way to learn and to live.

Having been away from China for a decade, I often wonder how students today regard English and experience English learning. As a research student in Canada and Britain, I read many fascinating studies on language acquisition and teaching methodology. Yet most of them are conducted with a researching or teaching perspective through native speakers of English who have acquired it so naturally that they never have to learn it (Krashen 1982). In the discourse of ELT research, the learning perspective is under-represented. This is particularly unfortunate as students often construct their own ideas about English and English learning which can be very different from the analysis of their teachers or researchers. In addition, they almost inevitably bring these ideas into their learning. As Woodward maintains, "We need to take into account learners' ideas or there maybe a complete mismatch between teacher attempts and student perception" (2001:39). There is thus an urgent need in ELT research to introduce students' own voice from a variety of learning situations and cultural backgrounds so that we can understand the nature, the process and the product of ELT from their perspective.

My field trips soon brought me back to the reality of English learning in the rapid social and economic changes in China. As soon as we landed in Beijing, we were lined up to have our blood tested for HIV. In the meantime, foreign passengers were waved through. At the railway station, a foreign passport gave me the instant privilege of sleeper tickets while thousands of people waited anxiously for theirs. Before boarding the train, I had to push my luggage through the X-ray machine. My foreign friends were ushered into an air-conditioned room for pre-boarding drinks. Many hotels offered complimentary breakfast but only to foreigners. One could not fail to notice the power of English at work.

In studying the colonial roles of the English language in India, Kachru identified it as "an added potential for material and social gain and advantage...which permits one to open the linguistic gates to international business, technology, science, and travel. In short, English provides linguistic power" (1986:1). Hartshone analysed language policies in South Africa and concluded that English was intimately related to "the protection of the power structure, the preservation of privilege and the distribution of economic resources" (1987:63). China may never have been completely colonised, and at least officially, English remains only a foreign language today, yet the modernisation campaign since the late 1970s has elevated English to such an extent that it is no longer a matter of preference but necessity. Chinese learners understand the relationship of English to power. Many enthusiastically follow Hollywood movies, yet their American dream is shattered when their visa applications are routinely rejected due to immigration intentions. Watching their anxious faces at the US consulate, I marvelled at the power of English in shaping young people's values and changing their expectations. "Regardless of whether or not proficiency in English does result in greater economic incentive and social gains, the belief that it can do this provides an important incentive for individuals to learn it' (McKay 1992:29). I came to the American library to check ELT books. The models I found could hardly do justice to those waiting outside the gate. In many ways, life was becoming freer. People were more relaxed and their opinions more liberal. But with the changes came greater aspirations. As English became essential to success, people repeatedly quoted an old saying to describe the rush to learn English: "It is a rat race, like an army pushing through a one-log bridge!"

As someone who has personally benefited from learning and teaching English, I am excited about the growing interest in English among Chinese students and the increasing opportunities it is bringing to them, such as quicker access to international communication,

better cross-cultural understanding and greater social and geographic mobility. At the national level, English facilitates the internationalisation process not only by helping China to learn from the Western technology but by encouraging China to share its human resource and cultural heritage with the rest of the world. This undoubtedly increases China's participation in the global economy and international community, even though its modernisation is still largely defined in Western terms. On the other hand, I am concerned for the spread of English in China, and in particular, the lack of interest among students in learning Chinese. Whenever I tell students that even for the sake of learning English they need to be better at Chinese, my persuasion is lost in the discourse of modernisation.

While China arguably has the biggest population of English learners, little research has been focused on English learning in China, particularly on the perspective of the learners. Even Fishman's three modals on languages of wider communication in developing nations (1969) offered no modal that could represent the reality of China:

> A-Modal: political unity through the use of a language of wider communication at the cost of indigenous languages (Cameroon);
> Uni-Modal: national identity through the use of an indigenous language as well as a language of wider communication (Malaysia);
> Multi-Modal: political compromise between competing indigenous languages and practical use of a language of wider communication as an official language (India).

Modal	*Indigenous language*	*Language of wider communication*	*Political unity*	*National identity*
A-Modal	no	yes	yes	no
Uni-Modal	yes	yes	no	yes
Multi-Modal	yes	yes	no	no

Tab. 0.1 Fishman's three modals for language in developing nations

The common denominator among these modals was a language of wider communication left over from colonial rules. On the surface, China seems to be a Uni-Modal country, but it is distinctively different on at least two important accounts. First, as the only official language, Chinese language is not a leftover from any colonial powers. Second, Chinese is simultaneously an indigenous language and a language of wider communication. This is not the case in the countries where Fishman did his studies. More recently, Kachru used three circles (1989) to describe the spread of English. One of them included China:

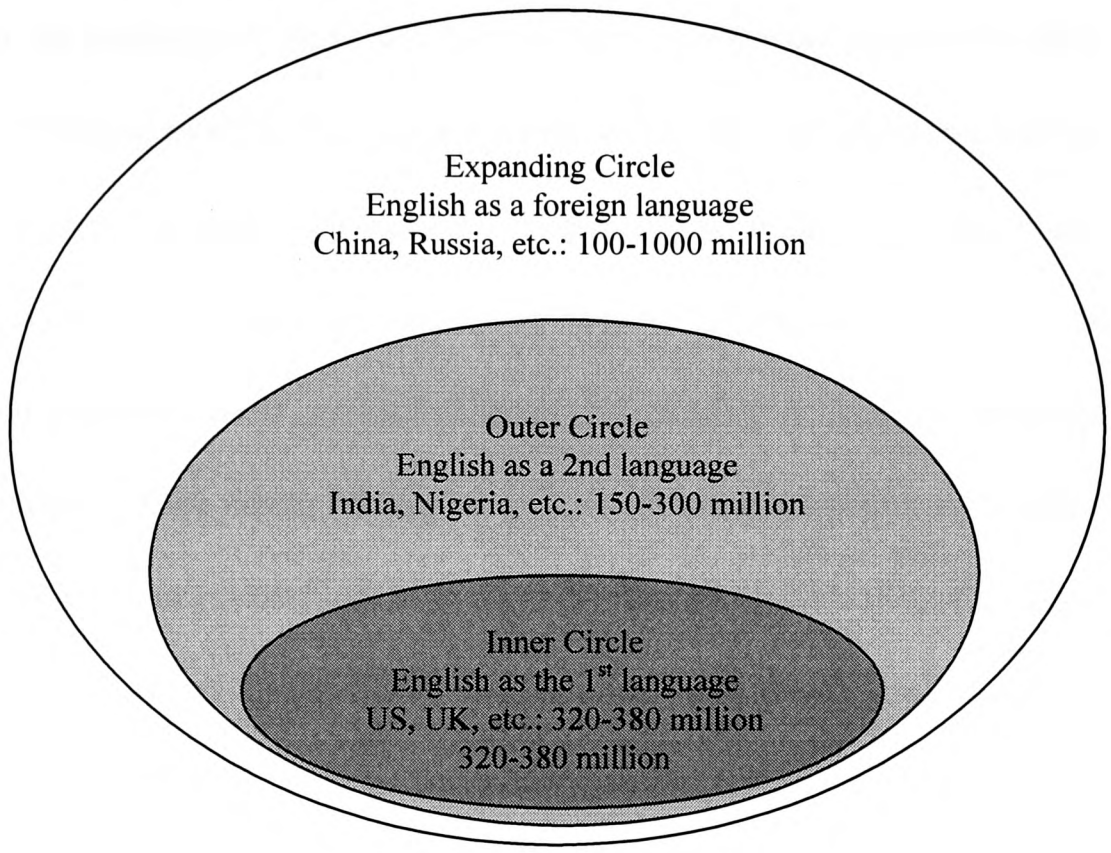

Fig. 0.1 Kachru's three circles of English in the world (adapted from Crystal 1997:54)

Kachru's analysis indicates that it is in countries of the expanding circle such as China that the status of English is the most vital for its future, as this is where English has the most potential to grow. Crystal recognised "much will depend on what happens in countries with the largest populations, notably China, Japan, Russia, Indonesia and Brazil" (1997:61). It is time that we shifted our research focus from the Inner and Outer Circles to the Expanding Circle. Since English learning in China will have significant impact on the future of China as a nation and English as a language, it is necessary that we investigate the nature and

structure of English in China and the process and product of English learning among Chinese learners. Important questions include why students learn English, how they learn English, how they make sense of its meaning, what are some of the effects of English to students' life and thought, and to what extent they are aware of its implications.

From two particular schools in China, this study attempts to describe students' encounters with English, their experience in English learning, their perceptions of English and reflection on learning. It examines how students' perceptions mediate their learning and how their learning modifies their perceptions. In identifying important themes in the reality of English learning from the students' perspectives, it explores the educational nature, cultural process and social implications of English learning in China. The study draws on motivation research from a psychological perspective in second language acquisition, critical analysis of the power of English from a sociological perspective in the sociology of language and language learning, as well as comparative studies on the culture of learning from an educational perspective in applied linguistics and educational studies. Ethnographic methods including observations and interviews are used to access and record students' experiences and perceptions. Semi-open surveys are then conducted to verify the qualitative data and measure the strength and scope of students' personal statements.

To steer it away from the influence of linguistic imperialism (Phillipson 1992), and in particular, the narrow focus of structuralism on language units and the professional emphasis on teaching techniques, the study adopts a socio-cultural approach to highlight the educational, social and cultural reality in the local contexts of English learning. My experience learning and teaching English in China is combined with my research training in Canada and Britain to create a unique semi-stranger role of observant-participant to this

reality. Such a role helps to expose hidden themes as they are easily taken for granted by members of the group under study. It also encourages the development of cultural insights which may not be readily available to members of one particular culture. It is hoped that the semi-stranger role of an observant-participant who is simultaneously a member of and a stranger to the culture will combine with my experience as a learner and teacher of English to facilitate reflection from an inter-cultural perspective. Local representation is maintained through the voice of students within the reality of learning. The main body of the data is formed by students' descriptions of their opinions, aspirations and reflections. Given the constraint of reality, I have tried to keep the process and result of data collection and analysis as systematic as possible, but not to the extent that the student voice is suppressed.

The thesis consists of three parts: the context, the process, and the findings. The context contains two chapters which respectively review the historical legacy of English learning in China and introduce a theoretical framework for the study. The process includes three chapters: one to define the research question and discuss the methodology, one to present the research design and describe the process of fieldwork, and one to introduce data and discuss issues in data collection and analysis. Four chapters report on the findings of the study. The first two describe students' formal and informal English learning experience. The third one examines their perceptions and reflections on learning. In these chapters, students' verbal and written statements are analysed to identify important themes and explore their relationships. The final chapter reports on a survey of learning conditions and attitudes to verify the themes and measure their strength. The thesis concludes with a reflection on the theoretical and practical implications of the study. The strength and weakness of the study are identified. Further research questions are suggested.

PART ONE

THE CONTEXT

Chapter 1 A historical legacy

My Grandfather learned some English in the 1940s from American soldiers stationed in Chengdu. He said if the Communists and the Nationalists were not fighting he would have learned more English. He taught me some words, like "desk" and "battle." At first I respected him for that. But Grandma said he was criticised for speaking English words during the Cultural Revolution. (MMX/SD)

This chapter reviews the history of English learning in China. It investigates how English entered China and how it was formalised in education by foreign missionaries and Chinese reformers. It examines how throughout the political struggles and social upheavals in modern Chinese history, different ideologies mediated the meaning of English in different terms to create the conditions and regulate the purposes for English learning.

Following the peace and prosperity brought by the open-door policy of the Tang Dynasty (618-907, AD)[1], internal strife and foreign invasions slowly forced China to disintegrate. Despite the fragile unity of the Song and Ming Dynasties, much of the country was repeatedly threatened and ruled by the Mongols. China at best was an inward-looking country with a self-sufficient economy. When the Manchu warriors conquered Beijing to establish the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911)[2], Chinese people once again became second-class citizens in their own country. As Manchu rulers grew hostile towards foreign influence, foreigners were demonised and shunned. Despite China's rich traditions in learning and education, English was not introduced into Chinese schools until after 1840, when British gunboats overpowered the cannons of the Manchu navy. The Opium War bombed open the Chinese door and modern Chinese history. The 1842 Sino-British Treaty of Nanjing ceded

[1] Effective governing and military strength assured Chinese control of the lucrative silk route which carried Chinese culture and goods to the West and Asian and European thoughts and products into China.
[2] China's last dynasty was established by Manchu invaders whose isolationist policy encouraged the European powers to use gun-boat diplomacy to carve up China between them.

Hong Kong[3] to Britain. Coastal ports and cities were opened to foreign residence. Suddenly, barbarians from distant land became traders and teachers who rubbed shoulders with sophisticated Mandarins. The 1858 Sino-British Treaty of Tianjin further opened China's vast interior to foreigners, according them increasing political power and economic privileges. Ironically, while the status of foreigners improved, the Chinese people became third-class citizens in China.

1.1 In search of a definition (1850--1900)

Deeply humiliated by foreign defeat, Chinese intellectuals swallowed their pride to admit English into their schools but only as a facilitator for China's modernisation. This pragmatic thinking effectively weakened the ideological association of English with the conquerors and paved the way for English to penetrate China. But when foreign missionaries first brought English into China, they did it for very different reasons.

1.1.1 The foreign missions

Scholars (Tang, 1984; Ross, 1993) agreed that English became a school subject when foreign missions began to set up schools as part of their effort to evangelise China. The need for communication and understanding made English teaching an essential part of missions. By the mid-19th century, British and American missions had founded schools in which English was introduced as a subject of learning and as a language of instruction. In a survey of English teaching in China, Ross (1993:19) noted that despite many missions' critical attitude towards Chinese traditions, recitation of Confucian and Christian classics constituted much of mission education. A closer look revealed, however, that there was a distinctive concern among mission-based English programmes for personal transformation.

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[3] Hong Kong Island was ceded in 1842, Kowloon in 1860, and the New Territories in 1898.

Missions were obviously interested in China's Christianisation, but this was achieved through individual decision-making. Such understanding provided learners of English with an alternative path to education and power apart from the existing routines such as imperial examination and family connection. New access to personal improvement in spite of learners' background lent a liberating function to the teaching of English at missions.

There were, however, conflicts within mission education from the outset. While English was established in the curriculum, the purpose of teaching English became problematic. Conversation was perceived by some as the "sugar-coating" for conversion. A mismatch developed between the mission's idealistic preoccupation with evangelisation and the learners' pragmatic aspiration for personal success. Perplexed by the contradiction, missionaries were among the first to realise the complex nature of ELT. Ross reported that in 1890, the American Board of Foreign Missions received this report from China:

> If English means an open way to position, as physicians, teachers, interpreters, and the like, with salaries three to five times greater than can be paid to native preachers and teachers in Christian schools, the best of our students will work toward such positions, and our mission will not be built up as it ought to (ibid.:20).

Such reflection indicated that learners' considerations for learning were often different from those of their teachers. Different experiences and contexts mediated different ideas about English learning. The conflicting agenda illustrated how the meaning of English converged and diverged between learners and teachers with different perspectives. The missionary dilemma in reconciling between preaching the Gospel and teaching English was intensified when state schools began to compete with missions for students.

1.1.2 The Chinese reformers

According to Ross, the first Chinese school to teach English was *Tongwen Guan* established in Beijing in 1861 by the Imperial Government's Foreign Affairs Office.

Tongwen meant to "equalise languages." *Guan* was an old word for "school." Its official mandate was to train translators and interpreters for the Manchu government. One year after its founding, foreigners were hired to teach English. Before long, most teachers were foreign. *Tongwen Guan* was a failure in many ways. First, students lacked commitment and discipline: They were chosen exclusively from well-connected families. Secondly, teachers were arrogant and ineffective. They thought they worked for the government and were ill-prepared to serve students. Thirdly, there was a lack of employment upon students' graduation due to the rigid style and narrow focus of teaching. Finally, there was strong opposition from conservative officials. *Tongwen Guan* was perhaps an early warning that native speakers of English did not necessarily make the best teachers, especially when they took side with the ruling interest and taught with the wrong attitudes. There was a conflict of agenda in that the official mandate to train translators and interpreters did not reflect what students wanted English for at the personal level.

Three years later, *Waiguo Yuyan Wenzi Xueguan*, Foreign Language School, was opened in Shanghai. The school quickly proved what could work in China. Its faculty was predominantly Chinese so teachers understood how Chinese students learned. Its focus was pragmatic and popular: China's modernisation through popularising scientific knowledge. Its attitudes were open and flexible which encouraged the students to learn from Western thoughts and ideas. Despite the lack of official support, the Shanghai school thrived. One reason was its Chinese distinctiveness. It was able to define its agenda in its own terms: Chinese teachers teaching Chinese students for Chinese purposes. Learners were equipped to use English for their personal advancement. The open atmosphere, flexible attitude and honest recognition of students' aspirations reflected the pragmatic attitudes of Shanghai educators in sharp contrast with the conservative politics of Beijing officials.

To prevent China from Western influence, conservative officials ensured that graduates of English were sent to the hinterland far away from the power centres. The resistance gathered its momentum in their attempt to ban English from Chinese schools. In 1898, however, China was once again defeated on the high sea, this time by the Japanese. At the turn of the century, Zhang Zhidong, a leading intellectual and loud advocate for Western learning argued with a renewed sense of urgency for restoring China's military might and technical power: *Zhongxue weiti; Xixue weiyong,* "Chinese learning for foundation, Western learning for application." With this slogan, Zhang defined the instrumental meaning of English according to China's pragmatic tradition.

The beginning of modern Chinese history coincided with the arrival of English in China. Chinese intellectuals suddenly woke up to the fact that foreigners had improved the technologies invented in China centuries before and used them to bully China. Out of a deeply wounded pride, they came to the realisation of China's tattered state and decided the best way to prevent further humiliation was to restore China's power and glory through modernisation. For this purpose, the mastery of English was necessary. The establishment of English in China was therefore a reaction to the national humiliation and a result of British imperialism. After its defeat at foreign hands, China had no other choice but to open itself, introducing English as a subject for its own survival. Humiliation from defeat has since then motivated the public agenda for English learning. Since English learning was a collective response to defeat, it was when it served the national interest of modernisation that it was accepted and its learning encouraged. Although this collective concern helped formalise English learning, it ignored important private meaning such as personal improvement. The two, in fact, did not have to contradict each other, as the

Shanghai school demonstrated. Secondly, the new social order favoured English speakers as the elite. English learning as an independent way to success threatened the existing power structure. This pre-determined that the instrumental meaning of English would co-exist with nationalistic resentment against English in China. While the public mandate for modernisation originated negatively from defeat, the private agenda for personal improvement derived positively from a sense of honour. This would make it difficult to sustain English learning with only the national agenda.

1.2 In search of a curriculum (1900--1950)

The reform movement of the 19th century helped foreign influence to grow in China. By the beginning of the 20th century, universities were established by missions where English was the primary language of instruction. English learning was formalised into higher education. In the state schools, however, it was Japanese that dominated foreign language teaching.

1.2.1 The Japanese model

Following the Sino-Japanese War, state schools mushroomed. Mission schools continued to teach English. With Japanese in state schools and English in mission schools, foreign language teaching needed a coordinated policy. In 1902, the Manchu government published "His Majesty's Teaching Standard for Primary and Secondary Schools". Japanese was highlighted in the curriculum as one of the three key subjects, claiming more time than any other subject, including Chinese and maths. This was the first time a foreign language held a key position in China's education. The desperation of the Manchu government after repeated defeat at the hands of foreigners contributed to the final adoption of reformers' agenda, elevating foreign languages to unprecedented height. According to Tang's review of foreign language teaching in China (1984), the Japanese model required eight hours

every week for teaching Japanese as the designated foreign language. The curriculum featured the traditional grammar-translation method, emphasising grammatical analysis, reading comprehension and translation. Lessons started with vocabulary and moved on to sentence structure for the accurate reproduction of Japanese through imitation, repetition and memorisation. Learning was well structured, highly disciplined and easily controlled by teachers with limited Japanese proficiency.

1905 marked the watershed for modern education in China with the abolishment of the imperial examination system. The century-old practice of selecting government officials on the basis of memorising Confucian classics was eliminated. Such educational reforms soon led to violent political upheaval. In 1911, the Qing Dynasty crumbled after a bloody bourgeoisie revolution led by Western trained Chinese elite. China became a republic ruled by Dr. Sun Yat San's Nationalist Party. During WWI, the dominance of Japanese diminished as China entered into military alliance with the US and the UK. Popular resentment against Japan increased. The May 4th Movement[4] of 1919, in particular, gave Chinese intellectuals a platform to voice their concerns. Debates on the endemic problems of Chinese culture, Western impact on Chinese traditions and China's position in the world began to frequent the intellectual discourse to this day. With Marxism coming into China, the pragmatic theme in foreign language learning took on a new meaning. It became a weapon for social transformation and proletarian revolution. As intellectuals expressed their disillusionment with traditions, Russell and Dewey's respective visits to China brought in the new ideologies of science (Mr. Sai) and democracy (Mr. De). Chinese intellectuals began to look West with the belief that science was the only hope for China. In

[4] May 4, 1919 saw students protesting on Tiananmen Square against the nationalist government's compromise to Japan in the Paris Peace Treaty. It signified the birth of the Communist movement in China.

1922, "Syllabus of the New Teaching System" introduced by the Nationalist government replaced the Japanese model with an Anglo-American one.

1.2.2 The Anglo-American model

The new system allocated five hours each week for English at state schools. Private schools where English was used exclusively gained official permission. It became fashionable to emphasise all-round training of listening, speaking, reading and writing in junior years. This was a breakthrough from rote learning, although reading remained the focus for senior students. Direct Method of using English to teach English was introduced. Some private schools used English textbooks for maths and science. In this brief period of development, English consolidated its position as a key subject in Chinese schools, even though English teaching varied substantially from mission schools and state schools. While state schools required English to be learned with reference to the Chinese context, many private academies encouraged students to conduct themselves according to the norms and standard defined in English. This was seen as not only necessary but beneficial.

As social and economic reforms of the nationalist government foundered in the 1930s, corruption worsened. Criticism of foreign imperialism increased. The Japanese invasion and occupation of Manchuria cast a shadow over foreign language learning. Unity became the national concern. Ideological and military conflict between the Communists and the Nationalists intensified. Even the invasion of a common enemy failed to unite them. As China was torn by wars, formal education was impossible except in a few southern cities, where English learning enjoyed popularity among the privileged as a gateway to go overseas. Privately run short-term courses flourished. Many young people left for the West.

The 1940s saw the return of the partnership between China and the Allied forces during WWII, which helped revive English learning. An increasing number of subjects were taught in English in mission and state universities. Teacher training programmes were established. Just as China was about to enter into a reform to streamline mission and state education, the Nationalist government was overthrown by the Communists. In 1949, the People's Republic of China was founded by Mao Zedong, who promptly proclaimed on Tiananmen[5] that China was finally liberated from the oppression and exploitation of the "Three Mountains"[6]. According to him, "The Chinese people have finally stood up."

1.3 In search of an ideology (1950--2000)

Since 1949, English was repeatedly ousted from and introduced back to the curriculum for ideological reasons. Before China re-opened its door in 1978, English teaching made little progress as changing ideologies kept the status of English on a roller-coaster.

1.3.1 The Paper Tiger and the Polar Bear

Shortly after Liberation, education policies and objectives were redefined. In the socialist reconstruction, education was to serve the proletarian politics, the Communist Party and the people. It was to be connected with production practice. Politically labelled as agents of spiritual opium and instruments for cultural imperialism, missionaries were told to leave. Mission schools and universities were confiscated, reformed and streamlined with state institutions. For a few years, despite the change of objectives, teaching materials and methods remained intact. 1951 saw the publication of the "Scheme for English Instruction in Secondary Schools", which defined English as a tool for socialist construction: *guwei jinyong, yangwei zhongyong,* "making ancient things serve today and foreign things serve

[5] Heavenly Peace Gate, the geographic centre of Beijing and symbolically the political centre of China.

China. Soon, the Korean War increased China's distrust for the West. The political and military alliance with the USSR weakened the power of English. Attitudes and ideas that favour the US were criticised. It became unpatriotic to learn English, a language of the "Paper Tiger." In 1954, English vanished from the curriculum entirely to be replaced by Russian as China's primary foreign language. Teachers of English were told to teach Russian. Russian textbooks were introduced. The Russian model was largely based on authoritative control. Teaching emphasised rules and regulations, teachers and textbooks. Before long, foreign language disappeared altogether from schools.

As mistrust between China and the USSR grew, English was reintroduced but remained marginal. The national curriculum of 1955 recognised that a complete rejection of English was short-sighted and that all foreign languages were necessary for China's development. English teaching resumed in the shadow of prevailing Russian influence. Its purpose, not surprisingly, was to serve as a weapon in Mao's class struggles. As China's educators searched for a foreign language policy that would take advantage of its practical use and filter out its corrosive influence, Sino-Soviet tension developed into open conflicts. Russian soon lost its favour. Before long, it became politically incorrect and educationally irrelevant to learn the language of the "Polar Bear." In 1958, educational reform was initiated. Under the Soviet threat, Mao launched the Great Leap Forward, claiming that China would catch up with the USSR, the UK and the US within decades. Mao's political idealism was rooted in the Chinese intellectual pride which perceived China as a country to be seriously rendered by the powers of the world. This pride was repeatedly wounded by foreign dominance and deeply frustrated by China's lack of progress.

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[6] Mao defined the "Three Mountains" over the Chinese people as imperialism, feudalism, and capitalism.

The need for China's development and its recognition by the world lent important meaning to English learning. New programmes were developed to distance education from Russian influence. The hours for English teaching increased. Popular resentment against Russian-style central control helped English regain its lost ground. "The Innovative Teaching Material" of 1960 emphasised listening and speaking. "English Textbooks for the 10-Year Curriculum" published in 1961 stressed the development of all-round skills. Within the same year, "The Curriculum Guidelines for Secondary School English Teaching" advocated the teaching of the history and culture of English-speaking countries including fables, stories, legends and literature in the original. In 1962, English was required for national university entrance examination. The 1963 publication of "The Seven-Year Plan for Foreign Language Teaching" by the CCCCP reinforced its importance.

The renaissance of English was a direct result of China's disillusionment with the Soviet ideology. Yet history once again had an unfortunate twist. Favourable turns towards English coincided with severe natural disasters. In the early 1960s, flood and drought devastated vast areas of China. Official corruption and incompetence added to the catastrophes. Conditions further deteriorated with the pull-out of Soviet assistance. Mao's attempts to advance the national economy through class struggles reflected his belief that the mouths of the millions could be fed with ideology. English became an ideology itself.

1.3.2 The Cultural Revolution

The pendulum kept swinging. In 1964, the educational emphasis on "basic knowledge" and "basic skills" came under fire with heated public debates. In 1966 Big-Character-Posters in Beijing University attacking authorities received Mao's personal blessing. To purge his

political enemies, Mao used students' emotions as sparks to launch the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. As the xenophobic concerns for ideological purity, patriotic sentiment and national independence spread, anything old and foreign was subject to the Red Guards' flame. As English served Capitalism, English textbooks were burnt as instruments of imperialism. Universities were closed as institutions for producing inequality. Students marched around the country to spread revolutionary seeds before congregating in Tiananmen Square to be received by Mao, who promptly sent them to the countryside for re-education. As formal education was disbanded, English became politically dangerous. Teachers of English were marched on the streets as foreign spies and dispatched to labour camps. Even short-wave radios became instruments of hostile foreign propaganda. Foreign connections were particularly dangerous. According to Jan Wong (1996:82)[7], hardly anyone was learning English. When she tried to help her friend in the English Department of Beijing University, she was told, "I am a peasant. When I graduate, I am going back to serve the peasants. Why do I need to know English? Without ABC I can still be a revolutionary." Another student declared, "English is useless to us. Our time would be better spent on studying class struggle, Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought." Wong's high ideals were dashed. When she stepped out to fulfil her dream of romance, she was nearly thrown out of China, only to be saved by the personal intervention of Premier Zhou Enlai. The Cultural Revolution eliminated all personal meaning in education as the personal agenda of Mao became the national agenda.

The American landing on the moon in 1969 reminded Mao of the crude power of science. English was reintroduced into schools in 1970. However, textbooks were compiled with more political ideals than linguistic theory. Texts routinely began with slogans such as

[7] Jan Wong was a Canadian journalist who went to China in the 1960s to embrace Mao's political idealism.

"Long live Chairman Mao" and "Never forget class struggle." Contents on foreign culture were forbidden. Classroom procedure required few methodology principles. Teachers followed the same routine teaching new words by repetition and memorisation, the text by analysis and translation. Lessons consisted of the life stories of communist heroes with strong ideological connotation. Comrade Lei Feng[8], a model soldier that remains China's annual choice of national hero today, was one of them:

Lei Feng was born in a poor peasant's family in Hunan. When he was young, his parents were too poor to send him to school. Lei Feng worked hard to help his parents make a living. As soon as they made a little money, the landlord would come and take it away. Lei Feng grew up owning nothing but the love of his parents.

In 1949, Hunan was liberated by the People's Liberation Army. Lei Feng was so happy that he joined the army. Little did he know that he was to become a truck driver. He could hardly believe his eyes when he saw his new truck. He wrote in his diary, "This is my Liberation![9]"

Lei Feng knew his life belonged to the people. He made it his most important goal to serve the people. One day, he saw an old lady at a railway station. She looked worried and was looking for something.

"Grandma," he asked, "did you lose something?" "Yes," the old lady answered, "I no longer seem to have my ticket." "What time is your train?" Lei Feng asked. "In about half an hour," Grandma replied.

Hearing this, Lei Feng wasted no time to help. They looked all over the station in vain. The old lady became increasingly worried. Lei Feng realised that her train was leaving. "Don't worry, Grandma." Lei Feng comforted her. "Let's get a new ticket."

"Thank you, young man." the old lady replied. "But I don't think I have enough money left." Lei Feng smiled, "That's no problem. We can use mine. Just follow me." With that, Lei Feng bought a new ticket for her. When he handed it to her, she was so moved that she couldn't help crying. "You are a good son of the people," she said, as Lei Feng waved her good-bye by the train.

"Learn from Comrade Lei Feng!" --Mao Zedong

The text was composed in a style of compassionate romance. Sentences were designed to demonstrate particular grammar or usage structures. They formed the basis for grammar analysis and substitution drills. The text was followed by a list of new words with translations. Exercises reinforced structures from the text:

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[8] This was reconstructed from memory of an English textbook published by Gansu People's Press, 1975.
[9] "Liberation" was a make of trucks made in China after a Soviet model in the 1960s and 1970s.

"Did you lose anything?"

Lei Feng asked the old lady if she had lost anything.

"I no longer seem to have my ticket."

The old lady told Lei Feng that she no longer seemed to have her ticket.

"What time is your train?"

Lei Feng asked her what time her train was.

"Don't worry."

Lei Feng told her not to worry.

"Learn from Comrade Lei Fang."

Chairman Mao asked us to learn from Comrade Lei Feng.

Grammar exercises included making up sentences with "too...to," "as soon as," "so that," "little did," "hardly" and "in vain". The level of difficulty was high, with gerund phrases, verbal inversions and the use of "it" to replace infinitive phrases frequently featured in analysis. Through carefully selected content and elaborate analysis, the focus was on ideology and discipline. English was used to teach values and structure. Examination was condemned as treating students as enemies. Universities were closed. Students were sent to the countryside, factories or army barracks, regardless of their grades.

As China and the US realised their need for each other to counter balance the influence of the USSR, Ping-Pong diplomacy prepared Nixon's visit to China in 1972. The changing dynamics in Sino-US relationships brought some Chinese American Nobel Prize winning scientists to China. At their urging, universities re-opened in 1973, with students selected from workers, peasants and soldiers. Following Mao's death in 1976, CCCCP officially declared the end of the Cultural Revolution. The legacy of class struggle was finally over.

1.3.3 The Black and White Cats

As Deng Xiaoping became the paramount leader, his pragmatism replaced Mao's ideals. The debate in the late 1970s on practice being the only tester of truth paved the way for his policy "It does not matter if it's a white or black cat as long as it catches rats." In 1977,

national examination was reintroduced to select middle school graduates for universities. After decades of political upheaval, China was back on the track of modernisation.

The launch of the "Four Modernisations"[10] in 1978 quickly restored the power of English. In no time, English regained its dominance as an instrument to empower China through science, industry and trade. The development of education, with English as a key part of it, became a pre-condition for modernisation. To advance the "Two Civilisations" [11], education was rationalised as a promoter of production force and an industry to create spiritual wealth. Since China embarked on the journey to open up to the outside world, English reclaimed its status as a key subject in schools and universities. English teaching hours increased to five each week. Courses offered by national television and radio stations including the BBC English teaching programmes enjoyed tremendous popularity. National conferences on foreign language teaching were convened to encourage innovations, experiments and debates. Increasing number of foreign experts and native speakers of English were invited to teach in China. The growing proportional importance of English in the national examination reflected the elevation of the status of English.

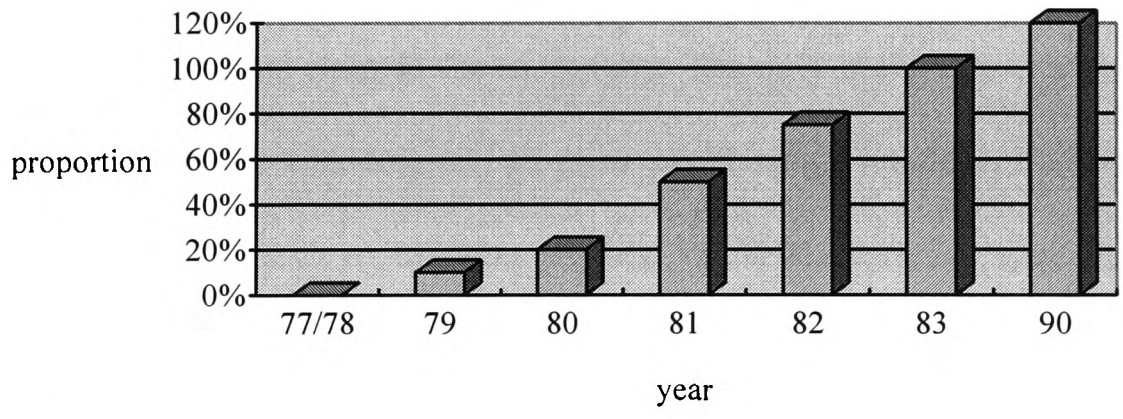

Fig. 1.1 Growing significance of English scores in the National Examination 1977-1990

[10] The modernisation of agriculture, industry, national defence, science and technology.
[11] Material progress and spiritual growth.

In 1977 and 1978, when such exams were reintroduced, English was optional while all other subjects were compulsory. Candidates might choose to take the English test but English scores were not added to their total scores, which determined whether they qualified, and if so, their placement in universities. In 1979, the English score was entered into the total score at the proportion of 10%. In 1980, English score was registered at the rate of 20%. By 1981, the proportion increased to 50%. In 1982, this rate jumped up to 75%. One year later, the English score was fully accepted into the final score at 100%. In the early 1990s, English enjoyed favour with Chinese and maths to be allocated 120 points each while marks for other subjects either remained at 100 or were reduced. More recently, the score for English was further increased to 150. After piloting in some provinces, a new national examination model "3+X"[12] was introduced recently to localise all tests except Chinese, maths and English.

Obviously, Deng's opening up and his pragmatic "one-country two-system"[13] policies reinforced the instrumental meaning of English. Under such banners, English became a "superpower" subject for students regardless of their specialisation. In schools and universities, English lessons claimed the most time. The only nationally examined subject for all university students was English. English could single-handedly fail students for degrees, postgraduate research or overseas studies. While more native speakers taught in universities, Chinese students and scholars went in rapidly increasing numbers to study overseas. Many sister school programmes were established with institutions in the West.

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[12] In this model, national tests consist of three compulsory subjects: Chinese, maths and English. The examination of all other subjects becomes optional at the discretion of provinces, universities and students.
[13] During the Sino-British negotiation on Hong Kong, Deng Xiaoping pledged to keep Hong Kong's capitalist system for 50 years after its handover to China, thus making China one country with two systems.

The growing power of English brought higher social status for people with English. Jobs most sought after required English. Teachers of English gained special privileges. Many moonlighted at tour agencies, computer shops, night schools, foreign organisations and joint-venture companies. Their second job dramatically increased their income. Schools found it hard to keep teachers with fluent English. Across the country, programmes were developed to train more teachers. Younger teachers were becoming more proficient in English and better trained to teach. International and private schools came into being to meet the growing demand for English.

The latter half of the 1980s saw waves of setbacks for modernisation. It seemed that progress was reversed every other year by a changing tide: the Anti-Spiritual Pollution Movement in 1985, the Anti-Bourgeois Liberalisation Movement in 1987, and especially, the crackdown on nation-wide student demonstrations in 1989. While modernisation enhanced development, it encouraged ideological liberalisation by creating a false illusion of the West. Chinese leaders wrestled hard against hostile elements abroad supposedly taking advantage of China's opening up to undermine the Communist establishment. They wanted English for its practical benefits without its necessary contamination. The frequent change of tides led to a sharp distinction between "hard" subjects such as maths and science and "soft" subjects like Chinese and English. The former was perceived as pure science with no ideological risk, while the latter represented different interests and values in conflict with one another. This partly explained the official and social favour for science and engineering rather than arts and humanities. It reflected the national policy that promoted economic development rather than political reform. As long as English was perceived instrumentally, it was a safe subject. The assumption was that English could be isolated from the values it represented. Western technology could be separated from its

ideology. The political setbacks in the 1980s helped to personalise the pragmatic meaning of English by dissociating it from ideology.

Reforms triggered the modernisation of English teaching. In the 1980s, People's Educational Press under the SEC[14] collaborated with the British Council and Longman[15] on a new series of English textbooks for junior and senior middle schools. The junior series was published in 1990 and senior one in 1995. The series applied principles of the communicative language teaching to develop practical skills while preserving some grammar-translation traditions. Cultural content formed the main part of the texts. Despite initial resistance from teachers, the junior series were successfully adopted. Teachers regarded the senior series as less helpful because it was perceived to have little to do with preparing students for exams. The situation would change little unless national examination focus changed from vocabulary and grammar knowledge to skills and cultural knowledge, as recent reforms aimed to achieve. Encouraged by the new books, priority in junior middle schools was given to speaking and listening while in senior ones it remained on reading comprehension and grammar analysis.

1.3.4 Friends or enemies?

The end of the cold war and the emergence of China as a potential super power changed the nature of the Sino-US relationship. After the crackdown of student demonstrations in 1989, human rights became a key issue in Western relationships with China. The strategic importance of the Sino-US tie dwindled. The 1990s saw growing popular resentment against the US. In 1995, human rights concerns led by the US successfully blocked Beijing

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[14] State Education Commission functioned as the Ministry of Education in most of the 1980s and 1990s.
[15] Longman, a leading international educational publisher based in London, became well-known in China with its English textbooks such as *New Concept English*.

in its bid for the 2000 Olympics. In 1996, Chinese and American navy ships came into open confrontation on the high sea during Taiwan's first presidential election. Following the 1997 Sino-US summits tension subsided, only to be refuelled by the American bombing of the Chinese Embassy in Belgrade in 1999. This bitterly humiliated China and made it all the more committed to modernisation. By the end of 1999, relationships improved as the two countries secured a trade agreement after thirteen years of negotiation, clearing the way for China to join the World Trade Organisation. Yet China was alarmed that the working class, once praised by Marx and Mao, was rapidly becoming its new enemy due to job losses from the economic reforms. As the US politicians debated whether China was a friend to co-operate with or an enemy to contain, the seesaw relationship continued, casting light or shadow on the political meaning of English in China.

Ironically, 150 years after English came into China, Britain returned Hong Kong to China. The history of English learning in China coincided with the history of British colonial rule in Hong Kong. When the British left in 1997, they left the English language behind, as David Tang, a Hong Kong businessman commented, "English language will go down in history as Britain's greatest and most enduring legacy" (Tang, 1997). Despite its growing power, English still lacked an official language status in China. Ideally, Hong Kong would serve as a bridge between the two cultures, exporting wealth and modernisation to China, importing resources and tradition from China. This would allow Chinese as the language of identity and English as the language of opportunity to co-exist in China and Hong Kong, creating a cultural and linguistic highway between the East and the West. Recently, educational officials in Hong Kong's SAR[16] government identified language, computers and understanding China as the three urgent issues for education in Hong Kong. The extent

to which the handover will affect the status of English in Hong Kong and China and how it will influence the making of China's language policy remains unclear.

International trade and educational exchange increased interaction with the world, bringing many Chinese into daily contact with foreign people and products, with new culture and ideas. A mania for learning English swept China whenever there was an international event staged on the media, such as the World Cup and the Olympics. These encounters with the world stimulated students' interest and created an eagerness to improve skills in listening and speaking in order to belong to the world and participate internationally. Cultural awareness became more fashionable than grammar knowledge. As students aspired to go overseas for education, foreign exams, especially TOEFL and GRE[17] became big business. English Corners appeared in city squares and on university campuses for learners to share new ideas in English. Foreign textbooks became instant best-sellers. British and American course books such as *New Concept English* and *English 900* were printed and reprinted in millions. In recent years, the Western need for experts in information technology and other technical areas created a new wave of interest in learning English among the well-educated young professionals for the purpose of emigrating to developed countries. The nation's thirst for English seemed impossible to quench. Personal demands for short-wave receivers, tape recorders, television sets, video players and personal computers increased, along with institutional needs for language labs, cable systems, satellite equipment and foreign teachers.

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[16] Special Administrative Region, the official status of Hong Kong within the People's Republic of China.
[17] Test of English as a Foreign Language and Graduate Record Examination, both administered by Educational Testing Services in Princeton, New Jersey.

Since China's opening up, American and British ELT efforts increased in creating conditions and structures to elevate the status of English in China. The instrumental meaning and technical teaching of English accorded it a neutral status. China for the sake of modernisation welcomed their efforts. American libraries and British cultural centres were established in big cities across the country. Thousands of foreign ELT professionals worked in China on Fulbright, the British Council, Peace Corp, VSO and independent programmes. A large number of Chinese officials and scholars went abroad for training. English became a standard against which political decisions and personal choices were made, economic resources allocated, social positions and cultural privileges distributed. The US and the UK secured personal and institutional ties with China and its potential leaders. English was widely promoted even by the Chinese government as a language of science and technology, development and modernisation, globalisation and integration.

1.4 Summary: English as a pragmatic means to an idealistic end

The history of English learning in China illustrated its close relationship with ideology. British imperialism helped to establish English in China but also led to the feeling of wounded pride and resentment against English among the people. The alliance with the USSR deleted English from the curriculum, but the deterioration of Sino-Soviet ties facilitated its re-emergence. The elimination of English from the curriculum was a result of ideology, so was the revival of English. It was China's need to survive that helped English to gain its foothold, consolidate its status and develop staying power in the twists and turns of the ideological storms in China. To Chinese reformers, English was a powerful tool for social change and national development. To foreign missionaries, it was an important medium for spiritual liberation and intellectual enlightenment. English, from the outset, was significant as a means rather than an end.

Since the turn of the century, Zhang Zhidong's teaching of Chinese learning for foundation and Western learning for application dominated the pragmatic discourse of intellectuals. Recently, Li Zehou (1994:315), a professor of Chinese philosophy, reversed the slogan: to *xiti zhongyong,* Western learning for principle, Chinese learning for application. Assuming that modernisation was the general direction of the human race, Li claimed that Western learning should serve as the basic principle. Since the concept of modernisation had to be applied according to the Chinese context, Li thought that this meant socialist modernisation with Chinese characteristics. What Zhang and Li had in common was their realisation that Chinese and Western learning did not have to conflict but could complement each other. Their difference, however, was not merely in their respective emphasis. While Zhang regarded Chinese learning as the foundation and Western learning as a pragmatic tool to solve Chinese problems, Li maintained that Western learning should be the general principle and Chinese learning the specific context. This understanding challenged the instrumental perception of English and indicated new meaning for English learning.

More than a century passed before the mainstream intellectual discourse began to shift from Chinese foundation to Western principle. Chinese intellectuals were increasingly frustrated with the Western indifference towards China. History taught them that globalisation rather than isolation would serve China's purpose better. Despite its idealistic tendency, this understanding shifted the nature of English from the language of imperialism to the language for modernisation. English learning evolved around the conflicting ideologies of the changing political, economic, social and cultural contexts within which the perception of English and experience of English learning affected one another. The student demonstrations of the late 1980s testified to the dialectic effect of English learning,

when English liberalised its learners to take political actions based on the idealisation of its values. Into the 21st century, information technology once again redefined the meaning of English. As the Internet made vast amount of information accessible, English was more associated with a global network identity rather than a specific country. Li would find a sympathiser in Crystal (1997:21) who claimed that English as a global language was no longer attached to a particular nation. Notwithstanding the concerns over the influence of English, it looked like after 150 years, English was finally gaining staying power in China.

In a comprehensive survey of ELT in China, Cortazzi and Jin observed,

> English has been widely accepted as a utilitarian tool for science, technology, national development and modernisation. This is sometimes in conflict with the view that English might also be a pathway to individual and cultural transformation (1996a:64).

The conflict between the officially instrumental and the personally transformational agenda was evident as more people were empowered by their experience of English learning. Internally, it could be argued that the nature of English as a relatively open and flexible language and its function as a carrier of new ideas encouraged the personalisation of the meaning of English for its learners. English soon became a new voice of freedom, an indication of personal quality, a status symbol. This was at least partially helped by the sudden release of suppressed personal aspiration for freedom after decades of revolutions. As missionaries realised long ago, personal transformation rather than scientific revolution would probably save China. However, the Chinese pragmatic understanding of such transformation was probably through human efforts rather than divine intervention. While the public agenda emphasised discipline and patriotism, personal goals focused on freedom and pragmatism. This conflict was reflected in the official attempts to filter out "spiritual pollution" and resist the penetration of Western values from English learning.

The perception of English as a pragmatic means to an idealistic end suggests that pragmatism is an important element in Chinese intellectual thinking. While missionaries rendered English as a medium to redeem the lost, a new language that ideally would lead to personal salvation, reformers rationalised English as an instrument to conceive modern China, an ideal for national salvation through science and technology. It was the reformers' perspective that was adopted by generations of Chinese government as the utilitarian need for survival gained the upper hand in the prevailing struggle of conflicting ideologies. Although the instrumental meaning of English represents the pragmatic perspective that tends to depoliticise English, the nature of English as a structure of meaning, an organisation of ideas, a social force, a system of political, economic and cultural values defined according to its interpretation of reality in its own terms remained unchanged. Subsequently, to understand the nature of English learning, we will explore different theoretical perspectives in the next chapter and discuss how they interpret the conditions and contexts of English learning in different terms.

Chapter 2 A theoretical framework

It was only during the Cultural Revolution that people disliked English for imperialism and capitalism. But English is not political. It is an international language for modernisation. How can China be modernised without English? English is a personal quality. I learn it to go to university, to find good jobs, and to go abroad. I met some rugby players from Scotland a long time ago. They were so tall but so kind. I liked them because they treated girls better than Chinese men do. (GX/SE)

This chapter approaches English learning from different theoretical angles. It reviews key concepts from related studies on second language acquisition, sociology of language, applied linguistics and cultural studies in the light of English learning in China. It discusses the inadequacies of instrumental and integrative motivations, investigates the decontextualisation of English in linguistic imperialism, and examines the relationships between anomie and English learning. It explores some aspects of the Chinese culture of learning. The purpose is to establish a theoretical platform to discuss important implications of these concepts for English learning in China. In this way, it prepares the study by developing these concepts from Chinese perspectives.

Despite frequent changes in China since 1840, the instrumental meaning of English persisted. Gone were the days when things were perceived in ideological terms. After the revolution, to be politically correct was to be apolitical. Encouraged by parents and teachers and mediated by their own social experience, students seemed to have decided to hibernate ideologically. If the public agenda for modernisation, the historical legacy of ideology and the traditional focus on structure distanced English from its political significance and cultural meaning, connections must be re-established to return English to its context. Studies on attitudes and motivation, linguistic imperialism, cultural distance and culture of learning provided opportunities to do so from the psychological, sociological, cultural and educational perspectives.

2.1 A psychological perspective: instrumental and integrative

Gardner and Lambert (1972) distinguished *instrumental* from *integrative* orientations in their study on motivation and attitudes in second language learning:

> The orientation is said to be *instrumental* in form if the purposes of language study reflect the more utilitarian value of linguistic achievement, such as getting ahead in one's occupation. In contrast, the orientation is *integrative* if the student wishes to learn more about the other cultural community because he is interested in it in an open-minded way, to the point of eventually being accepted as a member of that other group (1972:3).

Based on their studies on French learning as a second language in Canada, they elaborated that students were integratively motivated if they emphasised interaction with members of the French-speaking community for social and emotional purposes. They were instrumentally motivated if they stressed the pragmatic use of French in obtaining jobs and education. In making such distinction based on statistical analysis, they assumed:

1) Learners' claimed reasons for learning indicated their motivation of learning;
2) Motivation could be identified, isolated and correlated with language attainment;
3) Motivation and its relationships were static in the learning process; and
4) Learners' innate learning abilities, their contexts and conditions were equal.

In addition, motivation surveys were based on reasons students gave according to the functions of French, to what it *does* externally rather than what it *is* internally. There was little consideration for the social, cultural, political and personal meaning in the bilingual context of Canada. Reasons listed in the survey originated from the research agenda. Questions were formulated in research terms, not in the language of the learners. Little consideration was given to learner perspectives. Therefore, their findings were limited in their applicability and analytic power.

Gardner's initial studies suggested that integrative motivation seemed to be more significantly correlated with successful attainment. This supported Spolsky's studies (1969:271-285) among foreign students in American universities that claimed students'

greater desire to be like native speakers was significantly correlated with proficiency. While aspirations for new identities could produce strong motives, it did not necessarily follow that integrative purposes were better predictors for attainment than instrumental ones. In particular, the process of learning could change the nature of motivation. As learning proceeded, learners might make contact with native speakers and their culture. Integrative motivation might develop, when such experience produced appreciation for the new culture and identification with its group. Learners might initiate their learning with instrumental motives but as a result of learning they might develop aspirations for new associations. Thus integrative motives could be a product of instrumental learning, as encounter with the new culture affected motivation and attainment. An open mind to the new culture and strong gift in language learning could develop positive attitude as well as producing sustained attainment. Even students who routinely regarded English as a tool could be infatuated with star characters to the point of idealisation. Learning at this point became almost aesthetic (Hargreaves, 1983). Such positive experience stimulated fascination, revealed new reality and sustained appetite, changing the nature of learning from the instrumental to the integrative. Thus motivation must be studied with the social and cultural experience of learning.

Gardner's theory was challenged by later studies that evidenced the importance of instrumental motivation. Studies identified the importance of different social and cultural background of learners, such as minorities, immigrants and learners in former colonies. Lukmani (1972:261-273) observed that Indian learners with instrumental motives out-performed those with integrative ones because instrumental motives distanced English learning from imperialism. Burstall (1975:5-25) in a series of British studies found that both types of motivation were important among French learners. Scarcella and Oxford

(1992:53) discovered more kinds of motivation than the instrumental and integrative. Studies also questioned the cause-effect relationship from the psychological tradition, asserting that nothing motivated as much as success itself. Hermann (1980:247-254) demonstrated that learners' attitude and motivation changed significantly according to the number of years they spent on learning and the level of proficiency. Strong (1984:1-14) argued that motivation could result from successful learning. Success often became motivation itself. In the light of such criticism, the concepts of integrative and instrumental motivation were deterministic and inadequate in dealing with the interdependent relationships between motivation and attainment. As studies identified the importance of learners, learning process and context, Gardner admitted that "it is not simply that 'motivation causes achievement.' Of course, the causal sequence can be reciprocal" (1990:184).

The meaning of English in China appeared instrumental in terms of modernisation, universities and jobs. However, such reasons were not static. Neither did they expose their nature. Although English was often claimed for modernisation, the fever to go abroad suggested that such claims were superficial. Given that the instrumental value of English was emphasised, what was its nature remained a question. Haugen argued that stressing the instrumental value of a language was "reifying one aspect of language, and not necessarily the most important":

> When linguists refer to English as an instrument, they are not describing its essential nature, only its purpose. "Instrument" or "tool" is merely a metaphor that is synonymous with "means" and contrasted with "end" (1971:281-289).

Such ends were more likely to be socially defined and culturally mediated, rather than officially imposed. Learning English for education and employment could serve modernisation collectively but at the same time improve personal quality. In personal

improvement by means of English, the significance of English could be realised at a personal level in the official name of modernisation. In this, collective ends sheltered personal motives as their ideological pretext.

In the light of such criticism, Gardner proposed a socio-educational model to incorporate variables and concepts from four groups of factors (1985:145-166):

1) sociocultural milieu (cultural beliefs);
2) individual differences (intelligence, aptitude, motivation, situational anxiety);
3) language acquisition contexts (formal learning, informal experience); and
4) language learning outcomes (linguistic and non-linguistic).

The model defined contexts as formal and informal learning rather than the social and cultural contexts in which learning took place. In this study, context was used to refer to the social and cultural environment of learning, best described by the sociocultural milieu. Gardner's model indicated that existing quantitative studies helped to identify issues but he readily admitted its limitations. "We are psychologists, not language teachers, nor linguists" (1992:211). In advocating the exploration of learning context, he wrote:

> Many researchers view second language acquisition as a single phenomenon without recognising the importance of the context in which acquisition takes place. Attention must be directed towards the context (1985:4).

Citing a study in Israel on how the sociocultural setting influenced motivation, he commented that it was particularly informative because "it is necessary to consider carefully the factors that can contribute to motivation in different sociocultural contexts" (Gardner and MacIntyre, 1993:3). Such understanding prepared the way for qualitative work on the context of learning.

Canagarajah's study in Sri Lanka (1993:601-626) confirmed the importance of context in English learning. Through ethnographic means, he found that many university students preferred grammar-translation because the focus on the structure helped them steer away

from English cultural influence. In addition, translation helped relate learning to their native language. This indicated that learners' perception as mediated by the society and culture at large, or the context of learning, was significant. For example, one might suspect that learners in China preferred to focus on structure because it conformed to what they accepted as serious learning. On the other hand, cultural and experiential learning was mere play. Thus language learning was related to learners' meaning structure and learning culture, to the dynamics of the relationships between the native and the target languages. Learners' perceptions and experience would reveal important aspects of their meaning structure and reflect such linguistic relationships. English learning in China, with its strong instrumental values on the one hand and its close connection with ideologies on the other, presented an opportunity to study learning contexts. One way to explore its social context was through Phillipson's critical studies on *linguistic imperialism*.

2.2 A sociological perspective: linguistic imperialism

Inspired by Fishman (1972) and Kachru's (1986) studies in the sociology of language, Phillipson traced how ELT contributed to the reproduction and distribution of political, economic and cultural power. He defined English linguistic imperialism as

> ideologies, structures, and practices which are used to legitimate, effectuate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language whereby the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages (1992:47).

Phillipson asserted that *structural* referred to material properties including institutions and financial allocations while *cultural* the immaterial or ideological properties like attitudes and pedagogic principles. He identified two mechanisms of English linguistic imperialism:

1) *anglocentricity*, the practice of judging other cultures by the standard of English;
2) *professionalism*, theories, methods, techniques and procedures in ELT, which worked together to limit language pedagogy to technical matters.

Linguistic imperialism thus defined English in such a way that English was largely decontextualised from its social, economic and political contexts. Phillipson sought to recontextualise English.

The distinction between the structural and the cultural meaning could be related with Gardner's instrumental and integrative terms. The instrumental reflected the structural power in terms of material advancement through education and employment. The integrative represented cultural or ideological power in terms of assimilation or acculturation to the anglocentric norms. Problems arose when the structural was separated from the cultural, the instrumental from the integrative. Phillipson identified this as the hidden agenda of instrumentalism:

> Claiming that English is neutral (a tool, an instrument) involves a disconnection between what English *is* (culture) from its structural basis (from what it *has* and *does*). It disconnects the *means* from *ends* or *purposes*, from what English is being used for. This type of reasoning is part of the rationalisation process whereby the unequal power relations between English and other languages are explained and legitimated (1992:287).

The separation neutralised English. Its practical value as an imposed language was emphasised over the emotional, ideological and pedagogical importance of a native language. It was in this comparative sense that the meaning of English as the language of modernisation resided. Phillipson was able to identify the separation from his macro-level sociological analysis but he lacked micro-level experience of teachers and learners to understand the implications of this separation. Noble as he was critically reflecting on the power of English as a native speaker and teacher of English, being part of the power structure, he was unable to take his insight further. Writing on the nature of English with the local perspective of a teacher, Canagarajah asserted:

> When language is defined as a semiotic system that encodes ideologies and possesses the power to reproduce politico-economic structures, the connection with imperialism can be perceived in more direct ways. It is now possible to understand how language embodies and sustains the ideologies, structures and practices to effect inequality. The dominance of English is therefore not only a

result of politico-economic inequalities between the centre and the periphery, it is also a *cause* of these inequalities (1999:41).

Structural, functional values and cultural, ideological meaning of language were interconnected. Our language helped us to make sense of the world and interpret our experience. It helped us to organise our knowledge and understanding, even to store and retrieve information. Concepts and attitudes were often learned the same time as we acquired the language. Our language mediated our perception, interpretation and organisation of reality. At the same time, the development of concepts and attitudes enriched our language. When language was seen as a tool, its role in effecting the ways we defined our reality, sustained our values and related with the world was ignored. The elaboration below on the global power of English by Crystal, one of the most quoted experts on English today, illustrated the relationship between language and values:

> it may take a military powerful nation to establish a language, but it takes an economically powerful one to maintain and expand it....British political imperialism had sent English around the globe, during the nineteenth century, so that it was 'a language on which the sun never sets'. During the twentieth century, this world presence was maintained and promoted, almost single-handedly, through the economic supremacy of the new American superpower (1997:8).

Crystal was not approving the power of English. He was merely interpreting it. He was objective in his terms. Accordingly, English won its global status because it "repeatedly found itself in the right place at the right time" (ibid.:69). This neutralised British and American dominance, making the power of English a matter of chance. Because Crystal was the voice of authority, his discourse was dangerous as it expressed an anglocentric perspective revealed in his rendering:

> The biggest potential setback to English as a global language, it has been said with more than a little irony, would have taken place a generation ago-if Bill Gates had grown up speaking Chinese (1997:112).

Hence English encouraged the interpretation of reality in its own terms. When it was connected with objectivity, authority and modernisation, it became language superior when concepts and attitudes developed according to its terms and standards.

Phillipson and Crystal both traced how global English was established by the power of guns and maintained by the penetration and control of markets and resources through investment. Phillipson further identified the heavy-handed classical imperialism as sticks and the subtle soft-handed neo-imperialism as carrots. The former ended with national independence and the latter was still alive and kicking in the name of modernisation. The discourse for modernisation promoted the neutral status of English as a tool. Crystal (1997) hardly mentioned linguistic imperialism pursued by the British professionalism and American corporations. Such efforts continued to spread and maintain English in countries of strategic importance as identified by the British Council (1995). They were successful in replacing the political connection of English with the rationalisation of economic aid and financial assistance for development. Phillipson asserted,

> The discourse accompanying and legitimating the export of English to the world has been so persuasive that English has been equated with progress and prosperity. The majority of those working in the ELT field tend to confine themselves, by choice and training, to linguistic, literary or pedagogical matters. ELT is however an international activity with political, economic, military and cultural implications and ramifications (1992:8).

If the nature of political disconnection was the decontextualisation of ELT, the nature of technical training was professionalisation. Both contributed to the teaching of English irrelevant to the native language and culture as teachers had either inadequate command of English or the native language. With little respect for the local culture, they frequently adopted culturally inappropriate methods. Consequently, the stigmatisation of local language and culture and the loss of self-reliance occurred as professional guidance was dictated and expected from the West.

When ELT became a profession of linguistic structures, teaching methodologies and prospering business, the power of English began to define education quality and career prospects. Phillipson named this the *stratification* function (ibid.:25) of English:

> The pull of English is remarkably strong in periphery areas, not only among the elite who benefit directly from their proficiency in English but also among the masses, who appreciate that the language provides access to power and resources. Those in possession of English benefit from an alchemy which transmutes into material and social gain and advantage. Not surprisingly, attitudes to the language tend to be very favourable (ibid.:27).

As English increased its presence, it might reduce the importance of the native language. In places where the native language was not formalised, English might displace it, at first in specific spheres of science, technology and education, and later in multilingual countries by emerging as the supra-ethnic language of integration and unity. Phillipson identified this as the *displacement* function of English. This would lead to insufficient literacy in either English or the native language, as learners experienced the linguistic split between English as the formal language and native language as the emotional one. The split could cause the lack of maturity in both languages, as in Hong Kong, where, during the colonial rule, linguistic split produced many "cultural eunuchs" (ibid.:29).

Phillipson illustrated how the separation of the structural and cultural meanings of English helped produce inequality. But English could be used to develop open attitudes, create intercultural understanding and international perspective. Cummins (1979, 1981, 1984) demonstrated that L1 and L2[18] were interdependent in that cognitive development in L1 was significant for effective L2 learning. As linguistic and cultural interdependence should consolidate rather than displace one another, he advocated promoting L1 for the sake of L2 learning. Cortazzi and Jin introduced a model of cultural synergy (1996b:201), a two-way acculturation to foster open attitudes. It was after learners richly experienced both L1 and

[18] First language/mother tongue and second/new/target language.

L2, C1 and C2[19] that they were most likely to develop flexibility and tolerance towards new language and culture.

In criticising the ELT profession's emphasis on linguistic structure and teaching methodology, Phillipson argued that "ELT needs to be situated in the macro-societal theoretical perspective" (1992:2). Canagarajah insisted on a different micro-level local approach:

> In considering how social, economic, governmental, and cultural institutions effect inequality, Phillipson's perspective becomes too impersonal and global. What is sorely missed is the individual, the local, the particular, a micro-social perspective--the lived culture and everyday experience of the periphery communities (1999:41-2).

Canagarajah maintained that Phillipson's analytical models prevented him from exploring complex issues of linguistic domination and resistance. He argued that studies from the ELT centre were bound to be limited in its deterministic and systematic methodology with little sense of the real classrooms, little representation of the individual learners. What was needed was the periphery perspective of the learning culture to explore how English was experienced in the day-to-day life of the people, how it competed with other languages in the local communities, and how it infiltrated the hearts and minds of the people. Since there were unique power structures and relationships in local contexts, the study of language learning should address a specific language in a specific context. Pennycook, in a study of English in Singapore, concluded,

> The worldliness of English in Singapore is complex. It is constituted and reconstituted through the discourses of pragmatism, multiracialism and meritocracism caught in some critical ambivalence amid the cultural politics of Singapore. It is both the language of modernity and the language of decadence, the "first language" (i.e. the medium of education) but not the "mother tongue", a neutral medium of communication yet the bearer of Western values, the language of equality and yet the distributor of inequality, the language of Singaporean identity and yet the mother tongue of few. (1994:255)

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[19] Native culture and new/target culture.

To investigate how English was perceived and how its learning was experienced in the locality necessarily required that we hear students' voices. The identification of themes in the sociocultural dynamics would help define their learning conditions.

2.3 A cultural perspective: identity and anomie

In Gardner's definition of integrative motivation (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Gardner, 1985) and Spolsky's studies (1969) on *identity* in foreign language learning, learners' aspiration to become a member of the target culture was deemed significant. The concept of integrative motivation was intimately related to the concept of identity, whose importance in language learning was evident even in first language acquisition. Mowrer (1950) found that successful acquisition of first language was partly due to the child's desire to belong initially to the family and then to the larger speech community. Integrative motivation derived from the same desire to engage and to belong. If learners related positively to their own culture and/or negatively to the target culture, they were secure in their roots and happy with their identity. Their learning of the new language was more likely to be instrumental. When they associated negatively with their culture and/or aspired to assimilate to a new one, they were more insecure in their roots and less happy with their identity. They were more likely to seek a new identity with the new language. Their learning would perhaps be integrative in nature. Learners' perception of English would be mediated by their interpretation of social relationships and cultural realities. Disappointment triggered by negative interpretation of native social experience and cultural background stimulated learners to identify with a new language, as dissatisfaction and frustration built up a reservoir of social interests in learning it and a cultural inclination to its way of life.

Identity could also be defined by its lacking. Emile Durkheim (1951) used the term *anomie* to describe the feeling of normlessness, the sense of not belonging, the state of being without social ties, in relation to adjustment difficulties in industrialisation. Key to this concept was the loss of basic meaning, the frame of reference, "the lack of collective forces at certain points in society, that is, of groups established for the regulation of social life" (ibid.:382). Related to this concept was the crisis which would "disturb the equilibrium between him and his surroundings" (ibid.:288). Gardner and Lambert borrowed the notion to define a state of cultural distance in L2 learning:

> First, it seemed possible to us that certain students with an integrative orientation toward another cultural group might have developed along the way a basic dissatisfaction with their own society and were thus perceiving language study as a way of examining a potentially better way of life. Second, we felt that regardless of his attitudes toward society at the start of the language-learning process, the more advanced student of language might well find that his new skills permitted him to leave his own cultural group and become a member of the new group whose language he had nearly mastered. Thus the new option opened to him might create disillusionment, a feeling of being lost somewhere between two cultures (1972:16).

Obviously, such cultural distance could be a reason or a result of learning a new language. For the purpose of this study, we would define the emotional distance from C1 as dissatisfaction. When the perception of Chinese culture as superior was shattered, the balance was upset and learners might suffer dissatisfaction. At the same time, favourable images and information about the West fed a new illusion, creating a longing for it. This motivated learning its language. Since dissatisfaction was a serious concern, we would define anomie as the general dissatisfaction towards one's native cultural background. This definition captured the negative motivation triggered by the dissatisfaction with China's social reality and cultural traditions. The illusion was based on the promise of democracy and freedom, the power of science and technology and the prospects of industrialisation and modernisation. The aspiration was for a better way of life, a new cultural identity, a redefinition of the Chinese culture, and if it failed, a quick exit.

To trace this dissatisfaction, we returned to China's defeat in the 19th century, when intellectuals reflected on Chinese history and came to the conclusion that China would have to change if it was to regain its lost power. In a study on Chinese nationalism, Bernstein and Munro observed:

> The idea of "Chinese learning for the essence" gave way to a probing and critical examination of China's very values, which, in the minds of these intellectuals, encouraged passivity, slavish obedience to authority, and unscientific and undemocratic attitudes (1997:64).

This self-examination led to the founding of the Communist and the Nationalist Parties, the two conflicting political forces that dominated contemporary Chinese history. Defeat shattered the insular, self-satisfied attitude from the ancient belief that China was the centre of the world. A sense of inferiority that China had fallen behind followed, as illustrated by the cultural symbolism in the controversial television series *Heshang*[20].

For decades, the Yellow River was held as the cradle of Chinese civilisation. Originated from the Roof of the World, it crossed the vast Yellow Earth Plateau on its way to the Yellow Sea. Despite its golden glory, China had closed itself for so long that it took the humiliation of defeat to open up. The prosperity of the Tang Dynasty[21] was due to its openness in welcoming and assimilating foreign culture. Like the Yellow River, when it took in from rivers and lakes, it flowed. When it narrowed down, it blocked up. *Heshang* asserted that it was only after Chinese people abandoned their land-bound agricultural culture that they could break free to the world. It identified the feudal authoritarian structure which suppressed individual creativity with Confucian uniform mentality as the threat to China. When the river overflowed, people raised the bank and built up more danger. Likewise, when a feudal dynasty crumbled, another took over. Its fundamental nature remained unchanged. Unable to eradicate the root of the threat, Chinese people were

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[20] Song on the Death of the River, produced by young intellectuals and broadcast in China in 1988.

caught in the vicious cycle of its rampant flooding. *Heshang* maintained that the solution to China's misery was the maritime civilisation of the ocean. The Yellow River had exhausted its nurturing potential. It needed the raindrop of life brought along by the wind from the azure sea. English as the carrier of business and trade, the medium of science and technology, the language of freedom and democracy was the reviving wind. As an expression of frustration, *Heshang* demonstrated a determination to redeem time and resurrect China. Bernstein and Munro identified this as an underlying theme in its modernisation:

> (China) is a profoundly dissatisfied power. There is a kind of collective desperation in China to make up for lost time, to achieve its goal of renewed greatness (ibid.:204).

In the symbolic expression of their dissatisfaction with China and idealisation for the West, we found a burden to save China and an urgency to learn English.

Although the definition of English in China was articulated in terms of modernisation, within the discourse, there were sentiments of nationalism that sometimes pushed to the top of the national agenda. Eight years after *Heshang*, a book entitled *China Can Say No* (Song and others, 1996) was published and quickly became a national best-seller. Produced by the very people who advocated Westernisation and democracy with *Heshang*, the book selected essays of influential intellectuals with extensive experience studying and living in the US. The following essay titles illustrated that many went with an idealised illusion which were quickly replaced by feelings of disillusion and nationalism:

How did I enter the pro-American tie?
I won't take Boeing 777
Back from the US with more confidence for China
The Iron Lady of China says no to America
Irritated Chinese Americans say we are not spies!
McCarthyism dying hard
China's orphanage--Americans are saying no to their media

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[21] AD 618-906.

The US has no right to criticise China on human rights
The dishonesty and irresponsibility of American diplomacy
Setting Hollywood on fire
The self-loving and self-serving of the United States
The American way to maintain leadership: making conflicts before making peace

Cultural dissatisfaction with China led to anomie which encouraged English learning. Cultural disillusion with the West stirred ethnocentricity which discouraged English learning. Closely related to English learning were deep feelings of identity and nationalism. Sometimes, nationalism triggered dissatisfaction and shame. Identity crisis produced conditions for English learning as demonstrated by *Heshang*. Other times, it generated national pride and emotions against English as indicated by *China Can Say No*. Learners' reactions depended on how they perceived English and rationalised its meaning. Yet cultural meaning not only mediated learning perceptions, it also regulated learning practice. The next section would explore how established cultural patterns and values helped shape the experience of learning.

2.4 An educational perspective: the culture of learning

Many studies on ELT in China either focused on certain aspects of teaching or surveyed the conditions and status of ELT (Tang, 1984; Dzau, 1990; Ross, 1993; Schoenhals, 1993; Maley, 1995; Cortazzi and Jin, 1996a). Recently, researchers became more interested in the cultural studies of learning. In particular, Cortazzi and Jin (1996b; Jin and Cortazzi, 1998) investigated the Chinese culture of learning, which they defined as

> the frameworks of expectations and norms of interpretation through which cultures mediate learning and classroom communication (1998:98).

On the routines of learning, Cortazzi and Jin reported from observations in Chinese primary schools that the whole class often performed the same tasks, worked on the same materials, followed the same routine at the same speed. They noticed that lessons were well organised. The content was carefully structured to help learning take place in an ordered,

uniform and disciplined manner. While the appearance of organisation indicated that learning was vigorously structured and disciplined, it was not necessarily good organisation because there was little to organise. Everything from content and procedure to method and structure was predetermined. Learning was efficiently structured from top down, but it was not always effectively organised in the classroom, let alone at home. Teachers in China were often lukewarm towards methods that emphasised communicative skills rather than grammar knowledge because activities for communication were not as easy to organise. Therefore, organisation in the Chinese context of learning seemed to be conditional to collective activities that involved the whole class, to the structure of knowledge and the discipline of classroom management.

Cortazzi and Jin noticed that conformity was valued. Learning proceeded in chorus. Even assessment was conducted collectively.

> The priorities are that each person must be part of a group or community; learning interdependency, co-operation and social awareness; becoming oneself in relation to significant others; expressing that which is socially shared rather than individually felt; creating on the basis of mastery rather than discovery (1996b: 178).

The emphasis on co-operation would need to be qualified as well. While Chinese culture of learning emphasised common purposes, this did not necessarily encourage co-operation. Chinese students did not enjoy group work as much as individual or whole-class activities (ibid.:185). The competitive nature of the education system discouraged co-operation. Learning was perceived as a highly individual "inner mental" (ibid.:191) process. Individual effort in memorisation was deemed key to success. Large class size, importance of discipline, significance of knowledge and pressure of exams were used to rationalise the emphasis on consistency and conformity. With the focus on examination, competition better defined the culture of learning than co-operation.

Cortazzi and Jin identified the belief in attainability that anyone could achieve success through hard work as a feature of Chinese culture of learning. While this was a valid observation, its causes and implications could be made more explicit. Traditional work ethic encouraged strong willpower and diligence rather than gifts and talents as the key to success. One reason was perhaps the lack of Christian influence, as was the frequent use of comparison and humiliation to motivate learning. Success was perceived as achievement through self-directed efforts as a matter of perspiration rather than inspiration. To utilise the preoccupation for face as a form of motivation, personal and school rankings in exams were regularly published to instigate competitive spirit. Examination defined the content, methodology and organisation of learning as the ultimate competition, with its results determining the placement and career prospects of students, the ranking and promotion of teachers and schools. Hence the content of teaching consisted of knowledge easily testable on large scales and the method of learning became memorisation for reproduction in exams. This originated from the classical tradition that emphasised memorisation as a cultural process to develop mental discipline and accumulate vocabulary and knowledge. In the process of repetition, content was cognitively internalised. A cultured mindset was developed. The repetition of details highlighted the importance of efforts and reinforced order and discipline.

In studying different expectations and perceptions between Chinese students and their Western teachers, Cortazzi and Jin discovered that the quality students identified most with good teachers was knowledge. This association reflected their perceived role of teachers as the voice of authority. Since teachers were expected to be knowledgeable and authoritative, students often expected their foreign teachers to talk about English grammar as confidently as their Chinese teachers. The quality that most students associated with good students was

diligence, confirming the importance of hard work. Comparing how learning was perceived by Chinese students and their Western teachers, Cortazzi and Jin discovered:

> Where Chinese culture of learning emphasises knowledge of vocabulary and grammar and the result of learning, Western cultures of learning stress communication skills, language use and the process of learning. ... Where the West favours verbal activity Chinese culture stresses mental activity... For Western teachers, being active has a strong verbal component of talking; for Chinese learners, it has a strong reflective element of listening and learning from an authoritative teacher, memorising, and preparing for classes (ibid.:199).

Thus we noticed that Chinese students and foreign teachers often meant different things when they talked about learning. For Chinese, learning was the accumulation of knowledge through memorisation, the product of which had to be shown by exam results. For foreigners, learning was more like the development of skills through experience, the process of which was as important as the product. Despite the official emphasis on the common goals, learning was often seen as an individual endeavour. The pressure from competition and examination made co-operative learning irrelevant. Personal efforts were seen as the key to success. Even gifts could be improved by diligence. On the other hand, the Western view of learning was more socially communicative, despite its emphasis on individual needs and personal gifts. Group work and experiential learning were often favoured. Abilities, efforts and methods were all key players. Gifts were seen as predetermined. Students were encouraged to be creative and innovative. Even if there were entrance or exit exams, they were seldom the only options. Learning tended to be open-ended. Cortazzi and Jin reported that foreign teachers often considered their Chinese students diligent, persistent, thorough, but quiet, shy, and passive. Chinese students regarded their foreign teachers lively, active, flexible and spontaneous, but less structured in teaching and less precise in grammar knowledge. If Chinese teachers won respect by their authoritative voice, foreign teachers did so through authentic use of English.

In classroom communication routines, Cortazzi and Jin noticed that the teacher instructed from the front, presenting models and demonstrating their applications. No student asked any questions. As research on classroom interaction in China were rare, it would be useful to review studies on the nature of classroom discourse in the West. The Chinese context was different, but the problems could be similar. Recent studies on the quality of routine classroom interaction focused on "teacher talk", the kind of questions, speech modification and reaction to errors. Piper (1993), in particular, was highly critical of "teacher talk". She argued that there were sharp contradictions in language teaching between what it claimed to do and what it was really doing. The topics were often irrelevant. Not only did teachers like talking about things no one cared about, they often asked questions to which they had already determined the correct answers. Thus they served few communicative functions. Sometimes, everybody knew the answer, but teachers praised such answers. As their questions only superficially requested information, teaching became pretentious. Teachers confessed that the best way to teach talking was to get students to talk. Yet when children got into trouble in class, it was often for talking. Teachers enjoyed judging as a routine. The real value they put on students' talk was to evaluate it. When a teacher made a judgement about a child's language, as he did when he tried to correct it, he was essentially telling the child that her talk didn't really count. Piper's analysis revealed that teachers could be unaware of what they were doing in class when interactions were characterised by carelessness and manipulation. The talk was directed towards the teaching agenda rather than communication. With higher pitch, exaggerated enunciation and intonation, such talk became problematic:

> First, it was carried out according to the teacher's agenda. He had a purpose and manipulated the children's talk to that purpose. He initiated the turns, decided when they were completed, and controlled the topics. Second, it was conversationally dishonest. The repetitions of the children's responses served no purpose. They did not, for example, elaborate or expand the children's language. Third, the exchange was dishonest in that although it pretended to draw out children's

experiences, it did not do so in any meaningful way. The teacher determined what was appropriate for discussion and made it clear that what was appropriate was what he wanted (ibid.:267).

As the teacher used language for his agenda, children were seldom engaged in meaningful conversation. They were conditioned into a passive role waiting for the knowledge from the teacher. Such talk was hardly communication as it was not socially meaningful.

Cullen (1998), however, argued that since "teacher talk" took place in the educational context of classroom, it should not be scrutinised with principles for social communication:

> The criteria for assessing the communicativeness of classroom discussion and, by extension, of teacher talk, are taken from what is perceived to constitute communication behaviour in the world outside the classroom. Attempts to define communicative talk in classroom must be based primarily on what is or is not communicative in the context of the classroom itself (ibid.:180).

He maintained that "teacher talk" was a valuable source of comprehensible input for learners. Attempts to reduce it failed as they were unrealistic and culturally inappropriate. Cullen identified situations in which "teacher talk" was valid communication:

> referential questions where teacher asked something to which he did not know the answer,
> content feedback by the teacher when teacher's response to student's contribution focused on the content rather than on the form,
> speech modification, hesitation, and rephrasing, and
> attempts to negotiate meaning through requests for clarification and repetition.

Cullen identified routine classroom situations in which teacher talk were not valid communication. These included the exclusive or excessive use of display questions, feedback focused on form, echoing of students' response and sequence of predictable IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback). Piper and Cullen recognised that learning as communication was realised in social process which created opportunities for meaningful interaction. Their studies in "teacher talk" raised the conscious awareness of the nature of classroom activities. Yet they could be enriched by studies of the cultural of learning, where the local context and the learner perspective were taken into consideration. In

analysing the nature of learning, more attention should be given to routine classroom procedure of the learners and their local cultural perspective.

Cortazzi and Jin's primary concerns seemed to be creating conscious awareness for cultural differences and promoting intercultural perspective through cultural synergy:

> (a) two-way acculturation (which develops) an attitude of being willing to learn, understand and appreciate the other's culture without loss of their own cultural status, role or identity (ibid.:201).

Such an attitude would facilitate intercultural perspective without antagonising different cultures. Cultural synergy as a two-way process would ideally promote both cultures. An understanding of cultural differences and their implications was essential. This required not only the study of the general principles that governed language learning but the particularities of the local context and practice of learning, with the perceptions and experience of learning from the perspective of the students themselves.

2.5 Summary: English learning at the micro and macro level

There seemed to be a lack of coherent model to guide research in the sociocultural context of language learning, one that would cross the border between psychology, sociology and applied linguistics for sociocultural studies of English learning. Considering the complex nature of language learning, this was hardly surprising. While psychological studies on motivation in second language learning served as the launch pad for this study, they tended to be quantitative in nature and too restrictive for their models to be applied in the context of China. The discussion on motivation exposed the inadequacies of instrumental and integrative orientation. It pointed at learning context and process as important areas of study. The sociological analysis of the nature of ELT criticised the micro-level focus on linguistic structure and teaching methodology and defined the structural and cultural power of English. It reflected on the practice of ELT professionalism and anglocentricity in

stratifying the society and displacing the importance of native languages and culture in the name of modernisation. However, such systematic analysis at the macro-level was also deterministic, emphasising the general rather than local perspective.

The cultural study of English learning highlighted the importance of learners' relationships with native and target cultures. It identified significant roles of affective factors in learning, such as cultural distance, the sense of identity, the feelings of anomie and emotions of nationalism. Dissatisfactions and disillusions expressed by symbolic tools often produced intensive emotions that mediated the motivation, the action and condition of learning. Learning was further influenced by the culture of learning which shaped learning routines and defined the nature of interactions between teachers and students. The official agenda in China for the collective interest and common good served the ideology of modernisation, reinforced authority, order and discipline, but they did not necessarily encourage co-operative learning. Chinese culture seemed to define learning as an individual process rather than a social one. Knowledge and diligence were emphasised over skills and gifts. This suggested that while Western theories and models could help the study of English learning in China, there was a need for indigenous research in which the local context, conditions, process and product of English learning were examined in its own terms.

Since teachers and students were not always aware of the nature and implications of English learning, this study would seek to identify its defining themes and explore their nature and implications. Research on English learning argued from different angles for the need to study the context, the particularities and the process of learning. This study would focus on the particularities of students' perception of English and their experience in English learning. At the macro level, it examines the context of learning based on theories

from the sociology of English. As a cultural study of English learning, it discusses English learning as a cultural redefinition process. At the micro level, formal and informal learning situations as well as the local perspective of the students would be emphasised in exploring how English was penetrating their lives.

The next chapter will define the research question and discuss the selection of methods according to the nature of the question and the reality of the study.

PART TWO

THE PROCESS

Chapter 3 Defining the research

S: Why do you want to speak with us?
M: I want to find out how you learn English.
S: How do you find out?
M: I visit your class. I ask you to write about it. I speak with you.
S: But it doesn't sound like a research. You are not proving something is right or wrong. My father is a researcher. He does experiments in the lab. (C1S2/SE)

We have reviewed the development of ELT in China and introduced some theoretical insights that inspired this study. We now shift our attention to the study itself. This chapter seeks to define the research question and introduce the rationalisation behind the choice of methods. In discussing the nature of the question and the reality of the research, it traces the process of progressive clarification of the question and establishes how the nature of the question decided the methods and how the reality of research determined that reflexivity is the key to its validity.

3.1 Defining the question

This study began with a proposal to explore relationships between motivation and attainment in English learning among students in China. It was initially felt that such relationships could be better understood by testing Gardner's theories (1972, 1985) in China. Statistical analysis would be carried out with surveys data and results compared with his findings. Known correlation would be tested and new relationships identified. However, from the first field trip, it was realised that the contexts in China were so different from those of Gardner's studies that his survey procedures (Gardner and Lambert, 1972: 147-164) and test battery (Gardner, 1985: 177-184) were culturally inappropriate. Substantial alteration of the models would render comparisons invalid. Gardner's later studies (1990, 1993) pointed at the contexts of language learning. Recent developments in educational research such as Phillipson's studies (1992) on linguistic imperialism and

Cortazzi and Jin's studies (1996a, 1996b) on the culture of learning suggested alternative approaches from sociological traditions. Criticism of Phillipson's studies (Canagarajah, 1999) identified the importance of local perspective. Analysis of Cortazzi and Jin's studies revealed the need to define the nature of educational practice and make explicit the implications of cultural routines in learning. This study would follow the leads to explore the educational and sociocultural contexts of English learning in China.

While in China negotiating access for fieldwork, I visited some English classes. Initial observations revealed that the conditions of learning were so diverse that even within one city there would not be any school that could adequately represent the general situation. The complexity of Chinese society, the disparity of regional difference, the enormity of the research scope and the constraints of research reality made it difficult to conduct large-scale research to test models or administer surveys. Given that the diversity of China made generalisation futile, there did seem to be certain aspects of English learning that were common across the country. For instance, the learning of Japanese obviously carried the same mandate for modernisation, but it was not as popular as the learning of English. An accurate description of a particular school would have general implications. This study would, therefore, concentrate on a few middle schools.

The local context

As English was a foreign language in China, its dominance in education was a unique one. First, English seemed to enjoy much more power in China than a foreign language would in developed countries. However, most of the studies in foreign language learning were conducted in developed countries. The difference in the social and cultural reality of developing countries determined that learning objectives and methods were profoundly

different. Secondly, English seemed to have a special status in China different from other developing countries. China was never completely colonialised and the Chinese language survived as the common language of national unity. English was introduced as an international language for modernisation, with the financial and professional help from the US and the UK. It was to complement Chinese but never to displace it. Thirdly, despite its lack of official status, the pragmatic importance of English has probably grown beyond that of the Chinese language as indicated not only by the increasing interest in learning English but by its prominence in national curricula for schools and universities.

Different contexts often imply different relationships. The dynamics of English learning in China were very different from that of French learning among English-speaking Canadians. Even among students in Canada, the contexts between French learning among English-speaking students and English learning among French-speaking students were different and thus difficult to compare, as were the contexts between German learning among British students and English learning among German students. My visits to American, British, Canadian and Swiss schools indicated that as the status of English and French varied in these countries, students' perceptions and learning experiences differed. Yet in general, both English and French in these countries seemed to lack the growing power enjoyed by English in China. Despite good support for learning such as experienced bilingual teachers, authentic and up-to-date resources, computer-assisted learning, exchange students and teachers and trips to English and French speaking countries, students' motivation was visibly lower. It appeared that even the rich supply of resources and information made the languages less valuable. On the other hand, the scarcity of information and resources in China increased the urgency and motivation for English learning. Such differences in perceptions and experiences reflected different social and cultural contexts of learning. In

China, learners seemed more aspired to increase their opportunities and improve their living standard through English. This aspiration triggered and sustained a high level of motivation.

Different contexts would require different focus. In terms of motivation, Chinese cultural tradition often operated as such that motivation was derived negatively through humiliation. This could happen for students individually or for their families and schools collectively. Such a structure of motivation through positive encouragement and negative shame exerted strong influence on learners' perception and practice of learning. Quite possibly, similar situations existed in Western learning, but they were not as characteristic as in Chinese education. In addition, the context made it necessary to subject a specific kind of motivation to a specific language skill in a specific learning task. One instance was the routine reading in chorus in class. Students might find it tedious, but if there happened to be a new teacher leading, curiosity would increase motivation. If this new teacher was a foreigner, it would initiate higher level of motivation. If this foreigner was friendly and even spoke some Chinese, that would keep the motivation longer. In this context, "foreigner" was a special concept unique to Chinese learners and its meaning would need to be explored within the local social and cultural contexts.

The unique relationships of the local contexts dictated that researches be conducted with full respect to the learning reality according to its own terms. For example, applying general terms without knowing how they were used by students in the local contexts would be risky as implicit yet important features would skip our attention. The special relationships in the context also required that we know what makes good questions about English learning in China. In order to answer this question without imposing our own

assumptions, we need to begin with a simple and open-ended question on the characteristics of English learning in China.

The research question

The central question for this study is:

What is the place of English in middle school students' educational experiences and life aspirations?

In order to answer this question, the study will investigate the following issues:

A. Students' encounters with English and their experiences of English learning:
What is the extent and nature of their encounters and experiences?

B. Students' perceptions of English and their reflections on English learning:
How do they interpret the significance of English and English learning?

C. Interactions between experiences and aspirations:
1) What are students' aspirations in relation to English learning?
2) How do their experiences and aspirations influence one another?

The study will access the reality of learning by examining students' learning experiences and perceptions described by students themselves as participants of learning. This is not only to shift the research focus from the perspective of researchers to that of students but to improve the validity of the research. One obvious assumption is contained in the Chinese metaphor in the title of the thesis, *an army crossing a one-log bridge*, depicting the tension between thousands of people rushing across and the utter lack of room on the passage. This summarises the hypothesis of the thesis that the education system can hardly sustain the momentum of English learning in China. This hypothesis will be tested by exploring the extent to which English learning is facilitating students or preventing them from fulfilling their aspirations. The reality of the research predetermines that the clarification of the central research question, the identification of key issues and the maintenance of focus progress throughout the research design, data collection and analysis process. One can

probably start fieldwork with a carefully defined question, but an open mind is equally important. The questions raised, the themes emerged and the direction taken will all need to be dictated by the reality of research.

3.2 Selecting the method

To establish a platform for discussing methodological issues, this section reviews positivism and naturalism as two opposing schools of research philosophy probably best seen as extremes. For many years, positivism defines the scientific method of natural sciences. Its chief concerns are testing hypotheses and proving theories. With the help of Hammersley and Atkinson (1983), the main tenets of positivism is summarised as:

1) Experiment: Physical properties are quantitatively measured and manipulated to identify numerical relationships;
2) Logic: The language of science is the mathematical statement of cause and effect as all events can be explained in a deductive fashion;
3) Isolation: All things can be broken down to smaller units for analysis and knowledge can be departmentalised and professionalised through specialisation;
4) Generalisability: Proven laws of relationships between variables are consistent and regular, persisting across all circumstances and readily retestable;
5) Objectivity: The effect of researchers must be removed, with priority given to the observable while the intangibles dismissed as metaphysical nonsense;
6) Standardisation: Regulation of instruments and procedures of observation are emphasised to facilitate the achievement of measurements that are stable across observers;
7) Quantity: Data, analysis and findings are represented and manipulated through numerical means to the precision of mathematics.

At the other end, naturalism proposes that the world must be studied in its natural state, undisturbed by researchers. Hence it rejects artificial situations like experiments and surveys in data collecting. Its concerns are to describe particular social events and cultural phenomena in order to identify important themes, explore their meaning and understand their relationships. Its tenets can be defined as:

1) Experience: Human actions are based on social meanings including intentions, motives, attitudes and beliefs which cannot be tested but only experienced;
2) Meaning: Social events cannot always be understood in terms of causal relationships and deeper meanings exist to shape beliefs and guide behaviours;

3) Unity: The world is an interrelated, interconnected and interdependent unity so knowledge is systematic rather than fragmented;

4) Particularity: Social events are not always subject to universal laws, the application and interpretation of which vary among people and in different contexts;

5) Subjectivity: Skills we develop as social actors give access to meanings and help us understand people's beliefs and behaviours;

6) Participation: As participant observers we can learn the particular culture of the people under study and come to interpret the world in the same way as they do;

7) Quality: Data are described, analysed and interpreted through qualitative means to the details of particular cases.

While positivism dismisses naturalism for lacking standard procedure and solid proof, the latter accuses the former of restricting scientific investigation to manipulation in artificial situations. What they share in common is to improve understanding through systematic investigation and to develop theory through structured reflection. As science is dominated by positivism, there are growing concerns on its validity. Its preoccupation for *generalisability*, for example, expresses the belief that researches, after all, are to discover general laws and aspire for universal truth. However, even quantitative studies on motivation indicate the importance of particularities. This is not just a shift of research focus but a change in our attitude towards reality. Significance resides in particularity as well as in generality. Often, general meaning dwells in particular cases. In biology, the study of one cell in particular leads to the understanding of cells in general. In psychology, studies on particular cases of abnormal developments enhance understanding of the linguistic, intellectual and emotional functions of the brain. Typically, artists and writers apply the specifics of one person, one event or one location to depict the universal. Following the traditions of naturalist researches to probe open questions, this study seeks to understand the nature of English learning in China from the perspectives of the learners. Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, it attempts to identify and explore themes important to the learning experience and perceptions. Findings from the particular cases will not represent the general conditions and contexts of English learning

in China, but the systematic analysis of particular cases can reveal some common features of English learning. In addition, qualitative research can introduce a new perspective to the dominance of positivism in academic thinking in China and a new option for its education practice.

Reflexivity

A big concern for the validity of naturalistic research was on its seeming lack of objectivity. The process from formulating questions to selecting samples, from collecting data to identify key issues, was considered subjective. While objectivity was a key element for validity, it was not guaranteed simply because we tried to eliminate unwanted factors and conditions. In trying to achieve objectivity, we could exert stronger influence by manipulating its conditions. In the process the situations became artificial. Walford argued,

> it is now recognised that the careful, objective, step-by-step model of the research process is actually a fraud and that, within natural science as well as social science, the standard way in which research methods are taught and real research is often written up for publication perpetuates what is in fact a myth of objectivity (1991a:1).

On the contrary, objectivity increased when we respected reality with an open mind and honesty. Ultimately, researchers could only claim to be objective, as we were bound to be part of the situations we studied. Our values, actions and presence would influence the situation despite our best efforts. Hammersley and Atkinson (1983) argued that essential to objectivity was the concept of *reflexivity*, the need to maintain our awareness and the explicitness of our role by being openly and systematically reflective. To study interactions, how we interacted with students was as important as how they interacted with themselves. Our reflection on our own relationships with students formed good data in its own right. Hammersley and Atkinson elaborated:

> The first and most important step towards a resolution of the problems raised by positivism and naturalism in their joint obsession with eliminating the effects of the researcher on the data is to recognise the reflexive character of social research: that is, to recognise we are part of the social

world we study. This is not a matter of methodological commitment, it is an existential fact. There is no way in which we can escape the social world in order to study it, nor, fortunately, is that necessary. Instead of treating reactivity merely as a source of bias, we can exploit it. How people respond to the presence of the researcher may be as informative as how they react to other situations (1983:14-15).

Since all researchers were involved in the actions studied, reflecting on the process and product of their participation was crucial. Hammersley and Atkinson concluded,

> Neither positivism nor naturalism provides an adequate framework for social research. Both neglect its fundamental reflexivity, the fact that we are part of the social world we study, and that there is no escape from reliance on common-sense knowledge and on common-sense methods of investigation. All social research is founded on the human capacity for participant observation. We act in the social world and yet are able to reflect upon ourselves and our actions as objects in that world. By including our own role within the research focus and systematically exploiting our participation in the world under study as researchers, we can develop and test theory without placing reliance on futile appeals to empiricism, of either positivist or naturalist varieties (ibid.:25).

Gardner's studies assumed objectivity through statistical procedures, ignoring the context and the influence of researchers. Key aspects of language learning were ignored, as statistical procedures were inadequate on their own to study attitudes and emotions. To reduce the influence of traditional researches in their obsession with objectivity, this study would seek to apply the principle of reflexivity by identifying my role and effects on the research and making analytic use of them. Reflexivity on the research process and respect for the reality would improve its objectivity and therefore its validity.

Stranger

While maintaining a local perspective was one way to respect reality, observing reality from an outsider's eye could help describe reality by making explicit relationships easily taken for granted by the local perspective. In this, Schutz's concept of "*stranger*" (1964) was particularly useful. Researchers frequently entered the field as "strangers" with little knowledge of the locality. Schutz maintained that this was not always a misfortune. Knowledge as we knew it often turned out to be unreliable. As fieldwork proceeded, areas

of ignorance previously of no importance began to take on greater significance. In learning how to participate in social situations in the locality, the "stranger" gradually acquired an inside knowledge of it, supplanting his previous external knowledge. Schutz elaborated on the value of "stranger":

> By virtue of being forced to come to understand the culture of the host society in this way, the stranger acquires a certain objectivity not available to cultural members, who live inside the culture, quite unable to see it as anything but a reflection of "how the world is". They are not conscious of the fundamental assumptions, many of which are distinctive to that culture that shape their vision (Hammersley, 1983:8).

The association of objectivity with "stranger" posed a danger for researchers studying our own culture as our assumptions blinded us from seeing the significance of ordinary things. While it was true that the "stranger" in cross-cultural research could help recover issues taken for granted, insight from members of the locality could also benefit the study. A degree of intellectual distance should be maintained for reflexivity. It was this theoretical independence rather than social detachment that defined the "stranger".

My role as a researcher in China was a unique one. As a member of the culture, I had the benefit of personal experience and understanding of its tradition and education. Yet my ten years' absence from its rapid changes distanced me from its current culture. Hence I became a "semi-stranger" to China, with an insider's perspective to understand and an outsider's eye to perceive the changes and traditions unnoticeable to the local people. In selecting schools for the fieldwork, there were those that I attended as a student and those where I taught before. The "insider" perspective in those schools, helpful as it was, was at the same time subject to personal bias. Such bias need constant balance of the "outsider" perspective. Existing friendships might increase the frequency and intensity of communication, but intimacy could create blind spots. In the field, what I learned in the

changing process from an "outsider" to an "insider" was crucial. As a result of this reflection, unfamiliar schools were chosen for the study.

Ethnography

Hargreaves claimed that ethnography with its open attitudes and reflexivity not only produced better quality of data but contained a better theoretical framework:

> A commonly remarked advantage of ethnography and of case study work in particular is its openness compared to other methodological approaches, its sensitivity to the meaning, concerns and interpretations of participants in the field. More than any other method, ethnography does not prejudge what most important research issues are going to be. It does not question people about matters which may not concern them. It does not impose its own limited frameworks of meaning and interpretation on the participants through closed schedules, attitude scales, questionnaires, etc., based on pre-existing hypothesis. Ethnography suffers little from the "outsider's arrogance" often attributed by people in schools to those researchers who, for a brief time, come and work among them (1987:24).

The high level of flexibility and sensitivity marked the relevance of ethnography. Researchers had opportunities to adapt to changing situations when they were flexible and open to the problems of their research. Hargreaves continued,

> Of course, ethnographers do not and probably should not commence their work with a blank conceptual sheet, with no theoretical starting points in mind. But, sensitively conducted, the ethnographic approach should not only allow such starting points to be clarified, refined, and tested, but should also enable new and unexpected issues in the field to emerge: necessitating the consideration and development of other theories where appropriate (ibid.:24).

As researchers remained sensitive not only to what was expected but, in particular, to what was not anticipated, reality dictated the research. Ghaill asserted that "insights, hypothesis and questions were developed in the actual process of investigation" (1991:107). Walford argued that a flexible attitude encouraged researchers to be more conscious of the research process itself and more ready to make necessary adjustments according to the needs:

> Also important is the flexibility of ethnography. Since it does not entail extensive pre-fieldwork design, as social surveys and experiments generally do, the strategy and even direction of the research can be changed relatively easily, in line with changing assessment of what is required by the process of theory construction (1987:24).

Hargreaves urged researchers to remain open and sensitive especially towards the final stages: "As the substantive concerns shifted, so too did some of the theoretical ones, most notably during data analysis and writing up" (1987:24). Ethnography thus helped us to stay in touch with reality, open to unexpected changes in the unfolding of events. Such openness was essential especially when data indicated that existing concepts and models were not readily applicable, when familiar words meant different things.

The elaboration on reflexivity was indicative of the changing discourse in educational research from the positivist to the naturalist approach. Burgess called this a paradigm shift:

> Structural functionalism was replaced by symbolic interactionism and with this changing theoretical perspective came a change in methodology as the social survey was quickly replaced by participant observation and unstructured interviews. If the shift from this "old" to the "new" sociology of education was to be seen as the first paradigm shift, then the next had to be the recognition that classrooms and the activities within them could not be understood in isolation from the wider society (1984:122).

The development of Gardner's studies from the statistical manipulation of survey results to the focus on sociocultural milieu supported the shift. As researchers engaged themselves in more qualitative work to probe the social context and cultural environment of learning, specific cases in specific situations gained relevance. A "semi-stranger" perspective and the ethnographic discourse would be adopted in this study to facilitate open reflexivity.

3.3 Summary: The qualitative and quantitative

My experience with the research reality helped me understand that it was not quantitative or qualitative design *per se* that made a good research, but the appropriateness of the choice according to the nature of the question in relation to the contexts and conditions of the research. The nature of the research question, the objectives of this study and the conditions of the reality determined that it was best conducted with a qualitative design through participant observations, semi-structured interviews and students' writings. Quantitative

means could be used to identify general trends and key issues, but the main structure would be qualitative.

The qualitative

This study was descriptive and exploratory in nature. The aim was to describe and interpret the reality of English learning in China, to identify important themes in the practice and perception of English learning through systematic reflection, not to test any models or find any mathematical relationships. Secondly, it was felt that qualitative means were better able to focus the research attention on reality. No previously chosen models conditioned the study. No agenda pre-determined its course. No experiments artificially set its agenda. No people were controlled. The natural process of learning activities were observed, recorded, described and analysed, with key themes identified and explored. My effects were carefully reflected upon as a participant of the action. Thirdly, previous researches in the area had been predominately quantitative, with their instruments and procedures derived from positivist traditions. Surveys were used to generate comparative data which were then committed to statistical analysis. While quantitative methods helped establish the discipline of second language learning, it was time to apply qualitative methods to probe deeply with the social and cultural studies of language learning. The local perspective of students would enrich the research discourse. The study of their perceptions would contribute to the understanding of their aspirations in the changing process of modernisation. The point was not to disqualify quantitative researches but to emphasise the importance of qualitative methods when the focus was the locality. Since the nature of this study was to define the place of English in the educational experiences and life aspirations of Chinese students, general laws that governed language learning and effective ways of language teaching were not my concerns.

The quantitative

Data collected by different means could complement one another. Whilst qualitative data were often effective in addressing questions of particularities, quantitative data were more suitable for general questions by identifying patterns. The former tended to probe deep while the latter revealed broad trends. Naturally, both the particularities and the generalities were needed in describing English learning in China as a personal, educational, social and cultural process. Secondly, data derived from different methods frequently tested the validity of one another. Applying both the qualitative and the quantitative means to investigate related questions could serve the methodological purpose of triangulation. While themes emerging from the qualitative data was tested by quantitative method to measure its accuracy, frequency, strength and representativeness, patterns identified from the quantitative sources could be explored by qualitative method to define their meaning and nature. Thirdly, different data often answered the same question in different ways. While relationships between different factors could be analysed by either method, questions such as how students perceived and experienced English learning, why they perceived and learned it in a certain way, to what extent they enjoyed formal learning and what kind of students were more likely to benefit from informal learning were probably best tackled through qualitative means. However, one could argue that these questions could be answered by either way, depending on the objectives and conditions of the research. This study was concerned with one particular location at a particular time. China's diversity and immensity prevented any generalisation even at the local level. But a small-scale survey would be used to test the validity and strength of the themes. The nature of the study was primarily qualitative exploration, not quantitative generalisation. To disclose local sociocultural conditions and develop a theory of English learning from the

perspective of students, the content of the survey would be taken directly from students' personal statements in the qualitative data.

The next chapter will introduce the context by tracing the steps of fieldwork and discussing the process of data collection and analysis. It was hoped that the reflection on the nature of the research in this chapter and on the interactional dynamics of fieldwork in the next would help recreate, in a small way, the rich sociocultural context for the research.

Chapter 4 Conducting the fieldwork

I joined the line outside the principal's office. A teacher needed sick leave. Another wanted her schedule changed. Some parents waited to make payments. Finally the door opened. A man looked out and asked, "Where is the principal?" We peeked in and saw an empty chair. An hour later I found the head teacher in her office marking exams with a younger teacher.

Head teacher: We don't need more exercise books. We have enough for years.
Me: I am not a salesman. I am a student.
Young teacher: A student?
M: I am doing a study on English learning. I was wondering if you could help me.
HT: Where is your letter of introduction? You must talk with our principal.
M: I tried. Nobody knew where he was.
HT: You have to talk with the principal. We cannot help without his approval.
YT: What do you want to study?
M: To find out why students learn English.
YT: I'll tell you why. The better ones for going overseas and others for the exams. (CT)

This chapter introduces the process of fieldwork. To recreate the local environment and provide a feeling of the conditions in the field, it reports on the selection of the schools, my contacts and activities in them, focusing on the changing nature of field relationships with schools, students and teachers. It reflects on successes and failures in negotiating access, making entry and role-shifting in the process. Since reflection on the role of the researcher is vital to data quality, this chapter describes the problems experienced, identifies their effects on the research and discusses precautions taken to check and improve data validity.

The Chinese government restricted independent researchers from foreign countries conducting research in China. However, there were many foreigners teaching in universities who legitimised their researches as part of their academic work. In China's relationship-oriented society, connections and favour were more effective than law and regulations. Personal favour bypassed official rules. Foreigners' special status accorded them privileges their Chinese counterparts could only hope for. Officials were more willing to tolerate foreign researchers because they promoted institutional status as foreigners were often used to boost public image. Authorities enthusiastically facilitated foreign researchers

as opportunities to develop personal and institutional ties with the West. Yet Chinese researchers were perceived as intruders. Schools were unwilling to accept them as they felt evaluated by those lacking necessary authorities.

4.1 The negotiation

On my first field trip in 1995, Chinese officials appeared indecisive about my research application. One reason was the lack of guidelines for receiving Chinese researchers based overseas. Decisions were left to the discretion of the person dealing with the case. If it was approved, official letters of introduction would give me access to schools. However, official treatment was also problematic in formalising the study. Schools would make sure that they look good. I would be escorted and monitored. There might be particular interests that I must represent. Data validity would suffer. It would be harder to obtain data release because it had to be authorised. In the analysis, my arguments would be coloured by official interests. Academic freedom would be jeopardised. As official treatment implied power and simultaneous loss of freedom, my research was better served by the lack of such privileges. While lacking official support denied me the power, freedom would open access to private channels of information.

As a Chinese, I was able to blend in. I had the freedom to roam without attracting attention. Students were less nervous with me. The schools were less likely to conceal anything from me and control my research. This helped minimise the effect of my research on them and improve data quality. For the benefit of the schools, my association with Oxford helped them to look good in public relations. My contact with students and teachers helped in their English learning by exposing them to new ideas, stimulating them to think on their learning and encouraging action research among teachers. Since it was difficult to predict what uses

the research would be put to, precautions were taken to protect students and teachers. As the research was not endorsed by the government, I did not have to inform them of its findings. To make schools, students, teachers and parents less identifiable, I would use only their initials when necessary.

Chengdu was selected for practical reasons as it was where I had the financial and emotional support of my family. The selection of schools posed more problems. While the government attempted to categorise schools, in reality, no school fitted into any type. Different districts within the city had different schools with students from various backgrounds. Data was collected from a variety of schools but analysis would be focused on one or two schools. It was believed that there were lessons to learn about middle schools in general from a few selected schools. Before leaving England, I wrote to some schools to establish contacts. All schools responded positively. During my stay in China, however, I received different receptions from them. Often, access was denied after I gained it. Other times it was granted following my giving up. My visit to BLZ, for instance, illustrated the frustrating process of gaining access.

I first heard of BLZ at the English Corner and forgot all about it until I read in the local paper a report on their reforms. It was to be closed due to poor quality but was reformed into a special school for foreign languages. I thought their apparent openness would help me gain access.

I was received by two young women who introduced themselves as assistants to the principal. The principal was in a meeting, so they sat me down in his office, promising that he would be happy to see me after the meeting. As we waited, they insisted on speaking English with me. When they asked me what they could do for me, I said I would like to observe a class while waiting. Soon I found myself in a Senior 2 physics class.

As the class reached the end, I heard over the loudspeakers that a guest had come to speak at the English Corner. The announcement was made in English. As I returned to the office, a stern-faced middle-aged man came in to ask who I was. I realised something was wrong and offered my apology. Immediately he demanded to see my identifications, indicating he could only help me if I had a letter from the government.

Early the next morning, I went to the city government. This was not only important to the research, but to the young women who helped me. The official told me I would need a letter from the

provincial government. I hurried to the provincial government, wondering if they would want a letter from Beijing. A man took my letter and gave it back to me. "No," he said solemnly.

On my way home, I came across the research association of the city's education department. They would not have the power to authorise my visits, but it was part of the government. Most people in the office were calculating exam results. I asked if I could see the person in charge of English. An elderly lady stood up, took my introduction letter from Oxford, and signalled me to sit down on her chair. She asked me why I wanted to visit schools. Then she took me to the next room, where a man read my letter carefully. After a long time, he looked up and asked what schools I would like to see. I told him as many different ones as possible. With the help of the lady, he worked out a list of schools, apologising that he was too busy to accompany me. He then carefully wrote an official letter of introduction to each of the schools selected from the following categories:

1) National and provincial key middle school (SD, SS, QZ and XD);
2) Ordinary school (YZ, RZ, SZ);
3) Specialised middle school (BLZ and SW);
4) University affiliated middle school (JF, SR);
5) Factory affiliated middle school (CW, TY, TE);
6) Rural school (DF).

I rushed to BLZ. The man made a copy of the letter and told me his school was too new to be studied. He said there were other schools in the list more interesting, and he would appreciate some time to get the school in order before he would welcome visitors. As a good gesture, he would allow me to speak to a group of students for half an hour. There would be no visit to classes. I was given ten students for a discussion next to his office, escorted by two young men. I used the time answering students' questions. I asked them to write their questions down, thinking their questions would reveal their concerns. With teachers present, they were reluctant to speak out.

On my way out, the young men decided to walk me to the bus. They invited me for another visit, telling me not to mind what happened. Their principal was away for the week. It was the deputy who refused to help. "You know, being a teacher himself he resented those who might be better." One of them tried to comfort me.

At the end of my first trip, two schools, SS and SD, were selected for their openness. I would stay in those schools for one term before moving to other school for the second term. Senior 2 was chosen as the focus for the study because students in this year had learned English for four years. Senior 3, the graduating year, was preparing for national exams and too busy to be disturbed. Being key middle schools, SS and SD had students from across the city selected by qualification exams. Naturally, students at such schools were not representative. By beginning my fieldwork in these schools, my task was to get some examples of classroom routines as defined by the Chinese culture of learning. I would have better chance of finding systematic data from schools where students had to

learn English intensively and school routines had been well established. Students in other schools, in general, would not have to work on English as hard because the pressure to succeed in exams and the aspirations to go to universities and overseas were not as keen. Such schools varied from one to another, making stratified data collecting difficult. Secondly, key middle schools were widely held as model schools. If they were not representative of all schools, they were of the official direction for most schools. And practically, they were more open for public inspection. Their model status not only made access easier but increased the validity of the data, as students were used to being observed, making it easier for them to take me for granted and behave normally. Thirdly, because of their higher status, they were less vulnerable. Ordinary schools often lacked the power necessary to make decisions and protect themselves. A danger in this was to represent the elite interests without recognising it. As my fieldwork continued, the focus would shift from key schools to other schools, not to achieve a better representation, but to explore other schools.

4.2 The entry

The second trip to collect data lasted for ten months, from October 1995 to August 1996. This took place in three phases:

Phase 1: October-December, 1995 observations at SS and SD, interviews at SD
Phase 2: January-May, 1996 visits to various schools
Phase 3: June-July, 1996 visits to the English Corner

This was complemented by a third visit in early 1998 to administer a survey. The rest of the chapter discusses fieldwork in Phases 1. Phases 2 and 3 will be introduced in later chapters. The survey will be presented in Chapter 9.

The Chinese name for secondary school is *zhongxue*, or middle school, in relation to *xiaoxue* (small school, primary school) and *daxue* (big school, university). This conveniently marks the level of education into primary education (elementary school), secondary education (senior and junior middle school) and higher education (university and college). At present, a full university degree takes four years and a college diploma two years. Middle schools and primary schools each consist of six years of learning. Middle school as a common name covers the three years of junior middle school, *chuzhong*, and the three years of senior middle school, *gaozhong*. Thus, middle schools constitute the secondary level of education between the 7th and the 12th year, with students' average ages ranging from 13 to 18. For most of China, six years of primary school and three years of junior middle school form the nine years of compulsory education.

In May 1995, SEC staged a conference on restructuring senior middle schools. Educational objectives, national standards and pluralisation came into heated debate. Schools were told they had four models to follow according to their objectives and conditions:

1) The academic: Fewer but better key schools to prepare students for university;
2) The practical: More vocational schools to train for skilful trades;
3) The special: Some special schools for foreign language, music/arts, athletics;
4) The mixed: Some integrated schools to combine objectives of Models 1, 2 and 3.

The majority of senior middle schools belonged to the last category. A few better ones were the key middle schools established by tradition and maintained by a higher proportion of graduates qualifying for universities. The rest were ordinary schools that suffered from lack of funding and academically gifted students. The reform was to transform many ordinary schools into vocational schools. Of all the schools visited, data was collected from eight middle schools. Among them were national and provincial key schools, ordinary city schools, special schools for foreign languages, a rural school and a university affiliated

school. Participating students were selected by the school. The focus of analysis was at SD where I did most of my observations and interviews.

I arrived soon after the beginning of the new term. I had committed to do some teaching on my first visit, thinking that it would get me into the school. Further reflection helped me realise that there was a need to maintain independence to guarantee sufficient time and energy for data recording and reflection. Independence would help students feel open to share things that they would not share with members of their schools. The freedom of coming and going proved wise as events unfolded. Both schools were enthusiastic before my arrival. Yet after many attempts to contact them, I learned that neither principal who initially received me was present. One was away for professional development. The other was visiting a sister school in the US.

4.3 The schools

To present the context for the study, this section will introduce SS and SD, the two key middle schools where I began my fieldwork and collected most of my data. After the introduction, they will be compared to highlight the discourse of education in China.

The Stone Hall

SS, the Stone Hall, was established over 2,000 years ago near the city centre. Despite its rich heritage, classical buildings were completely demolished to make room for a modern complex to house growing number of students and teachers. A memorial garden with an old style lecture hall commemorated *Wenweng,* SS's ancient founder, and Guo Moruo[22], a SS alumnus who became one of the best known scholars in China. In its immediate neighbourhood, old streets were bulldozed for redevelopment. High-rise office and apartment buildings mushroomed in the city skyline. The passion for modernisation and the lack of space gave Chengdu a preference for skyscrapers.

I arrived one morning to find all students assembled on the playground saluting the national flag. Afterwards, a teacher read through the loudspeakers last week's scores of students' behaviour. She explained how marks were deducted when students were late, smoked on campus or threw food away in the dining hall. She then introduced how marks were awarded when they helped the

[22] A writer, doctor and scholar, the best known contemporary alumnus of SS. Guo was considered one of Mao Zedong's best friends and served for many years as the President of China Academy of Sciences.

library move books and fixed their teachers' bicycles. Another teacher announced scores for the school cleaning. A blackboard by the gate listed more scores. Top marks were in red, lowest in blue, and the others in white.

Then one student got up to share his experience studying maths. He had just brought back a silver medal from an international competition. According to him mathematics was an experience subject. His secret was to submit his mind to vigorous discipline by solving a hard problem every day. "You have to do as many as possible so that when you see similar problems you know them." Then a girl talked about her visit to the US with the school delegation. She suggested reading as many stories in English as possible to increase vocabulary. "You can learn English songs to correct your pronunciation and keep your interest." Students clapped their hands. By this time, they had stood still for half an hour. The assembly was dismissed when the bell rang for class.

I hid myself from the rushing crowd in the administrative building. On my right were some remarks from Guo Morou in 1957:

> *Love the motherland, love the people,*
> *Study for the construction of socialism;*
> *Seek truth, develop skills,*
> *Make your contribution for the glory of SS.*

On my left was a letter from Qian Xuesen:[23]

> *In the 21st century our children will start school at the age of 4. They will become masters at 18. In today's fifth industrial revolution, doctors that transcend natural and social sciences are trained overseas. Our 18-year-olds must have both general ability and special skills. Then they will be able to change their specialisation within a month. Human wisdom not only comes from the brain but from information network through the integration of intelligence between man and machine.*

The Party Secretary and deputy principal of SS, Mr. L, listened intently as I explained why I was doing my research through cases rather than experiments. He was relieved that I would not interrupt the school routine. Mr. L was concerned what my research would say about his school. He was glad to hear of the website for SS maintained by its alumni in the US.

Our talk was frequently interrupted. One teacher came for his signature to reimburse her bus ticket after visiting a sick teacher. Another came for permission to use the school car to meet a professor from Beijing. When he was interrupted, he would apologise and fill up my tea. While he attended to his business, I noticed on the wall a panoramic picture of Spirit Island in the Canadian Rockies. The Chinese title read "Beautiful America." It was left as a token of gratitude by a group of Tibetan students who were studying at SS.

To Foster Virtue

SD was very proud of its new classroom complex with a bright and functional modern design, but students nicknamed their school "the prison" as it shared a wall on one side with a city prison.

I arrived when school leaders were busy allocating apartments. This was obviously a very serious matter and quite an evaluation process. Key variables such as teachers' degrees, years of service and performance rankings were all quantified. The numbers derived were consolidated with the

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[23] A US-trained Chinese nuclear physicist who returned to China to help develop China.

number of students they had qualified for university, the number of hours and the level of classes they had taught. All figures were compared and published before they were added up to make the total marks, according to which each teacher's place in the apartment queue was determined. School leaders disliked the amount of work and the complex politics involved. Teachers were unhappy with what they saw as favouritism, or "going through the back door," when members of the housing committee secretly added marks to their favourites. There was much emotion as the order was published and revised on the notice board, openly visible to all at the gate.

On the same board was a notice from the Department of Student Work for a patriotic singing competition. Underneath the board, supported by a wooden chair, was a hard paper board with photos and essays of students campaigning for the student union election. One essay pledged to fight for language and computer labs. Another demanded the return of the playground sacrificed to build apartment buildings for teachers. One promised to work on the reduction of construction noise. Another challenged if it was money best spent sending a delegation to the US. Strikingly, they all made their final invitations in English, "Vote me for the President!"

Mr. H, a deputy principal, introduced Sichuan as the China of China[24], with its population of over a hundred million. As the government could afford little money in education, schools had to find their own. According to Mr. H, government funding hardly covered salaries. He was responsible not only for teaching but for school business and investments. He said the focus of Chinese education was on the collective need and common character of the nation rather than individual need and personal character. The reality of China determined that common goal and national interest must be served first. Within this understanding, the most economical system of teaching was lectures. The fairest assessment was national exams. This might not serve the interest of every individual student, but it was the best for China as a whole. It was all China could afford. Mr. H admitted that the whole country used one model. The state controlled the curriculum. Schools had no freedom to choose subjects or textbooks, to change the schedule or the content. Only exceptionally a new course was allowed as an experiment. As a key middle school, SD would soon drop its junior years to specialise in preparing students for university.

Students and teachers were under high pressure of exams. Even parents shared the burden. Many lost their youth to the Cultural Revolution and projected their dreams onto their children. Students worked hard for years to compete for three days in national exams in "Black July"[25]. Since the national, provincial and local ranking of schools, the evaluation and promotion of school management and teachers, the assessment and prospects of students all depended on the results, exams were the priority of every principal, teacher, student and parent. Mr. H characterised China's education as channelling millions of students through a narrow gate to the future, like "an army crossing a river on a one-log bridge!"

The histories of SS and SD were published in national educational magazines (Xu, 1995; Shude, 1995). Such publications contained the discourse schools used to define their qualities and thus revealed important preconceptions of contemporary Chinese education.

1) A strong sense of history and tradition

[24] Sichuan as the most populous province had more than 100 million people until 1998 when its biggest city, Chongqing, became a separate city at the province-level.
[25] July 7, 8, and 9 are the dates for the annual national higher education entrance examinations in China.

Both introductions began with a review of history. SS quoted from historical records to boast itself as one of the earliest schools in China deeply rooted in classical traditions:

SS is the first school run by a local government in China. According to *Huayang Guozhi* (History of *Huayang*[26]), it was established in 141 BC during the *Xihan* Dynasty by *Wenweng* (art master). The original stone room, *Jiangtang* (lecture hall), was built with white marble. On both sides were symmetric study halls named *Wengu* (review previous knowledge) and *Shixi* (frequent practice). Confucian classics and feudal laws were the main subjects for the 100 or so students. Within years, SS became a model for schools in China. Since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, SS has always been one of the national key middle schools.

SD, while having a much shorter history, emphasised its strong revolutionary background and its aspiration to foster virtue and shape characters:

SD was established in 1929 by General Sun Zhen of the 29th Nationalist Army. The aim of the school is to *shude* (foster virtue) and *shuren* (shape character). The motto is *zhong* (loyalty), *yong* (bravery), *qin* (diligence). In 1943 *Da Gong Bao*[27] elected SD as one of the six best run schools in China. Since 1953, it has been a national key school. In 1958, it was designated as the school for overseas Chinese students. In the 1960s, it became the school for children of high-level leaders.

SS and SD were both national key schools, two of the three such schools in Chengdu, a centre of education in China. Many of the shared values were common in schools across China, such as patriotism and diligence. Probably because of its long history, SS had a long list of renowned personalities among its graduates[28]. The sense of history produced a tremendous pride for reputation and fame among schools.

2) A clear acknowledgement of official support

Both SS and SD recognised their connections with the government, with SS claiming that it was the first school run by government in China and SD asserting that it was the school chosen by high-level leaders for their own children. Official connections and support were identified repeatedly as a primary reason for their achievements:

Of the reasons for SS's success is the tremendous importance the governments attach to it...

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[26] This is an old name for Chengdu.
[27] This is a national newspaper based in Shanghai before 1949 and in Hong Kong after 1949.
[28] These included Sima Xiangru, Yang Xiong, Wang Bao, Guo Moruo, Li Yimong and Li Jieren. All were eminent figures of literature and history throughout Chinese history.

SS's significance lies in the following facts: it was the first local education institution and the showcase of education run by government in China...
SD for the last five years has been the only one among many famous key middle schools to receive special awards from the government...

Such acknowledgements reflected the fact that government was in firm control of schools, despite the claim that schools would be left to choose their own directions according to the prescribed models. However, some schools appeared to be increasingly independent with their financial self-sufficiency through school business including running shops and factories, letting space, making investments, and last but not the least, accepting "out of the plan"[29] students whose parents had to pay much more for their education. However, it remained unclear whether their economic independence was leading to political freedom. There were concerns among teachers over the commercialisation of education but they seemed to tolerate it as long as they benefited financially from it. A few schools were successful in negotiating with the government on matters of their concerns. For example, both SS and SD were permitted to send delegations to the US using their own budgets as long as they invited government officials to lead the delegations. They also won government support in using their own revenues to build apartments for their staff, as long as they allocated the best apartments to government officials. By and large, the government has maintained its tight control of education.

3) A proud claim of achievements

SS defined its excellence with the outstanding quality of its leaders, teachers and students.

SS's success lies in the high moral standards, scholastic achievements and professional respect its many principals have enjoyed, the top quality of its teaching staff and students, the emphasis not only on book knowledge but on practical abilities, and its many inspiring models. Since 1949, SS has produced more than 30,000 graduates, over 92. 3% of whom have entered universities.

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[29] Each school is given a quota by the government to recruit students within its catchment area. But good schools often recruit beyond their quota and areas to increase revenue by charging higher tuition fees.

SD focused on its innovative teaching and learning, defining its success with its impressive reform programmes in which students' personalities were emphasised:

> The focus of the school was the development of students' self-teaching abilities and positive personalities. Reforms have been centred on the consolidation of basic knowledge and basic skills as well as the development of abilities and intelligence. Experiments were carried out to use new textbooks in teaching maths, physics, chemistry and English. Graduates won national and international Olympic medals in maths and physics competitions. Students' individuality was emphasised to promote a balance between personal characteristics and group identity. In 1993, all four top scoring students of national exams were from SD. SD has sent the biggest number of students to national winter and summer camps among all schools in China. In the city-wide track and field events for middle schools, SD won group championships for many years.

Both schools mentioned the balance of basic knowledge and basic skills, defined by the SEC as the central task for school education. However, the focus on exam was revealed by the tendency to define achievements with exam results. SS seemed more conservative in dwelling in its past record of qualifying more than 90% of its graduates for universities. In highlighting reforms, SD was more progressive, defining its achievements in exam results as well as national student camps and athletic activities. SD's attempts in developing a balance between personal characters and group identity were rare, as individuality was understood as a feature of capitalist education.

4) A new emphasis on international connections

Both schools used international connections to indicate quality. SS was designated to host the only official exchange programme between Sichuan and Washington:

> International exchange programmes have been developed with schools in Japan and the US for more than ten years. SS is the only school at the secondary level in Sichuan with an ongoing student and teacher exchange programme with the US.

SD was as ambitious in developing its own international programmes even though they appeared to be informal at this stage:

> SD has received visitors from the United States, Canada, Japan, and Singapore. It has sent principals, teachers and students on trips to these countries.

Such international links were limited to the key schools. As far as the schools were concerned, their significance was probably in the reputation such connections brought them rather than their educational meaning. International connections helped them identify with the world, especially with developed countries of wealth, influence and power. They helped schools identify with the national open-door policy and remain politically correct. International connections also helped them identify with other key schools and boost their public relations and reputations. As official favours, foreign links were reserved for key schools. Ordinary schools were denied opportunities to host international programmes by the government for not meeting the conditions to satisfy foreigners' needs. This made it difficult for them to break away from their negative image.

5) An ambitious plan for the future

SS's elaboration on its ambition was contained within the official guideline, quoting Deng Xiaoping's "Three-Embrace" and Mao Zedong's "Well-rounded development":

> Inspired by Deng Xiaoping's instruction "education must embrace modernisation, embrace the world and embrace the future," SS strives to reform its educational ideology, school management and teaching equipment. It is becoming a school of high standards in opening up to the world, experimenting new ideas and demonstrating new thinking. The management is led by the principal and monitored by the Party Committee. The school factory provides the financial guarantee. Well-rounded moral, intellectual and physical development is the core.

SD's plan was defined in a heavily competitive sense, emphasising "first-class" qualities:

> The SD target is to build a first-class teaching faculty, create a first-class learning environment, develop first-class management, produce first-class quality and graduate first-class students.

What SS defined as the structure was in fact the model adopted by all schools. Neither SS or SD explained what they meant by "high standard" or "first class" qualities. Rhetoric terms were routinely used with more emotion than meaning. Defined with slogans rather than procedures, their plans appeared more political than practical.

In summary, both SS and SD enjoyed a high standard of academic excellence and remained totally committed to the government. Both highlighted good exam results in defining their achievements, but SD's terms appeared wider in scope. Both strove for international connections, with SS enjoying government support while SD dependent on its own initiatives and resources. SS had a much longer history rooted in classical tradition as reflected in its conservative tendency and focus on ideology and leadership. SD, on the other hand, enjoyed a stronger revolutionary tradition in character shaping and a progressive vision for innovative reforms. Both schools defined their qualities in terms of traditions, government connections, examinations results and international relations. While official and international connections reflected the importance of relationships in Chinese culture, exam results were quantities easily manipulated and comparable. This indicated the importance of competition in the education process. Schools seemed unable to define their plans in concrete terms. National guidelines were quoted and slogans were used to maintain political correctness.

4.4 The observation

Burgess (1984a) identified four roles researchers often adopted: complete observer, observer-as-participant, participant-as-observer, and complete participant. In reality, researchers in the field often shifted their roles from one stage to another. To access and assess students' experience with formal learning, I entered the classroom with a passive role of complete observer, sitting at the back to observe the routines. Both SS and SD had six classes in Senior 2. One day was spent with each class. As students stayed in their own classroom for different lessons in China, I spent four hours each morning observing the same class taking different lessons, such as Chinese, mathematics, English, physics, chemistry, history, geography, politics and computing, with the focus on English. Entering

the classroom quietly from the back door before the beginning of the first class, I observed students as they followed lectures, taking notes, reading textbooks, doing exercises, interacting with teachers and with one another. Detailed notes covered teaching and organisation, students' activities, their level of engagement with tasks, and my interactions with students and teachers. Data at this stage described

1) the context: classroom environment, physical object, time, place;
2) the action: actors and activities, objectives, emotion; and
3) the language: words used by teachers and students, especially any patterns.

Initial observation was to provide the background for focused observation later. During this reconnaissance stage, I refrained from engaging interaction with the students.

After completing all classes in two weeks, I returned to each class for more English lessons. At this point, I began to initiate contact with students. My role gradually shifted to the less passive one of observer-as-participant. This I found much harder at SS than at SD, probably because my status was concealed at SS and students were uninterested in my work. When I initiated a conversation, the reaction was formal. The covert role required me to assume a low-key, largely passive role. Ideally this would minimise my effect but it limited personal contact to such an extent that I became disengaged. Passive observation revealed some characteristics of the lesson. It familiarised me with the field. But it prevented me from getting deeper to understand students' experience and perceptions. In detaching myself, I lost opportunities to engage students in the research. After suggesting to SS that I would like to meet students, I was referred to the head of English, who informed me they were too busy. She recommended that I go to the English Club. When I got there, I found few students. I was told many had gone home. Those who came appeared disengaged. Some brought their homework. Further reflection revealed that this had to do

with my failure to involve the head teacher. I did not fully realise her crucial role until I compared the situation with SD where the head teacher was more sympathetic.

Fortunately the situation at SD was encouraging. The principal mentioned my research to the staff. Teachers were expecting me and students were informed about my visit. As a result, they were interested in my research and eager to interact with me. The active role at SD facilitated the change from the etic role of a complete observer to the emic role of observer-as-participant, and soon after, participant-as-observer, when students asked me to speak in class. Observation at this stage became more focused and engaging. As I interacted with students and teachers, I gained insight into their school life and English learning. The overt role gave me favour among teachers and enthusiasm among students, who came to ask about my work. Such conversations informed me of their underlying concerns, such as this one with Mrs. F, the head teacher:

Did you meet the woman from Chengdu who wrote *Wild Swans* in England?
No, but I know of the book.
I know her sister. She introduced me to her last time she came back to Chengdu.
Oh, that was interesting. How was she received by Chengdu?
All the big shots turned out. She was introduced as the most successful British author from China.
Even after a book like that?
It's not the book as much as it's the money. She's rich now. As long as you are rich, it does not matter how you got rich. She comes and goes in a BMW. What a role model for Chinese girls. Do you have a foreign passport? You are more welcome if you come back as a foreigner.
I'm sure you are. That's why English is so important, isn't it?
Young people are very open these days. It's not like when we were young. We went to the countryside. They go overseas now. It's funny how things change...

Such talks helped teachers and students relax and facilitated natural contact between us.

With the head teacher's support, I decided to conduct interviews at SD.

4.5 The interview

In selecting students for interview, I attempted to achieve some representativeness with stratified sampling. However, the nature of students at SD determined that they were pre-

selected already by exams. In addition, it was inappropriate to demand those selected to come, as some students were naturally more reserved and might feel uncomfortable to speak about themselves. Asking students to volunteer would also be a biased selection because only certain students interested in my work would come. Some teachers warned me that students who wanted to skip class might volunteer themselves. Another option was to have teachers recommend students but that would also be biased, as teachers might choose according to their preference. To discover what students teachers would choose, I asked the head of each class and the teacher of English to recommend 10 students separately from their class. I encouraged them to aim at diversity of students at different levels of English and from different backgrounds. This would give me some idea of the criteria teachers used for their selection. Out of the ten students chosen from each class, about half were recommended by both teachers. This gave me confidence in their choices. Since I did not aim at generalisation, so long as there were different students, a mixed selection based on teachers' recommendations and student volunteers would suffice.

To facilitate interviews, the school arranged for me to use the meeting room between 4 pm and 6 pm on weekdays provided students were not having any class. I started the interview by serving tea. Each group had 20-30 minutes. I asked them if they minded being audio-taped. Of the 45 interviewees, all but one agreed. I explained they would not be heard by or reported to anybody in the school. The tape was for research purposes and their names would be concealed. They would not be marked and did not have to speak well. Interviews proved to be data generative. While groups were able to comment on each other's opinions, individuals spoke frankly on issues of concern. Many commented that they enjoyed being part of the research. However, one student said that he was a bit upset to miss class for the

interview. He suggested that we talk outside school. Students seemed to speak well, reflecting SD's excellent student quality.

It was not easy to manage the balance between distance and engagement. Fidelity to truth and a constant awareness of my influence on the research were imperative. Soon after I began to interview, Ms. L, head of Senior 2, asked me if I was Chinese or foreign. She was a Party member and had been kind and co-operative. Her question reminded me of my social and moral obligations to students and the effect we had on each other. I soon learned that quite a few children of the teachers, including her own son, were interviewed. Towards the end of the term, as I began to prepare to visit students' homes, the school became reluctant to cooperate. Understandably, they did not want to be responsible for what happened outside the school. As interviews continued, my relationship with students developed. At the same time, suspicion from the school increased. My interest in examination, in particular, was not appreciated by the school, perhaps because their teaching was not to focus on exams in principle but it had to in practice. My role as a researcher was to observe, describe and understand what happened, not to instruct and prescribe what should. After the interviews, there was no longer any role for me at SD. My concerns gradually shifted to other schools and informal learning.

4.6 Summary: Overt or covert roles

My experience with formal education at SS and SD indicated how researchers presented themselves strongly influenced field relationships. Different ways of entry led to different roles, producing different results. The different reactions due to different roles taught me that to conceal my background for the sake of data validity was probably idealistic and self-destructing. To generate data, student co-operation was essential. To find data that was

more than the obvious, students had to have some interest in what I was doing. There must be a relationship between us. Yet this relationship must be carefully managed to a balance between engagement and distance. Too much distance would lead to the lack of interaction. Too much engagement would lead to the interference of emotion and possible loss of trust from the school, stalling the fieldwork.

Although some teachers preferred the covert role because I seemed less of a threat to them, students apparently enjoyed the overt role better. Data quality was the chief concern when decisions were made between the roles. With a covert role at SS students saw me as an outsider. Data collected in this role was more valid in the sense that activities were public and part of the natural routines rather than of events organised specifically for research. Students were more spontaneous in their routine and less manipulated for the sake of the research. Validity was also enhanced in that the field was still fresh to me as a "stranger". It was relatively hard to take things for granted. On the other hand, my lack of inside knowledge and understanding of students' values and behaviour weakened data validity. As I deliberately cut myself from them, my passive role led to no role. Important data in classroom interaction were sacrificed to maintain the seeming objectivity. The overt role at SD assisted me to access the school, secure co-operation from teachers, and maintain interest level among students. Students and teachers reacted with enthusiasm. The data was more valid in the sense that their effort revealed their perceptions and values. In particular, the interaction with students exposed their motives and attitudes. As my knowledge improved, I began to understand their problems and appreciate their concerns.

Another lesson was the awareness of my effect on the field due to my association with English. I had planned to use English as the language of fieldwork, but the use of English

seemed to reinforce the message that English represented privilege and achievement. This unnecessarily elevated the status of English and confirmed its power. My speaking English, though often at students' request, had a status-marking effect that negatively influenced data validity. The association between English and privilege was an important aspect to study, but my reinforcing this association harmed validity as my study became more interesting to those students who were academically inclined and better at English. This might help decrease students' interest in other subjects. In addition, I noticed that using English created a mistrust in field relationships, as some teachers felt I was showing off. I decided to use Chinese in my conversations with students and teachers, unless I was asked to speak English. This was to highlight the importance of Chinese in learning English and express my willingness to identify with students.

The next chapter will present structure and samples of the data collected from fieldwork and discuss validity in data analysis.

Chapter 5 Describing and analysing the data

American teachers spend more time letting children learn on their own. In China, students follow the teacher. Their ways of thinking was fastened to the required way, while American students have their own way of thinking. Americans do well in developing each student's individual and free thoughts. However, it does not protect them from detrimental ways of thinking. We should combine these advantages and eliminate the disadvantages. (GW/SD)

This chapter describes data collected from fieldwork and the analytical process. It presents the structure and the examples of the data to provide a general view of its nature and scope. It introduces the process of data analysis to illustrate how themes are identified from the data. In examining the validity of the data and the analytical instruments, it seeks to expose problems and discuss solutions in the process of data recording, verifying and analysing.

5.1 The structure of the data

This study made use of two groups of data, the primary, thematic data and the supporting, contextual data. Thematic data were specifically generated by this research. They include:

1) Observation notes from English classes;
2) Students' writings entitled "English and me";
3) Interview transcripts with students on their English learning;
4) Conversation transcripts from the English Corner;
5) Survey results on reasons and conditions of English learning.

These were analysed to identify and define themes, to guide the discussion and provide evidence for the argument. Thematic data were collected from eight schools. The table below shows the structure and process of the fieldwork, with information about schools where thematic data was collected, grade and number of students participated, the way they were selected, the nature of fieldwork at each school, and the kind, amount, and date of data collected. Besides these, visits were made to other schools, including WY, a specialised school in foreign languages, XD, a key rural school, DF, an ordinary rural school, WF, a factory affiliated school, and GY, a private school. However, the purposes

for such visits were to gather general information on rural and private schools and to investigate experimental programmes rather than collecting data.

school	type	year	students	selection	observe.	**essay**	**interview**	survey	date
SS	national	Senior 2	300	head	20 hour	**19**			95.9-10
SD	national	Senior 2	300	head	24 hour	50	45		95.11-12
SE	provincial	Sen. 1/2	600	head		**60**		200	96.3-4
QZ	national	Senior 1	300	principal		**20**			96.5
RZ	city	Senior 1	100	principal		**16**			96.5
WS	special	Junior 3	200	principal		**14**			96.5
JD	university	1st Year	3000	union		**16**			96.5
JF	city	Sen. 1/2	400	principal				200	98.2

While thematic data formed the main body of the thesis, supporting data were used to introduce the context for the themes. These included a variety of information:

1) Official documents: national English textbooks; national syllabus, teaching guide, examination standard, etc.;
2) School documents: comparisons of key middle schools' performances in exams, calendars and timetables, weekly work plans, code of conduct, etc.;
3) The British Council documents: Landmark Review on ELT in China 1996; ELT Profile for China 1995; Report on English 2000 Global Consultation 1995; etc..

Various forms of media were scanned during the course of fieldwork for related information, including newspapers, magazines, books, televisions, radios and the Internet.

5.2 The examples of the data

This section presents samples of thematic data to introduce its nature and scope. Systematic analysis necessarily involved breaking down the data. This weakened its organic structure. It was therefore essential to present the data at different stages of analysis to expose analysis method and process and illustrate how themes were identified.

5.2.1 Students' writing

The majority of students' essays were collected after intensive observations and before semi-structured interviews. A total number of 195 students from seven schools contributed

to the essay collection, but analysis was focused on the 50 essays from SD. This was because my fieldwork was focused on SD and as a result data from SD was comparatively more systematic. Due to the volume of translation and analysis, data from other schools were not included in this presentation. To provide a basic structure for students' writing, all essays were entitled *English and me*. I encouraged students to focus on:

1) Why they learn English;
2) How they learn English at school and home; and
3) How they see English in relation to their life.

Students were selected by their teachers. They wrote in class for about half an hour up to a full page. They were told to write in Chinese, unless they felt confident in expressing themselves in English. All students but one wrote in Chinese. The one who wrote in English had lived in the US. In their essays students wrote about their family and school, with a focus on their English learning. They shared thoughts on their dreams and aspirations, about their attitudes toward English, English culture and foreigners. In the initial analysis, each idea was coded with a key word. Frequently appearing ideas were identified as themes. The most frequently occurring themes were selected for intensive studies by interview and survey.

1) Stage of categorisation

The following examples illustrated different stages of data analysis, in which the underlined words marked potential themes or elements of themes. Words in italics marked issues that were personally important to students concerned.

FK (C2S2M5)

I like playing <u>football</u>. I have day dreamt in English that I *represented China* for the World Cup. I watch science fiction, war, history <u>films</u>. I like playing video games. I read <u>novels</u> by Verne, Dumas and Lu Xun. *The Count of Monte Cristo* and Verne's three journeys are my favourites. I have a standard three-people family. At school I have many good friends.

I came to SD by exams. I have been at SD since Junior 1. It's close to home. SD in general is good. I like my teachers and our traditions. But sometimes students' opinions are not heard. The worst was losing our football ground. I am doing science, but I like all subjects. It doesn't matter to me whether to take science or arts, but science seemed to have brighter future.

I started learning English in primary school to lay a good foundation for the future. The more I meet foreign things, the more I am curious. I have a desire to go abroad to break new ground. Once I had a talk with a Japanese visitor in English. Since then I regard English as a basic skill.

I learn English mainly through self-study outside class. I am well ahead of school learning. I use *New Concept English* to learn British English and *Family Album USA* for American English. I have talked with Canadians and Americans at the English Corner. But our talk was shallow so I didn't feel I learned a lot. I desire to use English for communication *at a deeper level* to understand other countries. At home I hardly use English with my parents, except 'Okay' or 'That's right' to brighten up the atmosphere. I want English Corner to come back. I want to know English well. But I won't specialise in English in university, just like there is no need to go to automobile department to drive Languages are but tools to understand foreign culture.

I am Chinese. I think Chinese. If we learn Chinese, no matter how much we change, we will not change our nature. Because I am Chinese, Chinese is always primary. But we must learn from the West. I want to find out what our foreign counterparts do and think. Do they have exams?

In this example, letters and numbers in the title identified the student, his class, gender and his teachers' general impression of his level of English. Personal meaning were deemed important as they revealed the underlying meaning of English learning for individual students. Personal reflection on English learning received special attention during the interview and in analysis. To "represent China" and communicate "at a deeper level" were coded as theme indicators in the categories of ASPIRATION and RELATION respectively. The importance of being Chinese was included in IDENTITY. "Football", "films" and "novels" were coded into HOBBIES. Likewise, "exams" and "science" indicated educational VALUES. The perceptions of English as "foundation" and "tool" were coded under the category of PERCEPTION. Reasons for learning English for "going abroad", "communication" and "brightening up atmosphere" were categorised as REASONS. The experience of English learning through "self-study" and "school learning" were coded into EXPERIENCE, which was further categorised as INFORMAL and FORMAL learning. Within INFORMAL learning, the indicator of "English Corner" was included. The desire

to "use English" was coded into REFLECTION. Thus this essay provided an incomplete list of theme indicators:

Personal:		
ASPIRATION	representing China;	
RELATION	communicating at deep level;	
IDENTITY	being Chinese	
Others:		
HOBBIES	football, films, books;	
VALUES	exam, science;	
PERCEPTION	tool, skill;	
REASON	go abroad, communication, brightening up;	
EXPERIENCE	INFORMAL	self-study, English Corner;
	FORMAL	exam, school learning;
REFLECTION	use, etc.	

Significant indicators also included those that were directly connected with other categories. For instance, "exam" was coded under educational VALUES but it had direct meaning for FORMAL learning, as the function of exams as qualifiers indicated its importance in formal education. Such interrelating indicators often revealed key relationships to be carried forward into the higher level of analysis on themes. Another way themes emerged was through the frequency of occurrence of the indicators. Repeatedly occurring themes generated a deeper layer of analysis and might lead to new themes. After themes were tested, clarified, confirmed, they were discussed and defined according to the theoretical framework reviewed in Chapter 2.

2) Stage of connection

In the following example, remarks from individual students were related to reflection of others in essays and interviews. When such connections were made, the intention was not to make conclusions based on individual cases, but to illuminate and develop themes.

MHW (C1S2F5)

There are four people in my family: my father, mother, sister and me. My mother is a doctor. My father is a Party Secretary. My sister is a worker. Of all the subjects, *I like English the best.* I enjoy English tapes and songs and foreign films with no translation. I want to be a diplomat.

The biggest reason for me to learn English is to go abroad to study. I want to enrich my experience and broaden my perspective. This will develop my abilities. I can then realise my potential. I am very interested in foreign culture. English can help me understand foreign peoples. *I want to make friends with them.* I want to know more about American lifestyle, educational system and legal structure. It is a matter of personal quality to have a second language. In countries such as Singapore, English is widely spoken. In China, English is understood by few people. English is an international language now. It is a key to improving the quality of Chinese people.

My understanding is that although China's status in the world is rising, people outside know very little about China. Some have prejudice against us. They regard China as a backward country full of ignorance. With English I will be able to *introduce China to the world,* to help foreigners change their views on China.

Analytical notes showed the emerging of the following themes discussed according to the structure of the research in the order of frequency: These emerging themes and their coding as presented here were in the process of being developed and therefore incomplete. They were presented as examples to demonstrate the process of analysis, not to report findings.

1 Experience of learning

1-1 FORMAL (memorisation): The junior English textbook started with the sentence pattern *to be* in a text entitled "My Family". Memorisation might have conditioned students into this particular way of beginning the essay. During interviews, students often talked similarly about their families, showing the effects of memorisation. Such formal, precise, consistent but rigid statements were characteristic of memorised speech patterns. They produced accuracy for exams but confined language to simple topics, fixed phrases and limited vocabulary.

1-2 INFORMAL (media): Many associated English with foreign songs and films and were eager to connect their English learning with their interests. This indicated increasing opportunities to learn English outside schools and growing media influence on learning.

While this facilitated informal learning, it created challenges for formal learning. For example, students' attention span might be considerably shortened. They might be bored more easily as they expected to be entertained.

2 Perception of learning

2-1 ASPIRATION (abroad): The confession of the aspiration to go abroad reflected rapid value shift in China. For decades going abroad was perceived as defection. To openly admit such desire invited public criticism if not political trouble. Since 1978, however, going abroad became a symbol for personal fortune and success. The reason was to study, as the common phrase *liuxue* meant studying overseas. Foreign degrees were eagerly sought after. Studying overseas was considered as a "gilding" process. Mao's practice of sending intellectuals to the countryside for re-education during the Cultural Revolution as "earthy" re-education was often compared with going overseas as "foreign" re-education. Although the government tried to foster national pride, students were remarkably more pragmatic. The dissatisfaction with China and the idealisation and adoration of the West encouraged English learning for going abroad.

2-2 FAVOUR (English): English appeared to be a favourite subject. Considering that many found formal English learning difficult and boring, their favour was significant. This indicated that students were able to distinguish English from English learning. Such favour confirmed the dominance of English in relation to other subjects and other languages. In fact, the definition of English as an international language maintained the pragmatic connection with the world but conveniently kept the political distance from the US and the UK. In recent years, English as a second language in China was proposed by some

influential scholars[30]. However, the power of English did not have to derive from its official status. The linguistic power of English in China was more defined by political context and economic reality externally rather than language policy internally.

2-3 NATIONAL (China): To introduce China to the world as a reason for learning English connected the public and the private reasons at both the patriotic and the pragmatic levels. This aspiration reflected the perception that the world lacked understanding of China. Many voiced resentment against the Western lack of interest and understanding for China, indicating that English learning was closely related to nationalistic emotions. Some wished foreigners would learn Chinese as Chinese learned English. In general, students seemed proud of being Chinese.

2-4 IDENTITY (family): Students often began their essays with an introduction of their family. This suggested that they strongly identified themselves with families. Other key elements of their sense of identity was with China as a nation, Singapore and Japan as modernised Asian countries, the West as the target of modernisation and English as a tool for internationalisation.

3 Interaction between experience and perception

3-1 INTERNATIONAL (diplomat): Foreign service combined life overseas with elite status. Despite endemic official corruption, opportunities to travel overseas, represent China and build international ties were attractive to students. In addition, the experience of English learning made them more internationally oriented. Substantial proportion of international news on the Chinese media and growing interest in world history and

[30] Prof. Hu Wenzhong, President of Beijing University of Foreign Studies, suggested that China introduce

geography helped students become better-informed in international affairs and knowledge of the world. Another result of English learning was likely the open attitudes which prepared more willingness and readiness for learning. However, this coincided with hurtful feelings for countries they looked up to who mishandled China. Such feelings could emotionally intensify their aspiration to represent China in the world.

3-2 REASON (opportunities, skills, abilities, experience, quality, perspective): The change of reasons for English learning from opportunities and skills to better qualities, new attitudes and new way of life suggested strong influence of learning experience. Partly as a result of learning, students' expectations went beyond the instrumental belief that English was a tool. Meanwhile, the meaning of English developed from a personal quality to a national quality. This helped create preliminary awareness for the argument of English as a second language in China.

3-3 FAVOURITE (US): The US was favoured as the richest country with advanced science and technology. Many perceived the US as a model as well as a target. The interest in the US indicated the influence of the media cluttered with American programmes and the increasing contact with visiting students from North America.

3-4 INTEREST (culture): Interests in foreign culture was stimulated through the media, as few students had direct encounter with foreign culture. There appeared to be a growing fascination for foreign way of life. Positive feelings were likely results of idealistic interpretation of industrialisation encouraged by dissatisfaction with life reality.

English as a second language in a national newspaper based in Shanghai, Wen Hui Bao, 11 June 1996.

Students' writing was used as one of the data collection methods for two reasons: First, it saved time. Much data could be generated within a relatively short period of time in comparison with observation and interview. Second, it was relatively open-ended. Students described their experiences and concerns in their own terms. In this way, feeding and prompting caused by my selection and wording of questions in interviews and survey questionnaires were reduced. Concerns for the validity of essays centred on their personal nature in that they were produced by individual students privately for the specific purpose of the research. Such writing was not a natural part of the learning routine. This made triangulation with other data extremely important. Emerging themes from analysis of their writings were probed and verified through interviews.

5.2.2 Students' speaking

Semi-structured interviews were conducted after essays were analysed to help students elaborate their points. To help them talk freely but with some focus, I prepared an outline based on themes emerged from observations and essays. It was to provide direction for the conversation and encourage students to speak as much as they could. It was designed to solicit, not to be rigidly followed. To avoid prompting, I decided to use simple, open questions:

1) Could you tell me a bit about yourself?
2) How did you like your school?
3) When did you start learning English? How did you like it so far?
4) How do you see it in relation to what you want to do?
5) How can your school do better in helping you with English learning?
6) How can you do better yourself in learning English?
7) How do you like foreigners?
8) How do you feel about going abroad?

At the beginning, I was more dependent on the outline. As more students were interviewed, I became less constrained. Conversations became more informal. Interviews were recorded on tapes which were transcribed and translated. As with essays, similar techniques were

used to analyse interview data, but a more holistic and thematic approach was adopted to highlight connections between themes. The validity of the interview data was enhanced by spontaneous probing on issues important to students and immediate checks on ambiguous points. However, my wording of questions, verbal and facial reaction affected validity. Only statements that were clear, consistent and unambiguous were analysed. The following example took place in the middle of the interview period.

MMX/Meeting Room/1830 Wednesday, 3 January, 1996

So how do you like English?
I love all other subjects, science and philosophy. English is a branch of science. As a language, it is a tool. It is a tool to learn natural science. It is also a tool for communication. I see English as a spade for digging. A lot of natural science and foreign culture can be dug out. English by itself is useless. I don't learn English for exams. I want to use it in real life. I want to experience British and American culture. During the revolution, Americans were imperialists, Russians were revisionists. Now we want to make friends with them, to live with them in peace and develop together. Whether you are a politician, a scientist, or a philosopher, you have to be flexible in your understanding and wide in your knowledge. English can help you improve your personal quality.

Mismatch of FORMAL and INFORMAL learning: The popularity of English was sustained by the perception that it was an important subject as many students did not like the way English was taught. A common understanding was that English was like science. This could be one reason for and result of the grammar-translation approach in which English was learned as a precise structure governed by specific rules. Another possible connection was the focus on its instrumental meaning confirmed in the analogue of English as a spade. Yet learning English was not only to communicate and grow in knowledge but to experience foreign culture, develop flexibility, and improve personal quality. When examination defined formal English teaching, it failed to address the social functions and cultural meaning of English.

Have you always enjoyed English?
Before I learned English *I didn't like it*. It was hard to learn. I was afraid of it, because it meant bad influences. My grandma told me how bad imperialism was. So in my junior middle school my English was poor. Later I realised from watching TV that *I just could not do without English.* Computer games and foreign films helped me realise its values.

Interaction between EXPERIENCE and PERCEPTION: This confirmed perceptions often changed with learning. Attitudes towards English were often mediated by parental and social forces. Contact with English and encounters with foreigners in informal situations could change the perceptions of English. This illustrated the role of sociocultural forces in forming and changing perceptions. Students' perception of English was not systematic, consistent or static. At the beginning, they might fear it, perceiving it with instrumental values due to external influences, particularly exam pressure. Contact with foreign culture and connecting their interests with English changed the perception as students began to experience authentic English. The process could be expedited by success in learning.

How has English helped you so far?
I know more about the history and geography of English-speaking countries. This is very important. Second, I learned from the flexible models of English. Chinese speeches have rich images. English is very flexible, with modifiers going before or behind nouns. If you say something in Chinese wrong, it's hard to modify it. But English is different. You can put all kinds of phrases all over the place. Third, it has improved my memorisation and comprehension.

MENTAL benefits beyond the INSTRUMENTAL and INTEGRATIVE: All the listed benefits of learning English, including knowledge, flexibility, memorisation and comprehension were mental benefits. This suggested that intellectual rather than affective quality, mental development rather than social, physical, emotional and spiritual growth were emphasised. Flexibility was particularly important as learning took place at the high levels of perception and attitude forming. This was where English became more than a tool in mediating meaning and understanding.

What do you think is important to learn in English?
The soil for English is its culture. If the soil is not used for making road, if it's not used to plant crops, why do we need it? People may think Picasso was crazy. But if you see the layers of meaning in his painting, you would understand it. English is like that. If we take its culture away, we would not be able to see its layers. It became useless.

CULTURE and the gap between FORMAL and INFORMAL learning: The student wanted to see the "layers" of English through culture but teachers were reluctant to teach cultural contents for its irrelevance with exams. As long as relevance was defined by exams, only exam content was included. This led to mismatches between learning and teaching, between what students wanted to learn and what teachers were willing, able and ready to

teach. It contributed to the split between informal and formal learning. As students' experience with foreign culture increased, they became more dependent on informal learning and less interested in formal learning.

Would English become too important in China?
English is very important. Most English-speaking countries are advanced. Many computer languages are in English. This is the age of electronic information. It's no longer the political thinking of English being imperialist. As information technology sweeps China, our contact with foreign countries will increase. This is inevitable. We must learn English. If English is less important than an African language, that will be surprising. China will not allow English to hurt our culture. A new regulation says no product could be sold without Chinese labels. The government is doing something about it. But *to really protect our culture, we must make China strong.*

Status of ENGLISH in relation to Chinese and other languages: The perception of the importance of English was pragmatically patriotic, pragmatic in recognising the power of English and wanting to apply it, patriotic in using English to build up China and protect its culture. Such perception connected English with modernisation, with science and technology, international trade and industrialisation. It was related to the survival of China and its culture. The negative attitude towards African language indicated this pragmatic understanding, in which English was marking advancement and prosperity.

Do you want to go abroad?
I hope I can, so do my parents. Conditions are better abroad. Compared with staying in China, my experiences will be richer. You can train your character in hardships too. In foreign countries you can work part time and gain a lot of experiences. I will consider safety first. Canada is pretty safe. I don't want to go to the US, because American movies are full of violence. I like Canada with few people but a lot of space.

Going ABROAD was a popular topic. Students often cited this as their personal reason for learning English. To them, English meant opportunities to study or work overseas. Reasons given for going abroad were often pragmatic, such as better living conditions and richer experiences. Life overseas was also perceived as posing hardships and therefore it facilitated character development. Foreign student work for social and career experience sharply contrasted with student life in China where the focus on exams drove students to a narrow corner and disconnected education from society.

Would you stay in a foreign country?

We go abroad to seek better life. *It's not good staying in China.* This does not mean that we do not like China. Prof. Yang Zhenning[31] is an American. But he is still a fellow of Chinese Academy. He started a project in Sichuan University to encourage student innovation. He is contributing to our modernisation. *But foreigners discriminate against Chinese.* This is a big problem Chinese people face in foreign countries. Life is not easy for them and we must better understand them.

Going ABROAD and foreign ATTITUDES towards Chinese: The aspiration to seek life improvement abroad was a rejection of traditional attitude towards going overseas as an escape from socialist construction. This illustrated the changing attitudes in pragmatic thinking. Studying and working abroad could help China. Besides, it often made students love China and appreciate its culture more. Knowledge and skills gained abroad, money sent back and the international contact developed would serve China as well as students themselves. Such attitudes evidenced new values despite the lingering influence of ideology. However, concerns over foreign prejudice against Chinese people were growing.

How do your parents think of your learning English?
They won't tell me to study for socialist construction. They are practical. They want me to study for good jobs. They keep telling me with English I can go overseas.

Parental mediation of PRAGMATICS: Most parents missed out on higher education and opportunities to go overseas on re-education in the countryside. Having survived the upheavals with their ideals repeatedly disillusioned, they tended to be pragmatic in their outlook. Many saw English in extremely instrumental terms. To them, the official agenda for modernisation was another slogan, even though they might rally under its banner to shelter their personal motives. Students' instrumental perception of English was heavily mediated by their parents.

How do you think you can best help China?
A teacher asked, "Why is your English so poor?" His student replied, "I am patriotic." He saw patriotism as refusing foreign things. Lin Zexu[32] was China's first man to see reality. He accepted Western knowledge. He led the battles against the British, but he was wise enough to urge China to learn from Britain. He could *shi yi chang ji yi zhi yi* (resist foreign control with foreign skills), *shi yi chang ji yi zhi qiang* (develop oneself with advanced foreign technology). The Cultural Revolution claimed "Refuse whatever that's foreign, support whatever the enemy opposes, oppose whatever the enemy supports." If our enemy supports life we might as well stop breathing!

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[31] One of the Chinese American nuclear physicists who received Nobel Prize.
[32] Commander-in-Chief of the Imperial Navy, a senior imperial official of the Qing Dynasty sent by the emperor to guard China from British attacks during the Opium War.

The PRAGMATIC PATRIOTISM defined by Lin Zexu contrasted with the idealistic patriotism which dismissed the value of anything foreign. Lin's pragmatic realisation became the dominant theme in contemporary intellectual thinking. Ideals quickly led to disillusionment. This strengthened the instrumental meaning of English for modernisation.

Do you think it is dangerous to like English too much?
Some people go to the extreme to worship Western culture. They say "darling" here and there. Even the foreign moon is fuller. A cartoon was drawn with a small circle inside a big one. The small one said "Charge for seeing foreign moon, 5 *yuan* each." Once people connect English with money and status, they will pursue English. As more people learn English, information about foreign things spread. This leads to the idealisation of the American way. If Chinese behave like Americans, they will be so free that they won't care any more. American culture is flooding in. Even if you forbid English, it will be in vain. Like the Yellow River, you either drink or drown. You cannot block it.

INSTRUMENTAL and INTEGRATIVE motivation: The belief that foreign things were superior was common. One possible reason was the dissatisfaction with reality. Poor product quality, corruption, increasing unemployment, the deterioration of law and order and the dwindling social security system led to resentment. As people looked up to the West, motivation was stimulated. The economic and technological power of English displaced its political and ideological power.

Students liked the interview and appreciated the personal attention. It helped them review their English learning and become aware of the nature of their learning. Students interviewed were highly articulate and expressive. While this reflected the high quality of students at key middle schools, it was a strong indicator of the success of Chinese education in developing students' mental power and academic discipline.

5.3 The validity of the data

The process of fieldwork, by its nature, was a problematic one. Rather than trying to design a perfect research to avoid problems, the principle of reflexivity was adopted as the guiding

principle. Problems were not avoided, but regarded as opportunities for collecting and analysing data, as the examination of the problem often shed light on the question and on research process itself. For example, my lack of involvement in class at SS was initially frustrating because I felt utterly powerless in the situation. But it was because of the disengagement that I was able to observe naturally occurring behaviours of students. I had little control over the situation. The natural and public nature of the observed events left little room for my influence. Data validity was further improved as observation was the first thing I did as a stranger with little methodological bias on the observed. I was interested but remained distant to the actors and the actions. On the other hand, students' writings were composed for the specific purpose of research. They were private thoughts and lacked the check of public and spontaneous events. They had time to think and plan before writing and make changes afterwards. Thus the process of their writing made good data, as the product. The interview offered opportunities to help students recall the process, but no matter how hard I tried to avoid my own opinions, the more I spoke, the more opportunities I had to influence students with the way I asked questions and related to them. When I looked friendly and interested, they tended to speak more positively. When I appeared tired and rushed, they gave short and disengaging answers. I might feel in better control but validity suffered. While observation data described students' experiences of English learning, interview and written data revealed their perceptions and reflections. The former was to a large extent recording concrete and visible features and events, while the latter approximating invisible systems of value and beliefs. Different data complemented one another, as practice revealed perception and perceptions reflected experiences. For validity, different forms of data were used as triangulation for one another in mutual verification. To verify qualitative data, a survey designed according to emerging themes

was conducted. Despite the constraints of the reality, survey results were analysed to test the strength of the themes.

Transcribing and translating

The loss of validity in the data recording process was a serious concern. While it was impossible to maintain the total originality of the record, much time and effort were devoted to keeping the data as original as possible. Over 800 minutes of cassette tapes were transcribed, translated and verified. This, together with the translation of over 200 essays, took half a year's painstaking work. The transcripts were returned to individual students concerned for verification before final versions were derived. Whenever discrepancies occurred, students had the last say. Whenever any forms of addition or alteration was requested, it was granted. Whenever remarks were in doubt, they were deleted. To simplify the procedure without unnecessary loss of meaning, the principle of clarity was adopted throughout the data recording process. Markers for stress, pause, and intonation were omitted to keep the transcripts concise and easy to manage.

Although the process of translation could facilitate the interpretation, organisation and analysis of the data, translation was an added process. Interpretation was seldom a precise and complete representation of the original. Considering the difference between Chinese and English languages and cultures, the loss of meaning, no matter how precise the translation claimed to be, could be substantial. To reduce translation loss, two methods were piloted. One was to conduct analysis without translating. This meant an English analysis of Chinese transcripts. Since analysis was an abstract interpretation and organisation process, the loss would be relatively small so far as I was competent in both languages. This was an added advantage for the "semi-stranger". The other option,

simultaneous recording, was to have the data transcribed and translated at the same time, with the student concerned assisting. Students enjoyed it as opportunities to learn English but as a technique, it was time consuming. When students' command of English was limited, much time was spent on explaining grammar and vocabulary. Nonetheless, data validity was enhanced as difference between what was said and what was meant was cross-examined. Students had further opportunities to clarify and develop their ideas. And last but not the least, personal contact improved the quality of interaction and understanding.

In addition, there were cultural meanings in Chinese not really translatable into English. For example, a common Chinese term heavily loaded with educational meaning and often used in official and personal discourse was *rencai*, loosely translated as personal quality, talents or gifts. But the English meaning suggested a given, innate quality. Its Chinese connotation, however, referred more to the gained quality through education and experience, hence it was the main task for schools to produce *rencai*. The difference indicated different perceptions between cultures in understanding concepts such as gifts. One understanding emphasised disposition. The other stressed efforts. Related to this was the frequent use of the word *suzhi* by students when talking about their objectives in learning English. It referred to the total quality of either an individual person or a nation. When students used this word they were talking about English giving them a higher general quality, being more competitive as a person *and* as part of a highly educated nation. The best term I could think of was the combined personal quality of a nation, which to a Westerner might sound silly because English words often lacked such collective meaning. In such circumstance, it was felt that making problems explicit by identifying them and discussing various options for resolution was the best approach.

Data release

The control and release of the data varied according to the nature of the data. In general, authorities expressed substantial concern over the export of data overseas. Their control on the qualitative data seemed loose, as they did not consider my observation notes and students' writings as hard data. They felt particularly sensitive towards survey data, for numbers were treated seriously as hard evidence in China. This suggested that quantitative methods such as surveys attracted more official attention and consequently, getting the results out could be difficult. For example, few schools released the initial survey results in 1996, making the data too fragmented for statistical analysis. A second attempt to collect survey data on a short visit in 1998 produced more systematic data because a private connection negotiated on my behalf to purchase the data from the school. Another reason was that this particular school was affiliated to a university that belonged to the Ministry of Railways. Local education authorities did not feel as obliged to be responsible for their conduct. The control was therefore looser. Experience showed that when the survey was conducted without school involvement, it was easier to take the results. When there was school involvement, they tended to put conditions on the data. In this regard, help from school, no matter how sincere it was, was not necessarily helpful.

The next part, Part 3 of the thesis, will report and discuss the findings of the research. Chapters 6 and 7 will describe students' experiences with formal and informal English learning. Chapter 8 will discuss their perceptions of English and reflection on English learning. Survey results will be analysed in Chapter 9 to define students' reasons for learning English, examine its conditions and explore its relationships.

PART THREE

THE FINDINGS

Chapter 6 Formal English learning

Foreigners say "Me too" all the time but our grammar says "So do I." (G1B/SD)

This chapter describes how students experienced English learning in their English classes at school. To illustrate the structure and organisation of formal English learning, it reproduces an English class. Discussions highlight potentially significant themes emerging from observations. To introduce students' point of views and verify findings from observations, it examines their descriptions of English class and their reflection on formal learning, drawing from their personal statements in writings and interviews. In describing formal English learning from different angles, this chapter seeks to identify some of its defining features.

6.1 English class as observed

To characterise students' formal English learning, an English class is reported. This was one of the first of the 44 English classes observed at SS and SD. At this stage I was a complete observer and had little contact with students. It must be stressed that as a class observed and recorded by me, it was one look at one particular class. Since no one class or indeed all the classes observed could fully represent the nature of formal English learning in China, it was introduced here not as a typical English class, but as an open forum for discussion because it did raise questions on the characteristics of English lessons. Classes varied from one teacher to another and from school to school in terms of ages and personalities of the students, experiences and philosophy of the teachers as well as the nature and location of the school. The purpose of presenting one class was to raise issues for discussion on the nature of formal English learning. This particular class was chosen because it revealed some characteristics that students frequently referred to when they

talked about English class. Additionally, this was one version of an instance of English teaching subject to different interpretations by different teachers, students or observers. Problems identified were structural ones potentially important for the study, not personal ones of a particular teacher. Related background information, necessary explanation and initial identification of possible themes were presented immediately after the data, while main themes were analysed and discussed in the chapter summary. Such discussions would incorporate data from other sources to expose underlying features and verify findings across data. In the discussion, the chronological order of the class was retained to keep the class intact.

English Morning Reading/0730--0755
English Class 0805-0850
Friday/27.10.95/C2S2/SD/Science/Size: 54/F16/M38/Mr. L

Most students were reading for science. As a result, there were more science classes and they were much bigger than arts class. SD and SS both had five science classes of 60 students in Senior 2, but only one arts class of about 30 students.

0730 Students begin the day by reading new words in chorus. A girl stands before the class to lead. She says "Karl" and the class repeat "Karl". Then she says "Marx" and the class "Marx." The next one is "Germany", followed by "German", "native", "homeland", "London", "revolutionary", "base".... They carry on for 15 minutes. Most students seem to be on task. One boy is writing. His textbook is standing on the desk, hiding him doing homework.

Morning reading marked the beginning of the school day. This consisted of repeating new words, sentence patterns and sometimes long texts. On average, students spent ten hours from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. each day at school and worked long hours on homework after school. Marx and Lenin remained models for English learning. National Senior English textbook began with how Marx learned English. Another text shared Lenin's visits to the Speaker's Corner in Hyde Park between his double-decker bus rides comparing London's East and West Ends. Both considered foreign languages as revolutionary weapons and thus contributed to the instrumental understanding of English. The conventional wisdom

maintained that the bird sticking out its head would get shot. Students often preferred a low profile when they were engaged in personal tasks.

On the blackboard was a list of today's classes: English, physics, Chinese, mathematics, P. E., chemistry, politics, computing, with names of two students on duty to clean the blackboard, fetch hot water, and help teachers carry equipment. All names were listed in English. On the front wall, a national flag replaced Mao's portrait. Even the school motto was written in English: "Diligence", "Thrift", "Modesty", "Honesty". On the back wall are answer sheets to recent tests and exams. Portraits of scientists, including Marie Curie, Darwin, Newton, Einstein, Li Si Guang[33], and Li Shi Zeng[34] fill the side walls. The classroom is in a new building with big windows and a small balcony. Students sit in eight lines and seven rows, facing the blackboard and the teacher's desk. Students' desk drawers are filled with books and lunch boxes. They are casually dressed. Many wear American jackets of the "Bull" and the "Supersonic." One shirt says "Oxfor" without the final "d."

English made its way into the official school discourse with slogans such as "Study hard" and "Be diligent and brave" in classrooms. At the same time, expressions like "Thank you", "Bye-bye" and "OK" were frequently used by students. Such token use of English were fashionable and they stood out in sharp contrast to the otherwise Chinese environment. Morning lessons were mostly of key subjects: Chinese, mathematics and English. For science students, physics, chemistry and biology took the rest time, as history, geography and politics for arts students. Patriotism remained central in the curriculum. Its content, however, had changed from idolising Mao to modernising China, from idealism to pragmatism. Ironically, traditional values of diligence, thrift, modesty, honesty and discipline were spelt out in English, which brought the challenge of beliefs in comfort, consumerism, democracy and freedom. The emphasis on science was further reflected by the wall portraits: All were natural scientists. Thousands of scholars in science and engineering studied overseas. The few in humanities and social science came from legal, business and management studies. The seating arrangement focused attention and authority onto the teacher. But tokens of Western culture littered classrooms. And as tokens, they only appeared real.

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[33] A prominent modern Chinese geologist and glaciologist.
[34] A Ming Dynasty Chinese doctor who wrote extensively on Chinese herbal medicine.

0745 Students stop reading aloud. Some notice me at the back and start muttering. I avoid contact by reading their National Day essays on the back wall. Neat handwritings reveal the title "I love you, China." One article is about a Chinese American astronaut. The writer is impressed with the academic achievements of the astronaut who went through Harvard and MIT and beat many "Americans". The essay laments that he had to go with an American spaceship. "Soon there will be Chinese spaceships." An English notice on the back door announced a visit of an Australian lady.

Academic merits and career success were still important values. Successful Chinese people were admired, especially if they brought international honour to China. Those who won Nobel prizes became icons. Contact with foreigners was increasing in key middle schools, with more foreigners visiting than Chinese going overseas. Elite schools sent delegations abroad regularly. Some even exchanged teachers and students with foreign schools.

0755 The bell rings. Some students leave the room. Others start to chat about television. A group talk about the "Computer City" and "Electronic Street". Two girls check each others' answers for maths homework. A lady walks in with a thick stack of exercise books: "Here's your chemistry homework. Have a good look and we'll talk about it later." She tells students who rush to the front for their books. A few boys throw books around and storm their way out to the balcony. The room is now full of noise and dust. I pick up an English textbook. It is heavily marked and worn.

Pirated softwares were easily available in "Computer City" and "Electronic Street". Since parents controlled their television-watching, many students opted for computers which created the impression of studying. Parents assumed students must be learning at least English as they used the Internet, watched foreign films or played computer games.

0800 The bell rings. The English teacher, Mr. L arrives. Students rush back to their seats. One shouts "Stand up." Mr. L says "Good morning, class." Students answer "Good morning, Teacher." Then Mr. L says "Sit down, please." One boy goes to the front and starts talking in English about the weather. Then he tells a joke. Muttering among students makes it hard to hear him. A few students giggle. But most are not engaged. Many are doing their homework from the last class.

Students did not seem to appreciate the routine of formal speech in class when they were forced to speak in unnatural manners. Formal atmosphere reinforced teachers' authority and order but it did not help students to relax and speak naturally. Speaking in such artificial situations became little more than a token use of English or a lip service.

0805 Mr. L asks students to open their textbooks to page 14. He invites questions on the text. While he tries to use English, his students mutter in Chinese. They are confused as there is no text on page 14. At this point the conversation changes to Chinese:

T: What book have you got?
S: Book 2.
T: Where are your new textbooks?
S: We did not know we need them. You did not tell us.
T: I told you to read the text in Lesson 2.
S: But you did not tell us to bring the books.
T: Bring them tomorrow then.

The teacher tried to use English but students replied in Chinese. When the talk was finally spontaneous, it became Chinese. The teacher's attempt to use English indicated that he tried to follow the official mandate to speak English. Students, however, were not willing.

0810 Mr. L is slightly embarrassed. He asks students to take out their homework, making his commands first in Chinese, then in English. While he tries English, he slows down and looks at me. I look back with a smile, trying to show my understanding. After some silence, one boy puts up his hand. Mr. L calls on his name. The boy stands up with his worksheets. He asks in Chinese: "Question 43. I don't know the right choice." The class follow him to Question 43. It is one of the 50 multiple choice questions on grammar. This one is on phrasal verb:

No matter how hard she tried, he couldn't agree ____ her point.
A. with B. to C. on D. of

In Chinese, Mr. L asks another student for the answer. A girl stands up:

S: B.
T: Why?
S: Because it is followed by something, not somebody.
T: Right.

Mr. L goes to the blackboard with some chalk. Students take out their notebooks and start writing:

agree to st.
agree with sb.

After students failed to produce the right textbooks, class became the Chinese explanation of English grammar with the help of exam papers. Quite a number of students had been studying the worksheets since the class began, paying little attention to teacher's speaking English. As learning tasks unfolded, communication was carried in Chinese. Exam paper was the method and the content, the means and the end. Teaching centred on the level of sentences, the structures of which were analysed in meticulous details to extract patterns and rules for students to memorise. The assumption was that English learning was

memorising rules to apply in exams. If there was an exception, a new rule was articulated to count for the exception.

0815 Students' questions are on the use of propositions, articles, pronouns, verb tenses, phrases, idioms and usage. Mr. L invites answers from students but mostly in vain. After giving answers he proceeds to summarise his answers in the forms of rules for students to jot down. Strange as some of these rules are, they seem to work for exams. For example, one rule is introduced for the use of "each" and "every":

Use 'every' before noun and 'each' for other situations.

Then one student asks about "each other" saying "each" is used before "other." Mr. L explains that "each other" is a phrase like one word and must be memorised together. Another student asks if they can be replaced by one another. Mr. L explains they can be replaced sometimes but not always. He writes on the blackboard a new rule:

Use 'each other' for two people and 'one another' for other situations.

All questions and explanations are in Chinese. Students hardly look up except to copy the rules. Their eyes move from the handout to the blackboard, to their notebooks, then back to the handout, their backs bent over the desks. Many look serious but increasingly bored.

By this time the teacher had given up speaking English. The assumption seemed to be that speaking was a preliminary task to accomplish before moving onto serious topics rather than a constant opportunity to communicate. When Mr. Li did speak English, it was often to paraphrase and repeat his Chinese.

0835 Mr. L goes over the questions one by one, reading the sentence and filling in the right answer. Students follow him attentively. Some are still asking "Why is it D not B for Question 34?" Mr. L wants them to come to his office for more explanation after class. Some students look rather happy as their answers match. Others are frustrated as they find it hard to follow. Soon they start looking at one another's sheets and talking about the questions. The muttering overwhelms Mr. L's voice, making it hard to hear. Students gradually abandon the task and start chatting.

There was an increasing lack of order and interest towards the end of the class as students became tired and drifted off the task. They realised the importance of exams and were willing to tolerate intensive work as long as their patience held. But their attention quickly dissolved as the class became monotonous. This indicated that exam paper was the routine of formal learning, as students were most likely bored by the routine itself.

0845 Mr. L pins the answer sheet on the door. He hands out more worksheets for homework. "Oh no, not any more," students grumble. Mr. L tells the class today's homework will not be discussed but used as self-evaluation before mid-term exam. Students continue, "No way, not

another exam!" While they get their handouts, Mr. L comes over to me to offer his apology. "I am sorry. You see the mid-term exam is coming so we have to prepare for it."

Students resented homework and complained about frequent exams. But their complaints appeared ineffective as the teacher was only helping them prepare for exams. The teacher's apology indicated he was not happy with his class. He tried his best to speak English, but he faced the dilemma between teaching grammar knowledge as directed by exams and teaching communicative skills as demanded by students and the official guidelines.

0850 The bell rings. Students stand up reluctantly. Mr. L stands by his desk. "Good-bye, class," he says. "Good-bye, Teacher----" his students drag.

The insistence on formality became ironic. The student on duty and the teacher tried to bring the class to a proper end, despite the fact that many students had dismissed themselves already. Their dragged good-bye expressed their boredom with the routine.

Observations suggested that the central theme of formal English learning was examination. Students were the most serious when teachers talked about grammar in Chinese. They routinely dismissed the relevance of teachers' speaking English, regarding it as repetition of what was said in Chinese. Teaching was based on exams. The learning task was solving grammar problems. The idea was that when students wrote exams, questions would be familiar to them in form if not in content. This method proved efficient in achieving its pragmatic goals, as students became high scorers in exams at the expense of communication skills. Examination defined the content and structure, the means and end of formal English learning. For better efficiency, convenience, comprehension, English class often used Chinese as the medium of instruction. The use of English appeared to be a symbolic gesture. The Chinese explanation of English grammar was occasionally broken by a few functional English phrases. Sometimes English was used to paraphrase what was said in Chinese. Such token use of English for classroom routines became speaking English

for the sake of speaking it, serving little communicative purpose. Speaking was perceived as a specific and artificial task to accomplish rather than a constant and genuine opportunity to communicate. Once the task was over, the class resumed its routine in Chinese. Since model exam papers often became national best sellers, teaching for exams was a national problem rather than a local one.

6.2 English class as described by students

This section presents the students' voice and discusses how they articulate their formal English learning experience. Their remarks are scrutinised to exemplify and verify themes and show how their voices confirm or contradict observation finding. Data for this section came from 50 students' writings entitled "English and me" and subsequent interviews conducted with 45 of them at SD. In the analysis, remarks from students were organised according to the categories identified from initial analysis. While breaking down the data inevitably reduced the holistic representation of students' voices, attention was given to ensure that the meaning of every idea was accurately represented. All 50 students were quoted from and all their remarks were categorised. To reduce repetition, however, similar statements were used only once. For clearance, short comments were presented first. Ambiguous remarks were deleted.

6.2.1 The nature

In describing their formal learning, students perceived their roles passively:

I learn English by learning grammar in class. (CZ)
Everybody is taking notes to memorise at home. (WW)
Listening to the teacher+notes+review+exercise = good mark. (FK)
I listen attentively in class and review according to my notes at home. (ZJ)
I listen to grammar and learn new words and texts by heart before class is over. (CJL)
Grammar must be taught by teachers point by point. We students can only take notes. (LZ)

Now that exam is everything, we don't use tapes any more. Instead, we have grammar exercises. Once we finish they are marked and returned. Teachers then explain each question, filling the blackboard with grammar notes. We review notes and write exams based on them. (QM)

Their descriptions confirmed the theme of examination as evidenced by observation, with grammar as its content, memorisation its method, and examination its purpose. They were largely unhappy with the routine of their English class:

The pace of our English lesson is very slow. (GHG)
English class is boring because it is all about grammar. (QH)
What I dislike the most is English in senior years. There is nothing but grammar. (LDH)
Our English class is too rigid. I don't think grammar is a good way to learn a language. (WP)
We are always writing grammar notes to memorise. I hope our lesson becomes lively. Why can't we find interesting materials? Why don't we put on a drama or see a film? (FM)
The teacher uses Chinese to explain grammar all the time, about the many ways a certain word can be used. Every lesson is exactly the same. There is no using English at all. (G1C)
I am disappointed with my class, because there's hardly any other aims but exams. It is rigid like dead. There's no English environment to communicate in English. We have learned a lot but there's no opportunity to use it. Gradually we forget what we learned. (ZQL)

Grammar teaching and the class routine appeared to have disengaged students. The focus on exams limited their exposure to English and opportunities to use it. The overwhelmingly negative attitude towards English lessons indicated that in their perception, formal English teaching failed to meet students' needs despite its claim to have served the purpose of exams.

Likewise, students were negative on grammar teaching. Many saw it as rigid and difficult. It was particularly unfortunate that a flexible language was taught in such a sterile format:

The biggest problem is I can't remember all the grammar rules. (FK)
We have so much grammar in our lesson that we are constantly confused. (YX)
I feel English grammar is all broken pieces. There are so many exceptions. (LZ)
If I can change our English lesson, I will make sure that grammar is less important. (LHK)
I'm confused with the kind of grammar we learn. In exam questions, all choices look right. If I can change English lesson, I would simplify grammar. (GJ)
I hate mechanical analysis. English is flexible. As long as you can speak, there's no need for rigid rules. The point is to make others understand, not to judge them right or wrong. (MHW)

As grammar constituted the core of formal English learning, a closer examination of its meaning in students' discourse was needed. When students talked about grammar, they

were referring specifically to teachers' regulating English usage and language points. The validity of such regulations was highly problematic as they often derived from artificial questions in exams rather than authentic use of English. Their purpose was to explain particular forms of English usage for exams rather than to represent the general meaning structure of English language for communication. The nature of this pseudo-grammar was more pragmatic than systematic. Such grammar became necessary in the dominance of examination. Students were confused by the irregularities and exceptions as the flexible and versatile nature of English did not readily lend itself to mechanical regulation. Yet pseudo-grammar lent teachers a platform to teach with authority. It gave students rules to memorise and apply in exams. In English for examination, pseudo-grammar fit into the culture of learning as the voice of authority. However, the irrelevance of pseudo-grammar frustrated students as they encountered natural English in daily life:

> One classmate had lived in the US. He rarely memorises grammar but is the first in exams. (DG)
> My father said one who communicates in English without knowing grammar is far better than one who knows all the grammar but cannot talk. (HJ)
> Some Chinese and Japanese students in Australia went to a restaurant. The Japanese knew a lot of names on the menu, even though their grammar was poor. The Chinese knew grammar but nothing on the menu. The Japanese knew what to order. The Chinese did not. We pay attention to details of grammar that even foreigners don't care about. We must integrate English with life. (G3B)
> Even if you can do all the problems in exams, so what? In a university, you must express yourself in English, you must write essays and thesis. Even if you are a grammar expert, so what? English is constantly changing. Besides, there are different ways to express yourself. At home, you speak casual English. At work, you dress up with suit and tie and speak proper English. Grammar will not teach you that. What counts is ability. (MMX)

Such reflection from students helped them to become aware of the nature of their learning so that they could realise its limitations and develop their learning to meet their personal needs. This was one way that the research in its process and result hoped to benefit students' learning.

In relation to the routine of grammar, students found exams problematic in many ways:

> Exams must not be used to pressurise and control students. (CLJ)

The problem with exams is that they make us feel English is memorising new words and grammar. Some excel in exams but cannot speak. English is an action subject. You have to practice speaking rather than doing exams. (FY)
One type of question in the exam is cloze quiz. You must understand the passage before you can find the right words that fit according to meaning and grammar. I make many mistakes there. I can't understand the passage holistically. I also find it hard to analyse the grammar. (LX)

Structurally, they found exams misleading. Technically, questions requiring synthesised knowledge and integrated skills were particularly difficult to them, such as the cloze quiz when general knowledge, reading comprehension and grammar were tested at the same time. This suggested that formal teaching did not prepare them for the "ability" oriented questions in exams. Such questions would help steer teaching towards skills, expanding learning beyond grammar.

One student spoke in favour of exams, not necessarily because he liked it in any way but he understood why it was needed in China:

Exercises are necessary because exams cannot possibly ask us to speak. Neither is it possible to tape us to find out how fluent our English is. To assess our English objectively, standard exams must be used. For thousands of years we have been teaching for exams. Nobody has come up with anything better. There are better methods but they are not applicable. If conditions allow, teachers would love to take us to English-speaking countries to learn their culture. The Confucian way of learning by travelling is enjoyed by all. But the reality is that China cannot afford doing away with exams. So teachers cannot afford doing away with teaching for exams. (MMX)

China's historical, demographic and economic reality was used to legitimatise the use of exams. Considering that formal teaching in China tended to encourage conformity and consensus, the existence of independent thinking was significant.

Commenting on their teachers, students appreciated their responsibility and knowledgeability. Yet praises often preceded criticism. Rather than criticising teachers directly they focused on teaching:

Teachers are responsible but there is no environment to learn English. (HK)
Our teacher is kind-hearted and hardworking. But we want to prepare for real life, not just exams. I hope we can organise English activities to enrich our life. (LX)

I am happy with our teachers' grammar teaching because he knows it in great detail. But he seldom teaches speaking. I feel he is teaching for the exam. He is not teaching English. (HJ)

The criticism confirmed that students were unhappy with their formal learning. Those who enjoyed grammar realised that grammar was not English itself. They preferred opportunities to use English to enrich their lives. Observation found that teachers did try to speak some English. The question, however, was not the amount but the kind of English spoken by teachers, the context in which it was used, the purpose it served and its effects on learning. Students' remarks indicated that most of them wanted to hear more English from their teachers but often found it inadequate:

Teachers talk in Chinese far too much. (WW)
The teacher speaks half English and half Chinese. (ZY)
The English of our teacher is not fluent. It hardly helps our listening and speaking. (QH)
I do not like notes but listen attentively to every word in English from my teacher. (CLJ)
The teacher mostly speaks English unless she is criticising students or explaining grammar. (CJL)
In class the teacher speaks Chinese more than English in order to improve our exam skills. (YX)
My teacher uses English most of the time, unless she is explaining grammar or homework. (GHG)
Our teacher speaks English when it's easy to understand but Chinese when grammar is taught. His English is tasteless. You feel English is childish compared with Chinese. (WP)

Although the amount of English used by teachers varied from class to class, students' descriptions confirmed that many teachers were similar in their token use of English for simple commands. Since grammar constituted the main part of teaching and it was presented in Chinese, the amount of English used was limited. The kind of English used by teachers was mostly routine commands that featured artificial, fragmented, inflexible and repeated speech. Even teachers who tended to speak English often reverted to Chinese for the important content: grammar. When genuine opportunities arrived for communication, Chinese was used. Since teachers only used limited English in restricted ways, students' exposure to English was very limited in classroom. As they increased their knowledge and skills for exams, their English remained primitive.

With no role models to imitate from and insufficient input from natural English, students were largely unprepared to use English. While many students felt that their speaking was negatively influenced by the focus on grammar, some began to perceive English as limiting, unnatural and simplistic as they heard from their teachers:

It's hard to find suitable topics to talk about in English. (CJL)
I often speak English with classmates, when I borrowed pens, for instance. (ZG)
In normal conversation it's unnatural to speak English. Some classmates will laugh at us. (WW)
When we make sentences we cannot help but think of grammar. This restrains our speaking. (LSH)
When we speak we think for a long time to organise the sentence. It's not natural. We once made an agreement to talk in English on the way home. But it only lasted for a few days. (MHW)

The focus on grammar led to the intensive and abstract learning of structure and failed to prepare students for spontaneous conversation. Having to think about grammar all the time not only restricted speaking but took away its fun. Grammar taught this way did not necessarily increase accuracy nor fluency. Even "speaking class" failed to help:

In speaking class I am afraid to speak English because I don't want others to hear my mistakes. We write what we want to say in English on a piece of paper and pass it around. (G3C)
In speaking class everybody speaks at the same time. There is no order. We cannot speak more than a few sentences before we stop to use dictionaries. When the teacher comes we would try to say a few words in English. As soon as she leaves we shift back to Chinese. (LPJ)

Students did not like speaking for its own sake. Neither were they prepared to speak when opportunities arose. Some were uninterested as speaking was not examined. Others were limited by vocabulary. They were afraid of losing face by making mistakes.

Students perceived their speaking as poor:

If it is reciting text, I'm fine, but if it is speaking from my mind, I will stutter. (GJ)
Our listening is limited to our textbook. We read the text as we listen. Our speaking is poor. (CZ)
We know a lot of grammar but can't speak English. Grammar without speaking is nothing. (QM)
After all these years of hard work my speaking has not improved. The most important is to communicate. But I can't speak. What a misery! (XH)
Ultimately it is speaking that counts. I can understand others, but not express myself. I can't find the right words and patterns. I am nervous with foreigners. (GHG)
I hate speaking but like listening. I like to live in an English world and listen to the radio, even if I don't understand. Being in an English environment makes me want to speak it. (WU)
Speaking is the most difficult. I can write good sentences but I find it hard to express myself. We do not have opportunities to speak, so I speak by reciting the text. I made no progress at all. (ZT)

Besides the influence of grammar, there were many reasons for poor speaking skills. First, speaking was difficult to teach, for it required good command of English, creative organisation, effective discipline, and above all, a caring, trusting, supporting and understanding relationship. Second, the best way of teaching speaking was probably speaking itself. Talking about speaking would not help unless opportunities were created to facilitate speaking. Third, speaking had much to do with gifts rather than efforts. Poor speaking indicated that some essential qualities for speaking were perhaps not emphasised by the culture of learning. Since learning through repetition and memorisation required willpower, discipline and consistent effort, students developed strong motivation, self-control and diligence. Many of them aspired to live in an English environment. Some created their mini environment at home by listening to English radio. With the lack of resources and opportunities for natural use in formal learning, learning beyond grammar and examination was shifted to informal situations.

In their writings students were asked to self-evaluate their English learning on a 1-5 scale. The majority of them replied they were poor in speaking, listening and cultural knowledge. The average marks for "basic skills" and "basic knowledge" among the fifty students were:

Speaking: 1, Listening: 3, Reading: 5, Writing: 4, Grammar: 4, Culture: 2

Evidently, students attached specific meaning to common words related to learning. Such meaning reflected their learning experiences. For them, listening was to follow audio tapes of texts with the books open. Speaking could be reciting text. Reading often meant repeating individual words, sentence patterns and text. Writing could be taking notes, forming sentences and following substitution drills. Accordingly, their formal learning was based on text. Text was the sole input. Learning activities evolved around text. Hence the emphasis on reading rather than speaking. Targeted as the key by the national curriculum,

reading was perceived as the most relevant skill for science and technology. It was easily testable. But even reading was affected by the intensive grammar teaching:

If I am happy, I will look up new words. If there are too many new words, I give up. (SF)
I read English novels to study grammar and bilingual books to compare English and Chinese. (GJ)
I learn English by reading. I read the text over and over until I can recite it. Personally I like to read English novels to learn something about foreign culture but I have no time for it. (YQY)

Reading was originally focused on the analysis of structure, but pragmatically the focus shifted to exam questions. As a result, intensive reading became a nickname for teaching for exams. This was related to the cultural orientation that perceived English as science, whereas knowledge was the content and analysis the means. The effect of bilingual books with English on one side and its Chinese translation on the other was unclear. By and large, it reflected the focus on translation, the essence of which was intensive reading.

In addition to the emphasis on reading, the perception of vocabulary as a matter of accumulation reflected the importance of effort in the culture of learning. Many students defined English learning as a matter of effort. Some even resorted to ambitious memorisation of dictionaries:

English means hard work with thousands of words to learn. I like it and fear it. (FK)
My accumulation of vocabulary is not big. I have problems reading science articles. (FM)
Some memorise dictionaries, but it's no good to memorise words without using them. (G3B)
Our problem is vocabulary. Before exams I would work on vocabulary, but we're too busy. (CJL)
In doing reading comprehension questions in exams, new words keep me from understanding. (SF)
Vocabulary is the problem. English is accumulation, That's hard work. There's no other way. (ZY)
My biggest problem is laziness. I am not serious. I am prompted by sudden whims. I only work hard before exams. I may get 100, but within a week I forget. The problem is conscientiousness. Whoever has good marks in English is always a serious student. (CZ)

By regarding vocabulary as a matter of accumulation, students believed sustained hard work would lead to good exam results and eventually the mastery of English. Observations showed that teachers often emphasised the role of diligence and discipline, perhaps to encourage students. A slogan in the classroom confirmed this emphasis with a quote from

Isaac Newton that success was 99% perspiration and 1% inspiration. The role of gifts was not mentioned by students.

Students realised English learning involved skills and knowledge. There was a need for skills to be integrated and balanced with exam preparation:

> In senior years attention should be on exams. Only a smaller part should be on skills. (HJ)
> English learning must incorporate all skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. (FY)
> I hope we can integrate skills and knowledge. Grammar exercises make us exam machines! (WP)
> English learning has many aspects. Besides speaking, listening, reading and writing, there must be grammar knowledge. It is both exams and skills, knowledge and ability. (LX)
> If it is for exams, we should focus on grammar and vocabulary. But if we look ahead, we must be good at speaking. So between school and home, I try to keep a balance. I learn grammar and vocabulary while at the same time listen to English programmes on the radio. (WLT)

Examination encouraged a perception that grammar knowledge was formal and communication skills informal. The integration of grammar and skills and the balance between formal and informal learning would help skills and knowledge to develop one another, formal and informal learning to complement each other. Learning could then meet both the school agenda and students' needs.

Students' personal statements confirmed that the central theme for their formal learning was examination. In fact, learning was so much focused on exams that many students were unhappy with the routine of grammar teaching, which severely limited their exposure to English and negatively influenced the development of their speaking. Students' use of terms that referred to learning such as "grammar", "speaking" and "reading" carried specific meanings. Such meanings were important as they reflected their learning experiences and the emphasis of the culture of learning. Thus "grammar" consisted of rules taught by teachers for exams. Learning was based on text which was analysed in detail for "grammar". Students' concerns with their lack of speaking and vocabulary revealed the importance of effort in learning. Those students who regarded English as ability integrating

knowledge and skills tried to keep a balance between the learning of grammar and the development of communication skills.

6.2.2 The conditions

Students preferred the new set of textbooks for their information on foreign countries, connection with life experience and focus on listening and speaking:

> The new textbooks broaden our mind. The content is very good. (LPJ)
> I like situation dialogues in the new book. I dislike the old book for its grammar. (CLJ)
> Our old textbook is rigid like dead. Language should be lively. I don't like rigid teaching. (MHW)
> In junior years we used new books. Now we use old books which is all grammar. It's boring. (WY)
> English must be related to current affairs and life events. Information about foreign countries will increase our knowledge. (GHG)

The old textbook applied grammar-translation approach. Lessons consisted of texts for reading, analysis and memorisation. Each text was followed by new words, grammar and exercises. New books replaced grammar with practical skills. Texts were compiled to inform rather than to analyse. A comparison of contents showed the differences:

Senior English Book 1 (1984)[35]	Senior English for China Book 1 (1996)[36]
Lesson 1 How Marx learned foreign languages	Unit 1 The summer holidays
Lesson 2 At home in the future	Unit 2 In the lab
Lesson 3 The blind men and the elephant	Unit 3 American English
Lesson 4 Galileo and Aristotle	Unit 4 Travel
Lesson 5 The lost necklace	Unit 5 Why do you do that?
Lesson 6 Abraham Lincoln	Unit 6 A new factory
Lesson 7 The emperor's new clothes (I)	Unit 7 Earthquakes
Lesson 8 The emperor's new clothes (II)	Unit 8 Mainly revision
Lesson 9 Lady Silkworm	Unit 9 Computers
Lesson 10 The Great Wall of China	Unit 10 Sports
Lesson 11 At a tailor's shop	Unit 11 Country music
Lesson 12 Pollution	Unit 12 English programmes
Lesson 13 The footprint	Unit 13 Abraham Lincoln
Lesson 14 Watching ants	Unit 14 Mainly revision
Lesson 15 Napoleon's three questions	
Lesson 16 Continents and oceans	
Lesson 17 The story of William Tell	
Lesson 18 A little hero	

[35] People's Education Press, 1984. Beijing
[36] People's Education Press and Longman Group, Ltd. 1996. Beijing

Number of lessons was reduced. Serious readings in literature and history were replaced by contemporary topics on computers, travel, music and sports. The only surviving text, Abraham Lincoln, was simplified. Comparison in grammar showed that the new one was less difficult:

Senior English Book 1 (1984)	Senior English for China Book 1 (1996)
The attributive clause	The future in the past tense
Word formation	The past perfect tense
Noun clauses	The passive voice
Modal verbs	Direct speech and indirect speech
The participle	The attributive clause
The gerund	

Each page was designed to form an independent one-hour lesson. A unit consisted of six lessons on six separate pages. Bilingual notes and grammar appeared at the end of the book, rather than with individual lesson. Colour pictures and photos were used on broader sheets. Supplementary listening and reading materials accompanied each book. While students enjoyed the new books, many teachers preferred the old ones for their emphasis on grammar.

The focus on exams intensified as learning advanced to senior years. Students' enjoyment of English in junior years indicated that it was possible to change formal learning. Examination seemed to be the key. Without its pressure, teachers would be free to focus on skills and organise various learning activities, facilitated by new textbooks:

> Our teacher used to pay attention to skills. She allowed us to talk freely in English. We had an English Corner. It was really good. (G3B)
> I prefer junior years. Every day we had time to speak English. There were short plays in English. We developed our ability in English. (G3A)
> In junior years when we wrote exams we knew what was right because we could feel it. In senior years everything is grammar. I don't think we are learning English. (G3D)
> We used to have an English Corner. It stopped because of exams. We now can only listen to English while having lunch and watch English television while having supper. (G1A)
> I like drama in junior years. It was a lot of fun. My teacher was young, knowledgeable and stimulating. He taught according to us. He was humorous. We didn't think about exams. (LZ)

Observations confirmed that in junior years emphasis was on skills, with newly qualified, younger teachers willing and able to speak English. Experience in junior years contrasted sharply with senior ones, when increasing pressure shifted the focus to exams.

Students often used words like "environment" and "atmosphere" to describe a somewhat natural context to use English. By "natural" they did not necessarily mean a native English environment, but an informal atmosphere to use English. Opportunities included entertaining foreign visitors, talking with foreign teachers, listening to English tapes and radios, watching foreign films, etc., or what their formal teaching lacked:

The most urgent thing is to create natural environment for speaking. (MHW)
If I can change English teaching, I would make it real by using foreign films and songs. (SY)
We can begin by focusing on listening. The urgent thing is to create an English atmosphere. (CZ)
We must have natural environment. Otherwise speaking English is unnatural. The changing society create many opportunities, but our school lags behind. (ZS)
The school should know a natural environment facilitates English learning. English is a language. If you want to learn it, you have to live in its environment. (DY)
I think we should learn English by speaking it, not by memorising notes. Language is not one grammar rule after another. It is a system used in daily life and shared in a society. If we only see the trees but not the forest we can't learn it well. Memorising texts is only to help us consolidate grammar. Real English learning is to use it in life. (ZQ)

Thus "real" was not the linguistically authentic setting of English but pedagogically a quasi-natural environment in which learning became genuinely communicative. In China, linguistically natural environment for English hardly existed. Such environment was not even necessary, as it implied a new mode of meaning structure. What was "real" were opportunities when communication was spontaneous and learning became natural. Students realised that formal learning lagged behind existing opportunities. English Corners were "natural" as students could practice speaking spontaneously. Even language-labs were "real" in creating an "atmosphere" for English:

We should have an English Corner. We had it last term but we are too busy to keep it. (GHG)
If I can change it, I will do three things: language lab, foreign teachers, and English Corner. (XH)
My father works at a foreign language school. They encourage students to go to the English Corner. They often have English speech contest. Their students can speak English for a long time.

We can't even for a few sentences. We can't understand foreigners. My mother wants me to go to their school to talk with foreigners. I am too shy. I envy those students. (LPJ)

As informal learning was more "natural", what students wanted in "natural" environment was perhaps the informalisation of English learning.

Some comments expressed students' resentment towards the education system as a whole. For example, teachers' authority was not enjoyed by all students:

Teachers have absolute control over us. We don't have the right to speak. (G1B)
We are like meat waiting to be chopped up. Teachers talk about giving us democratic power but in reality they don't. Our request will only be considered when it fits into teaching. (G1C)

Considering that these students were speaking in a group, they were quite open about their feelings. Students realised that many problems resided in the system:

It is impossible to develop skills under the present system of examination. (LDH)
I feel the problem is the system. Our country is too big to change quickly. (G1B)
I agree our method must be changed. But it's not realistic. We can't change it anyway. (G3A)
It is impossible to change. Everybody is studying for exams. There's no room for change. (MHW)
Our educational system hasn't changed much at all. The primary goal is to increase the number of students going to universities. Examination is god. For its sake, we must learn things not really important in life. It is impossible to learn real English in this system. (G1A)
The problem is the system. It's like the muddy water of the Yellow River. If one or two bowls of clear water is poured in, it won't change. You will have to go to its root. Change will be a lengthy process. Maybe I won't even see that in my lifetime. But eventually it's going to happen. (LSH)

If examination was the key, any change should start with it. Reality made it unlikely, as examination in quantifying learning served the purpose of accountability and efficiency.

The focus on grammatical precision and the quantification of education reflected the ideological and cultural emphasis for science. Fierce competition among students and between different subjects intensified. Science subjects claimed most time:

We have no time. Time is all spent on science subjects. (LPJ)
Competition is fierce. If I spend too much time on one subject I will be out of the game. (FY)
I used to enjoy reading English stories. Since I became a science student, I am too busy. I would love to speak English after class, but I have no time. (YX)
We have so many useless subjects and so much homework that we cannot even go home for supper. We like English, but we cannot afford any time. (G1C)
The problem is time. Maths, physics and chemistry have filled up my day and my mind. We have far too many subjects. There's no time left for English except English class itself. (HJ)

Chinese wisdom maintained that with knowledge of maths, physics and chemistry, one could survive anywhere. This reflected the pragmatic thinking in the contemporary culture. Since only science could save China, English served science but it could not compete with it. Nevertheless, students described their reason for choosing science in different ways:

I chose science because I enjoy it. Science is the way to the future. (LS)
I like science class because there are many boys. It's active and lively. (WLT)
I chose science because there's too much to memorise in arts. I hate it. (ZY)
I chose science for its practicality. I am very interested in arts but I can't do it well. (WLT)
If our software development cannot catch up with English, English will influence our scientific life. Our science lags behind many countries. It is urgent that we develop science. (ZQL)
I chose science because it is not as rigid. I don't have to memorise as much. Boys are more relaxed. They pay less attention to competing in exams. Once they start working, we could hardly beat them. The learning atmosphere is strong. Because we are active, classroom discipline is not always good. But teachers are strict. We are forced to work hard as competition is fierce. A little rest means being left behind. (LPJ)

Associations between boys and science and between girls and arts were common. More science students were boys perceived as less diligent but more quick-minded. It therefore took courage for girls to choose science and for boys to choose arts. The value for science was heavily mediated by the society as a whole and, in particular, by parents. Some students even sacrificed their personal choice to please their parents:

It doesn't matter to me science or arts, but my parents said prospects for science were better. (FK)
I like science as well as arts. But my grandpa said the best was to master a practical skill because the 21st century need technological skills much more than political skills. (HJ)
I always enjoy philosophy. I am one of the best in politics and philosophy. But my parents said politics could not feed me. I have to rely on my ability. So I chose science instead. (GJ)

Students and parents seemed to agree that ability was best demonstrated and fulfilled in science. On the contrary, arts were associated with rigid memorisation and changing politics. Arts students had varied reasons for their choice and many had to resist parental and peer pressure:

I chose arts because I like international finance. I like my class, though it is not very active. (GHG)
I chose arts because my arts scores are better. I'm always nervous in science exams, especially in chemistry. I worry about not having enough time. I never feel like that in arts. I made this decision on my own. My family wanted me to take science. (TYH)
I chose arts because I want to be complete. In arts we study history, geography and politics. Compared with the narrow focus of science, arts are wider in its perspective. I feel science is

separated from the society. I don't want to become a bookworm of formula. I want to have knowledge from many areas. To fit into the society, we must be multi-talented. (WU)

Students could be very articulate in expressing their concerns. One student shared his concern for the lack of talents in arts and the neglect of social science:

In China there's a lack of talents in arts. Too many people are in science. There is a lopsided attitude regarding people in arts as incapable. This led to a neglect for arts. Many think arts are useless, but arts, social science and natural science are inseparable. Today's world is led by people with visions. Visions came from arts. That's why I chose arts. I love football. But it's hard to play now with so few boys in arts class. The prejudice against arts is inevitable because science and engineering are tools for modernisation. Our production force must increase. But when I grow up, production force will have reached a high level. Emphasis will shift to arts, to leading roles in management and policy-making. (ZG)

The dominance of science made arts too "soft" for boys. Meanwhile, science was hard subjects for providing the iron bowl of economic and political security. The instrumentality of science meant that its apolitical nature offered a safe and stable career without the risk of ideologies. Many Chinese leaders had technical backgrounds. Fellows in the Chinese Academy of Science enjoyed national recognition, but rarely did experts in arts, humanities and social sciences. The government sent thousands of scholars to study overseas, but hardly any from arts. Such bias discouraged students from arts. The division was not technically relevant for this study as English was a common subject for both science and arts students. But the value for science helped explain students' instrumental perception of English and their analytical approach to its learning.

6.3 Summary: English for examination

Students' descriptions of their English classes confirmed the dominating theme of examination in their formal English learning. They had clear expectations of the roles of their teachers and of themselves. Teachers spent most time explaining grammar. Students engaged in note taking and grammar exercises to prepare for exams. The medium of instruction was mostly Chinese, as grammar was the primary component of the class.

Students would like to increase input of natural English but in many cases teachers' English was limited to classroom commands and repetition. As a result, students' speaking was limited to basic phrases for functional routines. They found it difficult to conduct spontaneous conversation in English. They aspired for environments and opportunities to use English. Yet when opportunities arose, their efforts and interests failed to last, as their vocabulary and conversation skills were not developed beyond the nominal use of English. Students were also afraid of losing face by making mistakes.

Students' reflection on their formal learning was largely negative. They were disappointed with the inflexible class routines and resented the dominance of grammar. They had fond memories of their junior years and the new textbooks based on activities rather than grammar. Unfortunately, new textbooks were not adopted in senior years. Junior teachers tended to be newly trained and had a better command of English. They were less pressured by exams so teaching was not as grammar centred and the routine not as rigid. Senior teachers were much more concerned about exams. Students' biggest problem was the excessive teaching of grammar for exams. Many disliked but accepted it. Those who saw English learning as accumulation emphasised vocabulary. The determination could commit them to memorise dictionaries. Students expressed concerns for the lack of time, as science subjects highly regarded by the society took most of it.

Students perceived their problems as those of the education system. Despite their negative views on exams, they put a lot of effort into formal learning as it met their immediate need for exams. The meaning of examination was found not just in its functional meaning but in its structural meaning. The quantification of education through examination revealed that exams dominated formal learning in defining the organisation of teaching and learning.

Exams reduced the content to the testable and measurable and the method to exam itself. As an instrument of evaluation and control, it selected students and teachers and defined classroom teaching and school assessment. As a result, students experienced considerable anxiety. Their lack of creative and self-initiated learning suggested that they were strongly influenced by the quantitative measurement of learning. Indeed, one might argue that the most natural context for them was learning English for exams. This context needed to be respected as it was determined by the educational condition and social reality. Arguably, the ability to score in exams was an important academic skill in its own right. Learning in China was therefore extremely successful as many students were able to score high marks in exams. With such a context, teaching students to speak English with one another was not natural, because there was no natural context for speaking.

Despite its efficient and powerful functions, the nature of the examination was selection through competition. First of all, there was the administrative categorisation. Marks derived from exams became the sole criteria according to which students, teachers and schools were evaluated. Secondly, there was the pedagogical categorisation of subjects as well as content and method for each subject. Students and teachers defined the importance of each subject according to their importance in exams. Chinese, mathematics and English became the three key subjects. In English, grammar and structure, vocabulary and usage became the content and method. Thirdly, there was categorisation at the personal level. Exams could influence the personal choice of important subjects, as students gave up their favours when exams became imminent. Attempts to reform national exams continuously favoured English as a key subject. To accommodate, students modified their personal choice to benefit from the heavy loading of English exams.

In describing their formal learning, students often used common words with specific meanings. The contextualisation of their meanings revealed the nature of their learning experience and cultural emphasis. For example, by "speaking", students could mean repeating simple words or engaging in conversations. When they talked about "writing", they could refer to copying new words, translating sentences, or anything they wrote into their exercise books, which was rarely creative writing. "Listening" could be listening to the recording of new words, texts, stories or songs in English, or listening to foreign radio programmes. "Reading" could be reading aloud new words and texts, frequently in chorus, for reciting and memorisation, the intensive analysis of sentence, or the extensive reading of books, newspapers and magazines. "Grammar" was pragmatic rules for the specific purpose of exams rather than general rules governing the meaning structures of English. Such pseudo-rules only functioned in the context of exams. By "natural environment" they meant quasi-natural situations with spontaneous opportunities to use English in a less controlled, more realistic way. Students felt English Corner, language labs and foreign teachers could informalise learning and make it more natural.

Students could be articulate in describing their learning. Some were highly sophisticated in their reflections. Judging by what they said, it appeared their formal education had succeeded beyond expectation despite its limitations. The problems did not prevent students from developing their intellectual power. In fact, the lack of flexibility and limitation of conditions seemed to have helped at least some of them to become independent in their thinking and reflective in their learning. Their sharing indicated the lack of opportunities to speak about their learning. Thus this study did in fact help them to reflect on their learning and develop self-awareness to its nature and problems. Students often repeated one another and spoke in similar ways. This revealed strong influence by

parents and teachers. Few students mentioned the positive aspects of formal learning, such as mental discipline in memorisation, standard pronunciation and accurate production, efficiency in the quantification of education, and above all, the amazing success of English for the specific purpose of exams meeting their need to qualify for universities if not anything else.

This chapter suggested that as formal learning tried to meet the need for exams, it failed to make use of existing opportunities brought about by social development outside classrooms. Informal learning was thus increasingly important. The next chapter will examine the nature and scope of informal learning and the extent to which it is exposing students to the input and use of English.

Chapter 7 Informal English learning

My sister told me I was speaking in my dream in English. (CJL/SD)

Krashen (1981) distinguished language learning as a conscious process occurring in a controlled and organised manner from language acquiring as an unconscious process occurring naturally. One central question for this chapter is whether students had better opportunities to acquire English, or to learn English more "naturally" outside the school, and if so, what opportunities they had, how they differed in nature from formal situations, and to what extent students availed themselves of such opportunities. Data for this chapter came from essays and interviews in SD.

7.1 Learning at home

It appeared that studying at home was important in students' learning experience. For many students, home learning was a continuation of school learning. Teachers and parents expected them to review formal learning by going through vocabulary and grammar notes and doing model exams. Students perceived proper learning at home as the review and preview of formal learning. This was ironic, as many disliked formal learning. The systematic emphasis on exams and the influence of social and cultural values mediated such perceptions:

At home the focus is textbook, because I have to prepare for exams. (HK)
At home I read the text a few times. Then I work on the exercises from the school. (LPJ)
The little time I have at home for English is spent on memorising grammar to prepare for exams. We get a lot of homework. If I find time at all, I will review texts and grammar. (HJ)
I spend little time on English at home. But before exams, I read the texts, listen to tapes, work on grammar exercises, copy new words, memorise sentence patterns and write short passages. (SF)

Many students liked the British textbook *New Concept English*. For over thirty years, it was the most widely used unofficial textbook in China. Each passage told a story in authentic and personal English. Passages were humorous and short enough for

memorisation. Explanation on grammatical points were succinct. Lessons moved quickly so there was always something new:

At home I learn *New Concept English* unless there's too much homework. (TYH)
Outside class I memorise vocabulary for exam. I also read *New Concept English*. (ZT)
In summer our teacher wanted us to read *New Concept English*. I liked it very much. (CZ)
At home, I review new words. During vacations, I read *New Concept English* and memorise its passages. During term time, homework keeps me from reading. (CJL)
In my holidays I like to read *New Concept English*. Every time I read it my English improves. In Senior 1, our teacher did not assign homework. We had time to read *New Concept English*. Now, there is too much homework. So I have put it aside. I can only work on it during holidays. (HK)

But foreign textbooks were used often as supplementary materials. The focus remained on exams. Some students, however, were able to extend their formal learning at home:

At home I speak with my brother in English. (FM)
I learn English through self-study. I use *New Concept English*, *Family Album USA*, *Victor English*, etc.. I don't concentrate on grammar. (FK)

When students learned English from experience rather than textbooks, they engaged in informal learning with an open mind which facilitated the connection between experience and learning. Critical experiences such as foreign encounters helped trigger the openness by putting students into a new culture. This often encouraged reflection. As a result, students were more likely to create their own opportunities for using English:

I try to create an English environment. I speak English with those who have been abroad. (LO)
I like to learn English by speaking it in daily life, to forget Chinese and use only English. I want to place myself in an English environment. But this cannot be realised in China. (DY)
My visit to the US showed me how important it is to learn from life. Exams are important but life is more important and more interesting. I use English to enrich my experience. (ZS)

Some students would not mind forgetting Chinese in order to speak English. This indicated an antagonistic understanding of the nature of English learning not necessarily hindered by their proficiency in Chinese. Foreigners often became targets for speaking practice. However, most speaking was confined to simple phrases in fixed structures as students' output was limited by their input. The lack of conversational skills and opportunities restricted one another. In addition, the pressure of exams prevented them from taking advantage of existing opportunities.

7.2 Learning at large: the case of the English Corner

The unique phenomenon of the English Corner deserved special attention. The English Corner could be studied sociologically as a sub-society in contemporary urban communities or culturally as a sub-culture in the process of modernisation. This study was concerned with the nature of the English Corner as a quasi-natural, if not authentic, context to use English. Indeed, the story of the English Corner required detailed ethnographic studies, as it has bypassed social and cultural barriers to gain staying power. This section reports my experience with the English Corner in Chengdu, one of the earliest, biggest and most regular in China.

7.2.1 The background

The early 1980s was a time of enlightenment and relaxation as changes began to sweep China. There was a freshness of new life after decades of political suppression and economic depression. Chengdu English Corner began at the gate of Jinjiang Hotel, the city's main hotel for foreigners. It soon grew too big and was moved across the street to a park. This way foreign visitors would not have to subject themselves to people's eager desire to practise English. For Chinese learners, the English Corner was exciting as the new language brought a sense of ease and relaxation. Social barriers and cultural patterns were broken down. With English, people shared feelings and dreams. The English Corner soon became a new platform to speak, a new identity to relate to, and a new forum to test the freedom of speech. Anyone who could speak some English quickly became a role model. People listened with great interest and intensity. So much as it was a place of adventure for Chinese, foreigners often felt hunted for their English. Those looking for experiences bumped into it every now and then. In a country where self-organised public gatherings

were prohibited, not only had the English Corner survived, it had flourished in cities and university campuses with the personal blessings of Chinese leaders many of whom were interested in learning English themselves.

7.2.2 The conversations

Practical topics included ways of learning English, going abroad, changing jobs, doing business, making money, the Internet and China's endemic problems. On one visit, I found many students in groups led by teachers. Some exchanged exams skills. Others shared letters from friends and relatives overseas. A father came with his son because he wanted his dream dashed by the Cultural Revolution realised in his son. A girl told an older man she wanted to work in Tibet. The man warned her it's not easy to find a good job, even in Tibet. Some students yelled insults at a hotel guard. They tried to enter but were turned back. "It's worse than old Shanghai," one shouted, referring to the notorious "No Entry for dogs and Chinese" sign at foreign concessions. A girl followed me a few steps behind. Finally she asked if I spoke English. She was from a foreign language school two hours away. When told not to miss her last bus, she was more concerned about her accent. "Content was more important," I tried to encourage her. "As long as people understand you, it is fine." She looked only half convinced. A young woman overheard us and intervened: "Accent is very important. American accent feels so rich." A dark man overheard this and introduced himself as an engineer at a local aircraft plant. "Pop in for some beer Friday night," he said, inviting me to his place where the rich and the foreign live in villas. "Why did he invite you?" one student asked. "He knows him," a man replied for me. "So where are you from?" he asked. Hearing I was studying overseas, he immediately gathered his students around me.

The rest of the section presents three conversations at the English Corner.[37]

1. A talk between a school girl (G) and a middle-aged engineer (E), 1996-07-03

E: What is your dream?
G: To go to America. I think the easiest way is to marry an American.
E: Would you marry an ABC[38]?
G: No.
E: I admire you for being so courageous. I am too old now.
G: You speak English very well.
E: But you wouldn't marry me, anyway, even if I'm American.
G: Do you want to go to America?
E: I have thought about it. If I go, everybody would speak better. I would have a hard time.
G: You can learn.
E: Yes, but I am too old, and it takes years to speak like them. It's too hard for me.
G: I'm not afraid. The question is how to get there.
E: I heard many people are going to Canada. It's difficult to find jobs, but the government will give you money. If you tell them you don't speak English, they will say, "Here is some money for you to go to school." It's so easy!
G: Why don't you go to Canada then?
E: I am too old. Chinese girls are liked, but not Chinese men.

As a common topic, the perception of life abroad was based on imagination and speculation. While the student appeared enthusiastic, the engineer was more realistic. America was ideal. The idealisation revealed the desire for comfortable lifestyle within the motivation to go abroad.

A unique feature of the English Corner was its relatively free atmosphere. While many young people aspired to go abroad since the early 1980s, most would not openly share such personal dreams for political reasons. The frankness was shocking when two strangers shared deeply personal feelings. Apparently the openness was encouraged by the English Corner where pre-defined social structure or political rules no longer operated. At least superficially, no one needs to be politically or socially correct. No one needs to conform to the conventions of the local language and culture. The openness was also helped by the

[37] These conversations were reproduced from memory and should not be read as transcripts.
[38] American Born Chinese.

irregular and versatile nature of the English language and the democratic principles it represented. It seemed that as long as English was used, its power was shared and its values assumed. The English Corner brought together people from all walks of life, with different ages, backgrounds, experiences and perspectives for conversations. While the unstable and noncommittal relationships helped people to feel free, the casual nature of the relationships determined there was little accountability in speaking. This made relationships vulnerable.

The perspective of self in competition with others was important in contemporary Chinese society. This indicated the quantification of human relationships under the influence of Marxist ideology, the dominance of science in society and examination in education. Contradictory to Chinese tradition were values such as the fear for being old, the readiness of the young to judge and advise the old, the recognition that women were better appreciated abroad, etc., all reflecting the rapid social changes in China.

2. A talk between a college student (S) and me (M), 1996-07-03

S: I came from Ya'an. My younger brother studies automobile technology at Sichuan Industry College to be a car mechanic. My elder brother is a police officer. I am at the Economic Management Training College to study international trade. I don't like it but my family paid a lot of money for it. They think it's the best for me.
M: Why don't you like it?
S: Our teacher speaks good English but he doesn't want to teach us. He went abroad and got a Masters degree. But he is always complaining about the government and about others. If somebody tells the government, he will be in trouble.
M: Do you have any foreign teachers?
S: Our college used to be Canadian. We only have one left to teach those going to Canada. We send many, but it takes a lot of money. If my family had so much money, my brother would be promoted by the police. He wouldn't have to deal with criminals any more.
M: Why is that?
S: He told me many policemen got money from criminals to share with their boss. Then they will be promoted. Anyway, is it easy to be a car repairman in Canada?
M: I have no idea. I know there are many cars there.
S: I want to have my garage. My father has one but it is small. We want to make it big, but we don't have enough money. It's hard to get bank loans. You have to know people. I want to go to coastal cities. China is too poor, but some people are too rich. They know people in the government. They have nice cars and tall buildings.

With the opening up, subjects in international studies became popular. Parents had to pay dearly for such programmes after their children qualified in exams. Tuition fee was easily the average annual salary, and it was not uncommon that parents spent their life savings to send children to the best schools possible. Such financial commitment to children's future was making education an enormous business venture in China. At the same time, since the late 1980s, Western concerns for China's human rights helped to terminated many joint-venture education programmes. The Sino-Canadian Economic Management Training College was one of the first international programmes established in the early 1980s. As CIDA[39] gradually phased out, the Chinese management promptly commercialised the training college with the help of its Canadian name and the promise to send students to Canada. The amount of money required was over 10,000 pounds for each student per year, far beyond the means of most Chinese families. However, many related families would pool their resources to send one person abroad with the expectation that he or she would help the rest out. There were indications that the waves of exodus from China to the West, especially to English-speaking countries of the US, UK, Canada and Australia were on the rise as China's economic reform deepened and unemployment worsened. Teachers, especially those with good English were easily bored by teaching and frequently left to go abroad or work for foreign firms. Restricted by the education structure, many left to seek better education and employment. Those returning to China from abroad were among the most frustrated as they found readjusting difficult. Their comparison between the West and China tended to favour the West, which directly fed into students' motivation to learn English to going abroad. China's social reality also encouraged going abroad, as social problems such as corruption made life overseas all the more appealing.

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[39] CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency.

3. A talk between a graduate student (G) and me (M), 1996-08-02

G: My visa was refused. The officer did not see why I was going for a B. Sc. in the US while I had one in China already. 'I have met thousands of people like you and I know you well. All you want to do is to look for jobs in the US.' Well, if it is money, I will buy it. Do you know anyone in the US Consulate?
M: I wish I did. But why do you have to go to America?
G: You do not understand any more. You have been out for too long. People all lie here. The whole country is a big lie! I met a friend from Israel today. I know I like him even we only spoke a few words. I saw truth in his eyes. He's honest and sincere. That's why!
M: What about Israel? I heard they were admitting Chinese engineers.
G: But my sponsor is in the US.
M: Even if you want the US, it would be easier to apply from Israel. There are too many people here. In Israel your case becomes special and it has a better chance to succeed.

Visa application was a popular topic at the English Corner. Contents ranged from how to answer typical interview questions to which immigration officer to avoid. The student's expressions were full of disappointment with the officer and frustration with reality. Lying as a negative aspect of reality was compared with positive feelings in meeting a foreigner. The conversation testified that the sense of disappointment with reality and the idealisation of foreign countries intensified the motivation for English learning.

English used at the English Corner was beyond the token use of English at schools. Rather than functional phrases, information exchange and emotional sharing were the norm, with opportunities to speak English in a personally fulfilling and socially meaningful way. Encounters were brief but conversations were often frank, engaging and interesting.

7.2.3 The comments

Students considered the English Corner a place where they could use English:

I like going to the English Corner to speak English with others. (FM)
I used to go to the English Corner, but now time is limited so I don't. (ZT)
I only use English in the English Corner. I go to talk with university students and foreigners. (CJL)
I always go to the English Corner. I have talked with Canadians and Americans, but our talk was very shallow so I didn't feel I learned much. I desire for contact at a deeper level. (FK)
Sometimes I go to the English Corner to meet foreigners. At the beginning, I was afraid. I had only learned a little English. But I liked it so I kept going. I didn't talk much except greeting others in English. I decided to learn English well to speak with others. (G3A)

While many enjoyed the English Corner, superficiality disappointed students. This raised questions on the quality of communication at the English Corner. The nature of the English Corner as an artificial platform for speaking English seemed to add to conversations an artificial feeling. There was more freedom than classrooms, but freedom by itself did not satisfy students' deep needs. Schools organised English Corners were similar:

In Senior 1 we had an English Corner in our school. I was very happy to participate. Now it's no longer organised, because there's too much homework. (HK)
Our school had an English Corner. It is no longer there because we know one another too well now. Speaking in English is not practical. We can't find any interesting topics. (CJL)

Such statements indicated formal learning did not prepare students for speaking. When speaking was not beyond simple phrases such as greetings and commands, it was too formal. As a result, students felt they had nothing to talk about. The lack of discourse and pragmatic skills meant they were unable to begin and end conversations, hold and surrender turns, negotiate topics and take leaves. Formal learning thus failed to support informal learning.

Reasons for not liking English Corners were often fears:

The English Corner is quite messy. I live far away from it. So I don't go there. (MHW)
The English Corner was not a good place to speak English. There are bad people there. (HK)

The anarchic atmosphere and crowd of strangers easily intimidated some students. However, for the daring, the English Corner remained an exciting adventure.

7.2.4 Learning autonomy

The idea of Chinese people speaking English appeared problematic to students. Not only was it artificial, the nature of English spoken was far from natural. Native speakers often spoke formal and special English when they talked with non-natives. Such English featured superficial topics, simple vocabulary, slow pace, exaggerated articulation and intonation. It

was neither native nor natural. On the students' side, speaking was marked by constant awareness of grammar and heavy dependence on translation. Social pressure to conform and psychological intimidation to save face further inhibited them. Chinese culture could interpret Chinese speaking English as impolite, attention seeking or showing off. It was not natural, wise and proper for Chinese to speak English with one another. In addition, speaking English in public carried a pro-Westernisation statement. Without official endorsement, it was politically incorrect to speak English. Therefore, students had to ignore social customs, risk political trouble and resist face concerns to speak English. A great deal of courage was needed to break free and develop innovative opportunities. The English Corner, in this regard, was a test ground for confidence and courage. Some students became successful in this:

I first went to the English Corner about a year ago. I went with a few friends to listen. I felt I was lost. I couldn't even understand the English spoken by people of my own age. I could only hear a few words. But that was because I had never heard accents. I was translating every word into Chinese. So the first few times I went to experiment. I did not speak. Then one day I went by myself. I thought many students would go with me, but when I got there I was on my own. I thought I would leave, but I recognised somebody my friend once talked with. I thought he might recognise me, so I greeted him in English and asked him if he remembered me. His said no. I felt quite embarrassed but fortunately it was dark so nobody saw it.

I felt it was impolite to walk away. So I pumped myself up. I spoke of simple things. But I spoke pretty fast. I talked with someone about my age. He came from a foreign language school. He spoke fast, and was one year younger. His vocabulary was about the same as mine. We spoke fast so I did not have time to translate everything into Chinese. I followed the grammar and patterns we learned from school and what I heard from foreign films. I made a lot of mistakes. After one hour I went home. It was the first time I opened my mouth, and there was no classmate with me. I was encouraged and kept on going. The boy I talked with became a friend. Every time I went, I looked for him. His English was good. If we couldn't find anybody, we would speak to one another.

Then we became brave and went after foreigners. Foreigners often came late. Even ten minutes with them was excellent. If they came early, they would be surrounded by people. They were easier to understand because they spoke clearly with no technical terms. It's easier to guess!

The English Corner was organised by people. The government was not involved. People were divided into two groups, the inner half was adult; the outer half students. Students, especially those from foreign language school, had good pronunciation. English spoken by adults was bad. There's too much difference in our background so there's little to talk about. The foreign language school required students to go there once a week. Our English teacher encouraged us to go in Senior 1. The topics were very wide. I feel quite limited by the scope of my knowledge. (CJL)

Although grammar and sentence patterns from formal learning helped students speak basic English, the token use of English was problematic in that it encouraged the tendency to focus on form. In pronunciation, standard accent was emphasised to such an extent that accent replaced meaning. As a result, students could not understand English with different accents and developed negative attitudes against accents. Being able to understand and appreciate accents was an important skill for students of English as an international language. Understanding accents was a mark for native proficiency. Yet the intensive study of words and sentences conditioned students to mentally translating and constantly thinking of grammar. This prevented them from speaking freely. In addition, in a competitive culture where impression was the focus, students tried to speak fast. While some claimed that this gave them less time for translation, many did so either because they were nervous, or because speaking fast was perceived as speaking well. Therefore, clear speech should be encouraged to help focus on meaning.

Foreigners in China might not appreciate being the target of public attention. They could feel trapped when approached by students eager to speak English with them. Their reluctance could be perceived as rude, as Chinese culture interpreted attention as flattering. Nevertheless, for a Chinese learner, to speak with a foreigner, even for a few words, was a critical experience that often involved warm anticipation, overwhelming excitement and lingering memories. To them, no matter how well a Chinese might speak English, native English was always qualitatively better. Their English must be judged and accepted by native speakers. If speaking English with Chinese was practice, speaking with foreigners was the test. Students often found foreigners easier to understand, partly because native speakers selectively spoke slowly with formal speech and simple vocabulary when talking with Chinese. In a competitive system, students constantly compared themselves against

one another. Not being with classmates and friends could free and relax them as they did not have to worry about their face. A shared love for English brought people together. English accorded them a new shared identity that encouraged them to define new terms of relationship with Chinese and foreigners.

A key to success was identified as reflection, such as the realisation to focus on meaning rather than grammar when speaking. Reflection on learning could lead to creative learning even in highly restrictive systems. Students were freed to create environments according to their interests, personalities and aspirations. Learning became natural and personal. The gap between informal and formal learning was bridged. The following two cases revealed how English learning began to enrich students' lives and expand their horizon:

> Sometimes I go to the American Consulate because they have lectures in English on different aspects of American life. I would not tell my classmates or even my parents. I don't know if they will like it. I was scared when the Chinese guards took all our names and kept our ID cards while we were inside. I thought they might report me back to the school but they did not. Or maybe they did. I just don't know. But I think I will go again. I don't think there is anything wrong going there. For me it is just another interesting place. And I think it is a very good place to experience American life, just like Kentucky Fried Chicken. It's quite interesting. I like their reading room with many American magazines. They even have many magazines for teenagers like us. I don't understand everything in the lecture. But it is good to see that some Americans look just like us. Some of them are actually black! (LSH)

> I like to spend my holidays travelling. I try to keep a diary in English so that nobody could understand it but me. I can say whatever I want. Last year I went to visit factories with my father. I did some social investigation and found out that most factories had expensive machines imported from Japan or Germany but nobody knew how to use them. So the machines were just sleeping silently in the corner. The factory would send somebody to learn but nobody knew English, Japanese or German. This year I went with my mother back to the village where she stayed for her re-education 30 year ago. I was happy to be so close to nature away from the city but I was shocked by what I saw. I asked the children to take me to their school. They had to learn English but their teacher could not speak it. In Junior 2 they were still using the textbook of Junior 1. I tried to speak a few words in English to students. They just smiled back. I want to go back more often to help them. Maybe I can teach them some English. (ZS)

The importance of courage, independent thinking, self-reflection and connection-making was evident in developing learning autonomy when students refuse to give in to the confinement of the system and availed themselves of existing opportunities. When learning

was connected with social practice and personal interest, it became creative. Such autonomous learning expanded life scope, broadened perspective and enriched experience. In the process, students became motivated and self-directed in learning. English helped them pursue and develop their interests. Their interests enriched their experience, improved their English and increased their knowledge. This benefited them even in exams and brought further learning opportunities. Hence autonomous learning resembled the quality of acquiring in that learning became almost accidental.

7.3 Learning at large: the case of the media

Popular media was an increasingly important source of input for learners. However, with American influence, American English was becoming the standard. As students gained exposure to the natural use of English, their values and behaviours were changing. Freedom, democracy, equality and prosperity entered their value system. Movie and sports stars became role models. Fast food and mobile phones were the fashion.

7.3.1 Music and sports

In informal situations, students were better able to connect English and their interests with opportunities to exercise and develop learning autonomy. MTV and Karaoke stimulated their interest and motivation to learn English:

I listen to American and British songs. I like music. (QH)
I often sing English songs. I even sing Chinese songs in English sometimes. (MHW)
I like listening to original songs because they use the most recent colloquial terms. (LO)
I learn English pop songs by heart because I want to use their phrases in conversation. (ZQ)

Students seemed particularly impressed with the vividness of the language which confirmed their frustration with the rigidity of formal learning. The practice of singing Chinese songs in English reflected the influence of Chinese pop stars who mixed Chinese songs with English words, a practice imported from the multicultural music scene of Hong

Kong as one way to rebel against traditions. As the post-Cultural Revolution generation, students spoke with little concern for political correctness. The ideological relaxation was likely a result of the open door policy and English learning. Popular music with youthful singers dancing to fast rhythms, the rapid change of images and lights, the tendency to repeat simple phrases appealed to students who did not have to understand it to appreciate it. The appearance and atmosphere grasped their attention:

> I like English songs. I don't try to understand every word. I know the basic meaning and I can sing along, even if I am off the tune like Shakespeare in Chinese opera! English songs help me in many ways. They relax me in my homework. They even help me get exam questions right. At a recent party I sang "Can you feel the love tonight" from *Lion King*. My classmates enjoyed it. That was very satisfactory. It helped my English and made me happy. (GHG)

This student developed learning autonomy by becoming conscious of his passion and connecting it with learning. We noticed that English became a result rather than a reason of learning. English songs were used to practise listening and memorising, create a relaxed atmosphere for homework and exams, and satisfied personal needs for enjoyment and appreciation. Such learning was optimal as it applied personal gifts to meet personal needs with the new channels of English. The extent to which students were responsible for their learning determined the degree they optimised their informal opportunities. Reflection made them aware of their personalities, interests and gifts. They could then creatively connect it with English and gain increasing autonomy.

Like songs, sports contained rich cultural messages and were excellent authentic materials for learning English and raising cultural awareness:

> Many football stars are English. Getting to know them helps me know English better and learn about their way of life. I try to learn English according to what I like. (ZQL)
> The most important learning in English is outside class. Whatever we learn must be used. We memorise words and grammar, but we forget most of it if we don't use it. I pay great attention to English learning outside the class. For example, I like sports. Following American basketball and English football and watching Olympics on television increase my vocabulary, practice my listening comprehension, teach me about different countries and make my life more interesting. (FK)

Reflection from students indicated the growing importance of informal learning as it offered better opportunities to develop learning autonomy. Changes to formal learning might be difficult but they could often be realised in informal learning. Cultural learning and connection with life reality were aspects that formal learning with its preoccupation for examination simply failed to address. However, informal possibilities abounded in these. Increasing importance in formal learning could make students resent formal learning more. Since it better reflected the nature of language learning, it was a positive development as long as its social and cultural implications in changing students' perceptions and aspirations were made explicit.

7.3.2 Radio and television

Listening to foreign radio was politically dangerous under Mao's rule between 1949 and 1976. Foreign stations were labelled as enemy stations and the consequence of possessing a short-wave radio was severe. Since 1978, foreign stations became popular, bringing access to news and information in natural English. The student demonstrations in the 1980s illustrated the mediation of foreign media on students' values when they were perceived pragmatically as means of learning English and sources of information rather than politically as agents of foreign propaganda. Popular stations as the BBC and the VOA offered various ELT programmes:

At home I listen to the BBC. (LZ)
I learned much English by listening to the BBC and the VOA. (FY)

Tapes of BBC and VOA programmes were openly sold as listening materials in universities and bookstores. Both firmly established themselves as disseminators of English and information. Chinese national and local radio stations broadcast different levels of ELT programmes around the clock. These programmes often adopted American,

British, Canadian and Australian materials co-presented in Chinese and English by Chinese and foreign teachers, a pattern established in the 1980s by the BBC's successful adaptation of *Follow Me*. Despite official jamming, growing availability of English broadcast increased English input and improved learning conditions.

So far as input was concerned, foreign television and films provided added exposure. It was easy to observe that Chinese television was full of British dramatisation and nature programmes and American talk shows, fitness exercises and soap operas. Special Olympics, World Cups and NBA shows attracted national attention and produced waves of fever to learn English:

I like foreign cartoons. I watch them to relax. They take me to another world, away from the worries of life. This makes me happy. (ZJ)
I don't like actions or commercials. I like documentaries of foreign customs and habits, especially those about places of historical interests and natural beauties. (G3A)
I like English teaching programmes on television. I do not understand all of it but I like to feel it. I can hear Americans speak in natural environment. It feels good. (LSH)
At home there are all kinds of English programmes on television and video tapes. We watch them daily. My favourite is NBA matches. I miss no game no matter what. (MMX)

Such programmes increasingly exposed students to natural English, its culture and values. Since the early 1980s, ELT programmes took more and more air time. Television University courses and BBC ELT programmes were the most popular. Foreign films and videos offered not only entertainment but English lessons to the enjoyment and delight of many students.

In the 1990s, Hollywood movies flooded into China. *Lion King*, *Forrest Gump*, *The English Patient*, *Titanic* and *American Beauty* were dubbed into Chinese and attracted millions of viewers. Copies of classic and modern blockbusters were easily available:

Watching foreign films helps me the most. I am happy when I understand something. (MHW)
I spend much time on foreign films. I pay particular attention to how actors speak English. (CJL)
I learn English through watching foreign films. It is more interesting than learning at school. (SY)

I watch foreign films to widen the scope of my perspective so I am not limited by textbooks. (LZ)
I like English videos with Chinese subtitles. Without reading the subtitles, I can understand a third. When I don't understand I read the subtitles. This improves my listening. (G3D)
I like English videos. But most tapes in China are poor in quality. Many copies are incomplete. Imported films are not good if they have sex, murder, and violence. I like classics. (LHK)
Foreign films are the best. If it's translated it's no good any more. I am attracted by their culture and their acting. Production techniques are advanced. Stories are fast and their plots tight. (G3B)

Despite concerns for the quality and content of certain films, there were great possibilities for learning English from films such as *Lion King*, *Forrest Gump*, and *Schindler's List*:

I like *Lion King*. It's beautifully produced. It teaches lessons on life, love and responsibility. We can unconsciously hear natural English. Slowly we get used to its style. This is very helpful. (ZQL)
I like *Forrest Gump*. It revealed the American spirit: Keep trying, never give up. They have such a gentleman style, willing and brave enough to help others by sacrificing their own interests. (G3B)
I enjoy listening to conversations in foreign films to feel the difference of English. In translation, the real meaning is lost. I like *Schindler's List* the best. Conversations are touching, especially the monologue of the Jewish girl that exposes human nature, the good and the evil. I did not understand all, so I watched it a few times and understood more each time. (FK)

Films taught more than English. Students learned to think critically, comparing Chinese and foreign cultures, whether they liked the results or not:

American movies taught me that Americans are independent people. Their parents require their children to be on their own feet, to develop their own individual personalities, to be self-reliant. I was quite impressed. Our relationship structure should be independent as well as co-operative. We should love friends, trust them, help them, but never rely on them. (GHG)
Lion King is about lonely nobles who after all kinds of hardship stand up for their victory. This is perhaps what they respect as individuality. In China, we depend on one another. *Forrest Gump* is a personal reflection on America. Americans are so different. We have a clear aim to go to university. They have no clear aims. Life must be so empty. The hero was successful in the end, but only by chance. In China, if you want to succeed, you have to compete. (FK)
Senior middle school students are old enough to make decision about the good and the bad in foreign culture. Small children may not see this. That's why you see kids in the streets behaving like Hong Kong hooligans. This shows the influence of foreign films. It's easy to become worshipers of America. The US is so rich and modern and China is so much behind. Even in film making, there are many things China won't be able to do. I feel Chinese life is miserable. (G1A)

By presenting idealised versions of Western culture and values, many films had the effect of making students unhappy with China. Watching the Olympics' opening ceremony with some students, students were full of praises and amazement:

Look at that! He lit the fire with an arrow. How come we never thought of that. (LW1)
Did you see that? Children playing in water fountains in the street. I would love to do that. (LW2)

Such feelings disoriented students from their identity. Additionally, students were frustrated when they thought they could not understand foreign films. As formal learning

stressed accuracy, comprehension was perceived as understanding every word. Thus their self-tolerance was low:

> I am often puzzled by foreign films. It's like "An ox head does not fit a horse mouth". People in the film seem to be quite amused but I do not feel it's funny at all. It does not make any sense. (ZY)

It was easy to appreciate such frustration as their frequent contact with natural English increased the gap between formal and informal learning. The popularity of foreign films suggested that effective learning took place when English was used to engage students into their social and cultural life reality. While their life experiences lacked natural context for acquiring, foreign films gave students a feeling of being in a natural environment to experience the new culture. As the Internet entered the mass media, learning conditions continued to change.

7.3.3 Computer and the Internet

Students were spending an increasing amount of time online at home. The vulgarity of some foreign films helped the Internet gain an innocent image of learning and keeping in touch with the world. The entertaining use of computers from video games to surfing was more easily overlooked by parents as they perceived these as helpful to learning English and computing skills. Considering students' lack of time, this was significant as computer-based learning was time-consuming. Internet use soared despite tightening censorship[40]. Many foreign sites were blocked, but the effect of the Internet on learning was significant as it exposed students to vast amount of information in English. As a result, some students felt English was more convenient than Chinese:

> Computer is helpful. At the beginning I play games. If you know English, not only can you play well, you can also know more English and more about computers. For example, if you want to

[40] According to the BBC World Service, the Chinese government has recently blocked access to the Chinese web pages of the BBC but has left its English web pages fully accessible to users in China (BBC World Service, 13 October, 1998) .

write a programme, you have to do it in English. Programming in Chinese is troublesome. You have to memorise so much. So for computers and the Internet, English provides a shortcut. (LHK)

Related to the popularity of information technology was the concern for copyrights in China. Pirated softwares were easily affordable to most students. While profits were lost, public exposure was increased. Easy access thus served students and English language well by bringing information and technology to the hands of ordinary Chinese. In the process, English empowered particularly the deprived since they had relatively more to gain from the less discriminative dissemination of information on the Internet.

7.4 Learning at large: the case of private education

Increasing demand for English created bumper opportunities for business. The quantification of education by examination assisted this commercialisation process. Posters advertised weekend and evening English courses in city streets, boasting native speakers, foreign textbooks and TOEFL preparations. Because American universities used TOEFL scores for admission and scholarship decisions, TOEFL became big business since the 1980s. As Chinese teachers taught for exams, America cashed in on the best Chinese brains:

I have to leave the school mid-day to go to classes for TOEFL exams. I have permit from teachers to skip afternoon classes because I lived in the US for two years. I want to go back to America to study. TOEFL is the most important goal for me right now. (GW)

Commercialisation was not limited to private courses. In the 1990s, private schools began to re-appear, but it had yet to establish itself to be rendered as part of formal education as conditions continued to ripen. With high tuition fees, private schools often took students whose exam results would have disqualified them for public schools and students with special political and financial background. Some of the elite private schools had resources to employ foreign teachers. The next section presents a day in the life of such a school:

GY: To glorify Asia

For rich parents who want their children to receive an American-style education, GY, named after its principal, QGY, is an obvious choice. The annual fee for this private boarding school is an astronomical £22,000. A few years in existence, GY has over 500 students from pre-school age to Year 12. It claims to help students enter foreign universities to achieve international recognition. "Chinese parents will do anything to send their children to foreign universities," said Professor W, an assistant to the principal. "Our students came from all over China including Taiwan. We even have students from Burma, whose parents are military officers too busy to look after them."

GY buildings are painted with blue, red and white stripes. The gate is guarded by German shepherd dogs. At night they roam the compound to keep the bad elements out. This is an important day for GY as the official Central China Television is visiting. In a classroom, a crew is interviewing an American teacher in front of his standing students. The interviewer, a young lady, asks questions in English, while the American replies in Chinese. The teacher is apparently unhappy with all the attention and directs the microphone towards his students. The young lady finally turns her microphone towards students, asking them to behave actively, "You all look like you've had it!" With that she begins to direct them: "You smile. You talk to her. You read. You write. You look back. You jump up and down." By this time, students are terrified. The teacher breaks in to start a jumping game. The crew finally leaves. Class resumes, only to be interrupted again by the lady, "Were you paid more in the US?" "Oh, I wasn't working in the States. That's why I came to China." At that point the bell rings for the end of the class.

"They don't know what they are doing," Mr. Q, the principal, is not impressed. Mr. Q is a film director himself, according to the American teacher. "He knows all about it, public relations. This school is here because of his connections. It's not education that matters, you know, it's his social engineering. He's all over Beijing whenever there's a problem." When the bell rings again, marching music comes from loudspeakers. Students run to the playground for the assembly, chanting school songs all their way:

I am Chinese. I love China.
I want to make my motherland stronger and more beautiful.
I am a GY student. I love GY School.
I want to win my school glory and honour...

Then national and school flags are raised as students sing the national anthem in English:

Rise up, those who do not want to be slaves,
Let us build a new Great Wall with our flesh and blood.
China is facing survival crisis in history,
Build the motherland and guard the motherland,
We must strive hard and bold.
For that let us march on and on....

Walking by a classroom, I hear the voice of a lady talking about writing: "You all like Tom Cruise and Mike Jordan, don't you? Boys like them, but girls like them even more." A Canadian teacher is upset by Mr. Q who tells her that China with thousands of years of history knows more about education than she does. "I just do not appreciate being used as a show piece. They only want us because of our looks. We are their ads!" A Chinese teacher agrees. "Everything here is for show," she laughs. "They are trying to get as many students as they can. It's all business."

According to the American teacher, the big turn-over and poor quality of teachers are serious concerns. "They treat Chinese teachers badly. There's always a cheap supply." Communication is poor. "Somewhere along the line, things get held up. I don't know if we want to stay for long."

Chinese teachers at GY are badly paid. When Mr. Q's wife hands out contracts and wages, her dogs sit with her. Mr. H, the young arts teacher, is one of those who do not like the dogs. He came from Beijing three years ago, hoping to learn English from working with foreign teachers. He thinks he has picked up enough English. "I heard on the radio that all private schools would be closed if they did not meet official requirement." He says nervously, as Prof. W walks in.

W's job is to internationalise GY. He comes with a collection of foreign press cuttings about GY for me to read. "We have to use national textbooks for our primary school and junior middle school. In senior years, we choose our own books, because senior school is no longer compulsory education. We aim at international exams. We have exchanged students with foreign schools."

I must confess that I give up meeting the principal when I see those dogs. Besides, nobody seems to know where he is. I finally see him waving by the school bus as we drive away.

GY's chief purpose seemed to be profits. In trying to recruit as many students as possible, looking good became the main concern. Buildings and equipment were impressive but only from the outside. Many buildings with modern facilities appeared permanently locked up, only to be opened for visitors. Observatories had no telescope inside. A closer look at classrooms revealed many broken windows. To lure students and parents, public relations were taken seriously. GY claimed to follow an American curriculum so that their education was international and their graduates could feed into foreign universities. Such claims were better described as aspirations. Foreign teachers were hired to impress as their looks were more important than their teaching. Students were mostly from prospering families. Teaching often became baby-sitting. The insecurity of the school policy, the lack of respect for teachers, low teacher morale and student motivation made it hard for teachers to commit to the school. As an example of alternative education, GY offered important lessons for China's private education.

7.5 Summary: English for going abroad

For many students, informal learning was limited to homework, the continuation of formal learning. They were unable to break away from the overwhelming concern for exams. Despite their complaints about its rigidity, they could not avoid it even at home. This was

due to the lack of time, freedom and, last but not the least, courage. Only for some students, informal learning became the extension of formal learning. They managed to develop autonomy over their learning outside the school. The nature of learning changed from passive and intensive study of artificial rules to the exceedingly comprehensive input of natural English and active application of knowledge and skills. As English penetrated contemporary life, there were growing needs and opportunities for students to become creative in learning and make learning personal. Those students able and willing to avail themselves of such opportunities to use English considered informal learning as more natural and interesting. Compared with the intensive nature of formal learning, informal learning was relatively extensive and more comprehensive. Students had opportunities to receive input from a wide variety of natural English and develop different skills. As China integrated with the world and economic reforms, social developments and information technology continued to facilitate growing opportunities, there would be more contact with native speakers and more opportunities to connect English learning with personal interests, life experience and aspirations. Increasing exposure to foreign media, connection with the Internet, encounters at the English Corner and experience with foreign cultures overseas were bound to make informal learning more relevant and important to students, as English became a channel to reach beyond China and its established orders.

If formal learning was dominated by examination, the underlying theme for informal learning seemed to be going abroad. Nowhere was this revealed more clearly than at the English Corner. While examination was a public agenda that regulated learning through the institution of authority, going abroad was a personal aspiration that motivated learning through the inspiration of English and the idealisation of the West. The former was a passive, quantitative process, the latter an active and qualitative one. Pragmatic traditions

as revealed in the instrumental understanding of English in national and personal developments remained unchanged. Publicly, it was for national modernisation through science and technology. Privately, it was for personal improvement through the freedom and prosperity of life overseas. Going abroad was therefore hailed as a personal success by both the populace and the intellectual. In the discourse of modernisation, going abroad conveniently and simultaneously served the public and the private agenda. Students' aspiration to go abroad appeared to be based on the idealisation of the West and its values. Such idealisation originated from the mediation of parents and the media. It was stimulated by dissatisfaction with life reality in China. However perceived, the craving for freedom, democracy and prosperity made informal learning qualitatively different from formal studies. Learning thus began to resemble acquiring as it became self-automated, subconscious, almost accidental.

Students' reflection on learning seemed crucial for developing learning autonomy and making connections between formal and informal learning. Reflection helped them to learn about learning. They could then become aware of the nature of their learning and exercise control over it through active, creative and self-directed learning. Formal learning largely failed to address such high level learning because of its pragmatic focus. Confidence, courage, a clear purpose based on experiences from the past and inspired by aspirations for the future seemed necessary for learning autonomy to develop. Some students succeeded despite the limitation of conditions. Their learning became resourcefully personal drawing from both formal and informal opportunities. Their cases indicated that the limitation of formal learning did not have to hinder informal learning. Rather, learning was a natural process so dynamic that unfavourable conditions actually stimulated stronger motivation and triggered perseverance in learning. The unsatisfactory formal learning due to structural

limitation could motivate, intensify and sustain creative informal learning. The key to informal learning was that it was when students approached learning personally by stepping out of the routines that they began to develop learning autonomy. The degree of their openness, the extent of their flexibility and the level of their creativity would determine how far they could go. For learning to change from a passive to an active process, critical awareness and constant reflection were imperative. This was where this study, in its process and finding, seeks to help.

This chapter discussed the extent and nature of informal learning and identified the importance of reflection in learning. The next chapter will analysis students' reflective statements to continue the exploration of the main themes and the examination of how students make sense of their learning.

Chapter 8 Reflections on English learning

There is a lot of good literature in Britain but people are cold. In America people are open but they love money and guns. Canada is a good mixture. To study, I would go to England. To work, perhaps America. To live, certainly Canada. (LO/SD)

The study of students' learning experience identified examination and going abroad as dominant themes in their English learning. We also noticed that students' reflection was crucial in developing learning autonomy which made learning a personal process. This chapter focuses on students' reflection to explore their reasons, aspirations and attitudes concerning English learning. It seeks to access students' values by describing their aspirations in terms of favourite jobs and countries and examining their attitudes towards Chinese and English languages, cultures and peoples.

8.1 The reasons

Recent studies on motivation in L2 learning emphasised the interaction between motivation and learning process. Students' remarks indicated that their learning experience and perceptions influenced one another. As learning progressed, motivation often shifted from the public to the private, from the instrumental to the integrative. But this change could take place in reverse direction, especially when exam pressure intensified:

I began to learn English because my parents wanted me to. Later I became more and more interested. I can enrich my life by learning English. (WY)
At the beginning I learned it because I liked it. There was a sense of freshness. Now as I start to think about my future, I feel the urgency to learn it. (SF)
I started learning English as a required subject. I had to learn it. As I learn more I became curious, active and good at English. This increased my interest. I would love to learn more. (YX)
In Junior 1, I was passive. It was a tested subject. As I learn more, my reasons changed. English means I am no longer limited by our border. Because life has become international, it is impossible to limit one's life to one's own country. I would love to go abroad. (LZ)

The change from "have to" to "like to" was a change from the passive to the active, as a result of learning and the interaction of experiences and perceptions.

8.1.1 The public

Students perceived English in different ways. On one extreme, there was a *pragmatically instrumental* understanding on the nature of English as a subject:

The school offers English as a subject and provides the conditions to learn it. (G2A)
There are English textbooks from junior to senior schools so I must learn it. I don't like it. (LPJ)

At the other end, they interpreted its meaning in a *pragmatically relational* way as an international language, pragmatic in the sense that English was seen as an asset to access the world, relational as a personal quality and identity to belong to the world:

I won't give up English for other languages. English is used all over the world. (CZ)
English is the most widely used language in the world. If you know English, it equals knowing many languages. You can communicate with the world. (FK)
To communicate internationally we need English as the bridge. English is a world language. Much is written in English, from the Internet to product manuals. Even if I can't go abroad, it is still important. With English we will know the world. (FY)

Students expressed their understanding of English in *patriotically instrumental* terms as a tool for modernisation or a national quality essential for its growing international status:

I learn English to help develop China and internationalise myself. (WW)
China needs to be connected with the world. English is the bridge. (SF)
If everybody in China speaks English, her status in the world will improve more. (FM)
China will be a strong power. The quality of our people must be high. We must learn English. (CLJ)
At present science and technology are progressing rapidly. English is helpful for receiving advanced technology from foreign countries. (LPJ)

Patriotism was often defined in terms of foreign prejudice against China. Students' reaction to national humiliation could motivate them to learn English for *patriotically emotional* reasons:

I hope I won't have to lower my head in international communication. (CZ)
I want to introduce China to the world so that the foreign prejudice can be eliminated. (WP)
English always reminds me of the Opium War. Our defeat was due to our blind resentment of the West. I learn English so that the world will know China and China will know the world. (QM)
China's status will improve. Many foreigners come for investment and business. With English we would not be short-changed. Chinese people are discriminated against because we are poor. Once our economy develops, we will not be treated unequally any more. (SY)
I want to know foreign cultures. Foreigners' understanding of us is limited to ancient history and huge market. They don't like us to be strong. They try to block us. If we can understand the world more, we will survive better. Learning English is a good way to know the world. (LO)

One of my cousins married a Dane. She told me Chinese were treated worse than black people--black people are physically stronger. Once she went to dinner at her mother-in-law's. They deliberately made noise as they drank the soup. My cousin was so mad that she left. (WCY)

Students regretted the way the world treated China, regarding China's economic backwardness as the reason for its suffering. This understanding indicated the influence of Marxism, which interpreted reality, even emotions, attitudes and relationships in materialistic terms. Some students resented such perspective:

I have my own doubt about modern culture. The good traditions such as respecting parents and teachers have disappeared. Our culture emphasises personal relationship. Western culture defines value in material terms. I prefer our own. (WCY)

Public reasons appeared instrumental but there were underlying emotions about national quality, identity and shared aspirations for China to be recognised by the world. The instrumental outlook and the emotional reaction motivated students:

At a world wine fair, our best wine, *Maotai*, did not sell. One day the manager got mad. The trip was going to be a failure. In his anger he threw a bottle on the ground. The smell of the wine quickly spread throughout the hall. Foreigners traced the smell and found *Maotai*. It became famous, with orders from many countries. We are weak in showing our products to the world, at presenting ourselves. We must learn English. (GHG)

The Chinese version of nationalism was pragmatic, as students shared when comparing English and Chinese languages:

It's impossible to communicate always in Chinese. Chinese is essential as our mother tongue. But China is opening up. Whether I go abroad or not English is a must for communication. (CJL)
There are many Chinese speakers but it is not as widely used. To catch up with the world, we must learn English. China centuries ago was the world leader. Now English is the way to go. (DG)
Chinese is an excellent language. But Chinese teaching is a failure. First, it is not practical. Creative writing is not taught even though it is useful. Second, in writing we are to follow an imposed title. As soon as we open up we are marked down. I learn English because it will make me free. (YQY)
Chinese is the best language. Since the bone and shell inscriptions of Shang Dynasty, it's got more than 3,000 years of history, conceiving many generations of Chinese people and culture. The history of Chinese shows the talents of the Chinese people. But, if I want a good job to make my contribution to China, I must learn English. It is the world's language. (SF)

Idealistically, even though students defended Chinese enthusiastically and pragmatically they opted rationally for English. In a written answer to my question on the status of

Chinese, Xu Jialu (1996), Deputy Chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress and Minister-in-Charge of Chinese Language admitted:

> In many students' hearts, the importance of English has surpassed Chinese. Even in education policies, English became higher than Chinese. Recent surveys among students indicated that their Chinese knowledge and skills were dropping. The level of their ancient Chinese was even worse.

Such concerns indicated that despite the lack of official status, English has become the focus of language education in China with grave consequences for Chinese as the national language. This became particularly significant as the institutional belief as revealed in the education policy seemed to maintain that the usefulness of English could be isolated from the reality it represented and values it carried and that the relationship between Chinese and English was antagonistic.

8.1.2 The private

As reviewed, the instrumental understanding of English disconnected its cultural meaning (what it does) from its structural meaning (what it is). Since instrumentalism tended to ignore its context, questions must be raised on what English was, what it was made to do and where. The popular perception of English as a tool was *pragmatically instrumental*:

> Its usefulness is the biggest reason. (G1A)
> With English you would be given priority for good jobs. (SF)
> For my future development in education and career, English is a tool. (FY)
> It will help my employment and put me in a favourable position in competitions. (SY)
> It is a tool to compete for university, for jobs, for going overseas, for scholarships. (ZG)
> English is practical in doing business with foreigners and working for foreign firms. (WCY)
> English is helpful for going abroad, for getting a good job, and for achieving success. (DY)
> English is practical. It is a key subject for exams. For jobs in the future English will be crucial. It is a powerful weapon. English is a tool subject. (LHK)

Yet personal goals in learning English were achieved through public competition. This gave instrumentalism a relational dimension. It was in competition against one another that the significance of English at the personal level was realised. The nature of exams was competition which defined the reality of learning by antagonising and stratifying

relationships. Imperial exams might have been replaced by national exams, but competition as a means of defining personal quality and exams as a quantitative way of qualifying students remained unchanged:

Exam is the most important thing. If we do it well, we fly. If we don't, we crawl. If I get bad marks for English, no matter how good my other subjects are, I won't go to any good university. If I don't work hard at English now, I will surely drop behind. Competition will be fiercer. (LHK)
I do not like English, but if I want to have any chance for success, I need English. Advertisements seek people with good English, not good Chinese. In senior years the issue is exam. My English is not good. The most practical thing is to become competitive by learning English. (GJ)

The aim of learning was described as to make them more competitive for the future:

Exam is not my aim. My aim is to excel in competition so that I can beat exams. (CJL)
English is a key subject, especially in the highly competitive society in the future. But our exams focus on grammar and do not make us competitive. (GJ)
Exam does not make me competitive. English does. My purpose is clear: to learn English for foreign relations or international finance so that I can compete for China. (LDH)
I don't learn English for exams. English is necessary for enjoying modern life, for scientific research and for cultural studies. I can learn a lot of new ideas from reading directly in English. I can express my own thinking directly with foreigners. By widening my perspective, increasing my knowledge, improving my quality, English makes me highly competitive for the future. (ZQL)

The importance of competition was such that it dominated the public and personal agenda.

China was competing with the world. Chinese people competed with one another to seek freedom and prosperity overseas. National and personal qualities were often described in identical terms in which English was deemed one of the basic skills for modernisation:

English is the best bridge for the future. (WP)
English is a bridge that can take me anywhere I want. (LDH)
English is a basic skill. Once I have English I have one skill many don't. (FK)
English is a tool. I don't think it is like maths, physics and chemistry. It is a necessary assistant for my work and study in the future. Without English, I will be blocked in the future. (CZ)
Learning English for me is like mastering a tool. No matter what I become, scientist, manager, diplomat, English is essential. English, maths and computer are the three essential tools. (CJL)

Instrumentalism also perceived English as essential for the computer-based information:

I like playing video games. I need a lot of English. (ZY)
To master English is very important for using computers. (DG)
The modern world is the world of information. Most information is in English. (ZT)
Learning English helps me with computer. With English and maths I can be a programmer. (GHG)
Most computing languages are in English. If you want to be good, you have to know English. (ZQL)

English was rendered as a means to an end, not an end in itself. Consequently, students were uninterested in specialising in English:

I will not specialise in English. I do not want to be a translator. (CJL)
I never think of working as a translator to relate to language directly. (YX)
I won't go to English department in university. Languages are but tools. (CZ)

Instrumentalism could be carried to such an extreme that English was defined as a utility:

It is essential capital for my life. (LX)
English is an aspect of wealth. Without it, I am crippled. (WU)
To know English is to gain an extra stick to walk and extra capital to live. (YK)
English is personal capital for social status. It helps me catch up with the changing society rather than being eliminated. Learning English has a hundred benefits but no harm at all. (QH)

Students also perceived English in *relationally instrumental* terms, as a tool for foreign contact and cultural appreciation. They seemed eager in making such contact:

I can make different friends and learn about foreign culture and social customs. (DY)
I want to communicate with foreigners, to understand foreign films, to read English newspapers, and to absorb foreign culture. It deepens my understanding of the world. (YK)
In international relationships, if you depend on interpreters, it's impossible to deeply understand. If you know their language, you can communicate at deep levels and make good friends. (G1B)
I learn English to introduce myself and my country to foreigners. I want to enrich my life, to make contact with new people and new things. English will help me understand them better. (GHG)
I would like to understand their life. My father's English was not good when he was abroad. He knew a lot of foreigners but he understood little. He wasted his trip. I want to communicate with foreigners directly without any translators. (G3C)

Although the motivation was to integrate, the understanding was instrumental in that English was seen as a tool for personal contact, cultural access, a bridge to go overseas:

I would love to travel around the globe. (WP)
Naturally, I hope I will go to study abroad. (QM)
English is the foundation for studying overseas. (SF)
I hope I can go abroad to further my study. Knowing English is a must. (LPJ)
I want to study overseas, to experience the world. I have never met any foreigner. (TYH)
My biggest hope is to go overseas to have a look of the world. English can help me. (LHK)
China is big. But the world is bigger. To go abroad and make foreign friends, I need English. (FM)
Without English life is limited. I learn it for more space, wider environment, for going abroad. (ZQ)

Going abroad was a means to better education, employment and experience. This perspective of English would affect the quality of contact with foreign culture and relationship with foreign people, making it purpose-driven, or relating for purposes other than relationship itself.

At the personal level, English was also valued as a symbol for quality. Many students associated English with honour, fame, privilege, prestige and status. The function of English was not only to empower and enable but to set standards for quality and mark social status:

Speaking English makes me feel good about myself. (G2A)
Personal quality is defined now with English and computer. (G2B)
The sense of honour in English marks me highly educated. (ZQ)
English is an important standard in evaluating the quality of a person. (ZT)
I feel proud to be able to use English, because it shows knowledge and quality. (TYH)
It indicates my quality, proving that I can do things others may not be able to do. (ZG)
The most important reason is to improve my quality. English gives me many abilities. (WU)
If I want to be a man of quality fit for society and adaptable to changes, I must know English. (HK)

The growing importance of English coincided with the diminishing of the power of Chinese. The association of English with science, technology, freedom, democracy, modernisation and globalisation produced an aspiration for a new identity defined in English. In addition, growing power of English contributed to the stratification of the Chinese society. A recent survey[41] found Chinese scholars ranked Chinese people in the descending order of those married to the Blonde & Brunette, overseas Chinese, resident in foreign countries and finally, residents in China. This order revealed the dominance of English in the perception of power among Chinese intellectuals. Even though English was powerful at the personal level, such power was fulfilled at the social level. Identity thus connected the personal meaning of English with its public meaning.

There were students who learned English for their curiosity, interest and fascination. Within this motivation language was the end itself rather than means to an end:

Chinese square characters are rigid. English handwriting is pretty. (WU)
I found English articulation very clear and its expression straightforward. (G1A)
I learn English because I have a sense of curiosity for it. I am very interested. (TYH)
English is like a stream of water falling from the mountain. English sounds so nice. (HJ)

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[41] Feng Hua Yuan, 1998. http://www.fhy.net/gif/1998/9807a/06.html

My interest in English far surpasses my interest in Chinese. English sounds lovely to me. (CLJ)
What I like to do is to do what I like! I learn English because I like it. Even if it is not in the exams, I still like it. Whenever I speak English with foreigners, I have a sense of thrill and satisfaction. When I read English, I feel pleased. There is a sense of joy in my heart. (QM)

Students who liked English for its own sake tended to perceive it in an idealised and romanticised fashion, especially in relation to Chinese. In the context that English and Chinese were seen as representatives of West and East cultures, the fondness for English showed that students' experience with English was not only instrumentally significant but cultural insightful. Many regarded English as their favourite subject:

I like English the best. (LSH)
I like English and physics the best. (FY)
Of all the subjects, English is the best. No subject is as interesting as English. I learn other subjects for exams but I learn English because I like it very much. (DY)

Hence English was beyond the immediate concerns for exams, worthy for its own sake:

I like to sing in English. I am very fond of its flow. (G1A)
Reading English in the original was far more interesting than reading the translation. (DY)
English can change my thinking pattern. Through understanding foreign countries in English, I can see the world with a balance. I can consolidate my patriotism and adjust my values. I will use it all my life, as my second language, my second way of thinking. (LX)

One could argue that in these statements English was still perceived as a tool, but the pursuit of pleasure in English was beyond the pragmatic concern of the instrumental nature. The ends were not so much practical benefits but cultural insights. Such understanding of English was more focused on its internal power, its linguistic features and thinking patterns rather than external power in economic and social gains. Its intellectual functions in perceiving reality, interpreting experience, forming concept, processing information and organising knowledge were realised when students learned to make sense of life and participate in the world in English.

While the nature of students' reasons for learning English was mixed, they seemed to perceive the reasons as practical even when they were cultural and ideological in nature:

There are many practical benefits from English learning. You can read and hear about foreign countries. You can understand their economy and culture. You gain an international perspective. You have better reference when making decisions about the future. (G1A)

The perception of English in terms of its benefits was rooted in instrumentalism. It defined English in utilitarian terms despite the fact that it influenced our understanding. The conflict of external and internal meaning of English was an important feature of English learning in China.

Students perceived and described their achievements in English learning in many ways.

I can speak slowly with foreigners now. (QM)
I can understand news and articles in English now. This made me happy. (HJ)
Without English, I am incomplete. English has raised my academic and social status. (LX)
I can read short articles in English. My heart is full of joy. I can use a new language. (WLT)
The best thing I learned from English is a wider perspective to understand the world now. (LHK)
English is flexible. It has influenced my thinking. I am more open towards new things now. (YX)
I learned a new language very different from Chinese. What you read in English cannot really be expressed in Chinese. I am more confident now. (LO)

On the practical level, there was joy when they could use English to enrich their life. More deeply, many felt English influenced their thinking and their identity, making them more open-minded in their understanding of the world and more confident in themselves.

8.1.3 The parental

It appeared that social influence mediated by parents strongly affected students' learning. Parental influence operated between public and personal meaning. The personal projection of modernisation was interpreted as going abroad, and going abroad as success:

My father knows English. He cares a lot for my English. He encourages me to go abroad. (TYH)
I learn English to realise my parents' expectations for me to become successful, that is, to go abroad. This is the most important. (QM)
The biggest reason, perhaps, is my uncle. My uncle is at Qinghua University. He's finished his doctorate and works for a company there. My parents told me I should follow my uncle. He was a Red Guard and had no education, but he almost qualified to go overseas except he had little English. He was very disappointed. My parents use him to encourage me to learn English. (CJL)

It seemed that values of English became personally meaningful to students through parental mediation. Parental expectations were high, as parents were denied opportunities by the Cultural Revolution. Such mediation took place in different ways:

When I began, English was just another subject. But my father wrote me from Japan to say that English is for communication. With his age and the fact that he is in Japan, he still learns English. I realised I would be a deaf outside China. How sad it would be if I can only live in China with no connection with the world! This drives me to learn English. (XH)
I had no personal motive to learn English until a letter from my father told me that even in Pakistan, English is very useful. He said if he went shopping without a translator it was very inconvenient. Sometimes he was invited to parties but it was hard to talk to anybody. He was frustrated that he had no communication with the people. English became much more important to me. (G3C)

Students' respect for parents and eagerness to please them helped to motivate them. Parental mediation was thus a unique feature in the motivation dynamics. With more than twenty years of the practice of the family planning policy, the majority of the students were from the one-child families where they were the focus of the family. Parental involvement was likely to increase, as revealed by two parents on the future of their children:

ZS's mother (ZSM, while peeling apples and oranges): Originally I wanted him to become a prime minister. We developed his independence since he was small. We wanted him to have many abilities. We taught him how to relate with others. He took the train from Beijing back all by himself when he was 12. He went to Shiyan for industrial research during the summer at 13. He went to Kunming at 14. Last year, he was in Beijing to represent Sichuan in the national student conference. This year he went to the US with the school delegation.

Ms. Zhang (Z): ZS went through the customs and immigration by himself and helped others. The official interpreter couldn't understand what was going on!

ZSM: His principal said ZS impressed him so much on the trip that he believed he deserved all opportunities to go overseas. It is his nature to help others. There is too much control in China.

Z: He acted like a big brother to my daughter. He's the only person I want to help besides my daughter. I was going to get him to Japan, but it would be too hard for him not speaking Japanese.

ZSM: Ms. Zhang told me he must go overseas.

Z: ZS's problem is he does not flatter. He does not know how to please people. To climb up you must be well connected. I know quite a few provincial leaders. I visited them often. I was going to take ZS to give him some exposure. But these leaders do not look happy at all. What kind of face his boss has decides if they are having a good day or not. You see, they are not free. I'd rather be a rich businessman with money rather than a politician with power. No matter who you are, no matter what government we have, if you have cash, they all smile. It's like that throughout history. I have made up my mind. Politics is a dangerous game too hard to play.

ZSM: After visiting the US ZS is more determined to go to Qinghua University. I know he can make it, but if he does not, I don't know what to do. I am convinced he should go abroad. He will have to make it. I am confident my son will.

Z: ZS must go abroad, the sooner the better.

While students aspired to go abroad for experience and learning, parents often talked in concrete terms about how and where to go. Success and honour were attached to the economic benefits and political freedom of life overseas. Students echoed such concerns:

The biggest difference between China and foreign countries is China's backwardness. The reason is not economic but political. The bottom line is the quality of our people. Our education lags far behind the world. (LDH)

English is very important for us who live in the time when two kinds of life are coming together. We will need to accept many foreign ideas, because things in China do not satisfy us any more. We must take nutrition from other countries. (GHG)

These remarks confirmed the importance of affective factors in learning English. Students' negative feelings towards China and positive attitudes towards foreign countries motivated English learning. Parental mediation heavily affected their values. The opinion that China's problem was political and educational suggested that students were able to reflect on the nature of their experience. Such personal reflection and parental mediation between the society and the student worked together to define the motivation of English learning.

8.2 The aspirations

The advantage of studying aspirations was that they not only help us access learning motives but they were personal. Students were more likely to break away from the public discourse to reflect on their passions and dreams in concrete terms.

8.2.1 Favourite jobs

Many students were too busy to think about the future. This did not mean students had no aspirations. Indeed, the lack of choice made personal dreams all the more meaningful.

Students frequently articulated their reasons for English learning in terms of specific career goals, preferring people-oriented and science-related work:

Management

I want to get an MBA from Harvard. Whether or not I can reach that goal is hard to say. But this has a lot to do with English. I want to be in business management. (G3B)
My dream is to start my own electronic technology company. There will be fierce competition. If I only have knowledge but do not participate in economic life, if I get somebody else to market it for me, the profit will be taken away. This is a waste of my labour and knowledge. (MMX)

I am confident and extroverted. I make sound decisions. I can lead. I want to be a manager of an international corporation. With English I will be able to negotiate with foreigners and demonstrate my managing quality and skills. It is important for a senior manager to be trained overseas, for China is adapting to international standard. A senior manager is a white collar worker with good salary, high living standard and rich knowledge. (WU)

Journalism

I would like to be a journalist, but I don't think I'll do it for life. I will try different careers. (QH)
I'd like to live my life like this: journalist--military service--politics--state leader. I like being a reporter on the battle field. I don't like wars, but I want to go to military foreign institute. (LX)
I hope I can taste many tastes of life. I like interviewing different people and reporting on big events, meeting all kinds of people in all kinds of places, learning things I can't from books. In China politics is a big deal. No matter what you do, you work for the Party. As a reporter, you only report good news. I didn't know this until my parents told me. I don't like it. I don't like writing what I am told to. I want to find a job that suits my personality. In China such opportunities are rare. (G1B)

Science and engineering

The ideal job for me is to be an engineer, even a scientist. (WLT)
I like technology, such as communication engineering. A doctoral degree is a must. (G1C)
I want to get into science and engineering, computers or biology, doing scientific research. (LO)
I like biology. Every time there's a programme on nature, I watch it no matter how busy I am. My father won't stop me. If it's anything else he would get me back to study. No matter what my job is, I won't give up biology. (G3D)

International

I learn English to realise my dream to become a diplomat. (ZJ)
I want to work in international relations or international finance. (ZT)
I want to get into international finance and trade. English is very important. (GHG)
I want to specialise in international commerce. I won't become a translator. (G3A)
I like to be a diplomat. I want to negotiate for China in Sino-US trade negotiations. (G2B)

Law

My ideal is to be a lawyer who can deal with foreigners and perform on international stage. (WP)
I like to be a lawyer. There are many injustices in our society. I want to help maintain justice and truth. One must base one's decision on careful investigation and firm principles, not serve only the government. In the US, lawyers and doctors are the most admired professions. (G1A)

Others:

I want to work in educational psychology. (YX)
I want to be a doctor or work on virtual reality on computer. (ZQL)

I want to be a fashion designer. I love models and dolls. I can spend a whole day making dresses. Too bad, I don't think I can choose my career. The reality does not permit that. My parents won't agree to that, either. (G3C)

Students' aspirations were highly idealistic in nature. This might have to do with the cultural meaning of aspirations (*lixiang*) as something like a dream, an ideal to hope for rather than a practical plan to work towards. Many realised the connection between English and their personal goals. They were frustrated with China's lack of freedom. Some suggested that they wanted to experience different jobs, showing their favour for choice, flexibility and mobility. English was perceived to lead to a freer lifestyle. In many cases, English learning was directly related to their aspirations. Meanwhile, their aspirations motivated their English learning. As economic reform deepened, job security disappeared. But the society still lacked mobility and opportunities. This encouraged students to idealise their future in English according to its values. For many, English offered the best chance to bridge social, political, economic and cultural gaps. Thus it was a democratic force in liberating their potentials to fulfil their aspirations.

8.2.2 Favourite countries

Most students' encounters with foreign countries were indirect through the media and the Internet. Many aspired to go abroad and had their favourite destinations:

USA

I think the US is the best. Its economy and technology are well developed. (ZY)
I will go to the US, because it is a country for immigrants. My cousin is in Oklahoma. (HJ)
Most Chinese scientists go to the US. White House and Niagara Falls are very famous. (G3C)
I am very interested in America. America has the strongest production force. American culture is impacting ours powerfully. I want to understand it. (LO)
In America, if you are competent, you move up; if not, you drop down. That suits me. A person must have the courage to compete. Only when you compete, there's a chance to win. (FK)
The best universities are in the US. Science and technology there are very advanced. Despite bad press, American people are not that bad. Most people are good, just like in China. (LZ)
I want to go to the US, where it is easy to meet people from other countries and experience their culture. I know the US the best. People I know who went overseas all went to the US. (ZQL)
My first choice is the US. It's easier to get jobs. It's economy is powerful. Discrimination is not too bad. It is great to learn advanced technology but I will return. China has better prospects. (FU)

American universities are very famous. Even though discrimination still exists, compared with Britain and Germany where foreigners are hated, it is easier to make a living. There's more room for development. China does not have good conditions for research. There's no chance to improve my life. I might stay in the US, even if I am Chinese. (CJL)

The US was favoured for its advanced science and technology. This was largely instrumental. Some said they would return to China, indicating that they were idealistically patriotic and politically sensitive. The admiration of the US revealed strong influence of pragmatic thinking in perceiving the world in competitive terms. While the US was among the most favoured nations, it was also the only country disliked by many students:

We've seen a lot of the US on television. It's not safe. (LPJ)
China has problems with the US. Many people dislike the US. (YX)
I wouldn't go to the US. The US did not give me a good impression. (G3D)
One thing I do not like is that the US always acts like a world policeman. (CZ)
I don't like the US. It is always telling others what to do, running other people's business. (G1B)
The US, according to our textbook, is not well governed. It claims to be democratic and free but people there don't seem to have moral standard any more. (G1C)

Students perceived the US with both admiration and contempt. Compared with the pro-American feelings of the 1980s, the nationalist sentiment against the US gained momentum in the 1990s. The US as both the land of opportunities and the target to beat determined students' love-hate feelings towards America.

Britain

I will choose Britain for its long history, beautiful countryside and safety. (WLT)
To study, I will go to Britain for its high standard. Things in the US are too informal. (ZT)
Britain is an old country so it must be similar to China. There is a good integration of traditional and modern life. British education is among the best. (G1C)
I like Britain. The US discriminates against China. Japan is against China too. Britain is far better. There are good universities. The British people are conservative with strong traditions. (LHK)
I like Britain for its history, even though it's a class society. I like English countryside, Jane Eyre and Withering Heights. I like the British culture. We have something in common. (WU)
My first choice is Britain. It is home to English. Though Western culture originated from Greece and Rome, since the Middle Ages the focus moved to Britain. London and Oxford became centres of commerce or learning. Shakespeare made it a centre for Western culture. (ZG)

Britain was favoured for its rich cultural heritage and beautiful countryside. It was also considered good for studying and safe for living. While the US was often preferred for instrumental reasons such as science and employment, Britain was liked for integrative reasons in its intellectual and conservative traditions that resembled the cultural

characteristics of China. This marked in some measures the success of cultural teaching based on classical British literature in China.

Other favourite countries:
I will choose Canada. It is beautiful and safe. (WY)
I like Switzerland. I like peaceful and quiet places. (YX)
I choose Sweden. I have some relatives there. It is a welfare state. (LZ)
I like Australia. We know too much about the US. Australia is new to us. (G2B)
I want less crowded and beautiful places, Australia, Canada, Norway and Denmark. (G3D)
I like Western European countries. They are well managed, safe, peaceful, and elegant. (LPJ)
Switzerland, Canada, and Australia. They are not too political, not crowded but beautiful. (G1B)
Italy is my favourite country because I like football. Italian football is the best in the world. (SF)
I like Canada, Holland and Austria. They are stable, peaceful and musical, with social programmes, higher standard of living and smaller gap between the rich and the poor. (GHG)
I want to go to Canada. I like its vast size and its forests. I love nature. I will stay there when I am young to realise my potential to the fullest. After I make my career I will return to China. (G3A)
I like Japan or the US for studying, Canada or Australia for living. Japan is an oriental country, but it is much more advanced than China. Its people have high qualities. They pay more attention to education. Canada's natural resource is enormous. I want to breathe its fresh air. (QM)

Students preferred rich countries for high standard of living, peace and prosperity, security and safety. Their interests in going abroad were to improve their living rather than to help others. However, some important developed countries were not mentioned, including Germany, France and Russia. Students tended to favour English countries: the US, the UK, Canada and Australia. Developed countries in Asia were preferred for cultural similarities:

I think the Japanese have a spirit that we do not have. I admire the spirit of self-discipline and perseverance. They are always striving to become better. (HJ)
I want to go to Singapore, because there are many Chinese there. Western countries have racial discrimination. Singapore has many Chinese so discrimination against Chinese hardly exists. (DY)

China's corruption and backwardness disillusioned students. At the same time, exposure to the Western media encouraged idealisation of the West:

I personally think the Sino-Japanese War was caused by ourselves. Our government was too corrupted. If we were strong, nobody could beat us up like that. (HJ)
China is quite backward. I was naive thinking I could change China. Realistically, my ability is far from enough. I don't have any way to change it. So I want to leave. (LPJ)
Personally, I did not think it mattered if I didn't go abroad. China in the 21st century would be a country of status. Motorways in China would have even more lanes. I always felt the US was a bad country. Relatively speaking, countries in Europe were better. But my parents told me China was too corrupted. There is no place to use my talents here, I have to go abroad. (GJ)

The self-critical comment was particularly daring as it was rare that student developed and shared such personal perspective different from official positions. Idealisation of the West

was balanced by resentment against their perceived poor treatment of China by Western powers. A majority of students thought Chinese people were mistreated in the West. Their comments on this carried strong emotions:

I heard Chinese people are second class citizens. I don't want to live overseas. (ZQ)
We must not lose face in front of foreigners. We must have our own self-respect. (LHK)
People always have prejudice. It is only when we become strong that we will be respected. (G1C)
I am a Chinese. My skin won't change. My heart won't change. I will return. I don't want to be second class in the eyes of foreigners, to lower my head every time I see them. (GHG)
I used to feel that China was poor. There was too much corruption. If I had a chance I would go overseas. Having heard how Chinese people lived overseas I am not so sure any more. (WLT)
China is my root. No matter how much better other countries are, it is not home. I heard deep in foreigners' hearts we are not of the same type. We do not really belong. No matter how rich you become, your life will be unhappy because your spirit is not satisfied. (G1A)
Going overseas for personal gains is narrow-minded and selfish. Only when you return to China with knowledge and skills can you be noble. Many people go abroad because China is poor. But with such big gaps between the East and the West, no matter how long you stay, you won't melt into the main stream. We all hope China can be better. We must do what we can. Even if you are doing top science in the US, you are serving the US. How can your conscience justify it? (G1B)

Students with a strong national pride were hurt by the perceived Western rejection of China. Some maintained that the way to eliminate prejudice was to make China strong. The disillusion of China and the idealisation of the West fanned the flame for going abroad. Even those with strong national pride seldom condemned going abroad. However, the dominant discourse appeared to be returning to help China.

8.3 The attitudes

Despite their patriotic emotions, students' attitudes towards foreign culture and foreigners were positive. This was a strong argument against their seemingly instrumental understanding of English. It strengthened the hypothesis that instrumentalism was a convenient cover that sheltered deeply embedded motivation of a relational nature.

8.3.1 Foreign culture

Students expressed their interest in foreign culture as part of their English learning, favouring more cultural content to bring English learning closer to life reality:

I once saw a video tape on Michael Jackson. His way of speaking English impressed me, even though I understood nothing. It helped me feel the life in English. (XH)
We can learn many things through learning English. Without English my life was in a small world. Now I read in English about foreign countries. My mind was broadened. (G1B)
We want to learn more foreign social customs and natural beauties, how foreigners see China, the plus and minus of foreign societies to better understand China and foreign countries. (QH)
Culture stimulates our interest in English. It helps us to know the West. For China to be rich and strong, we must absorb the best of Western culture. English learning must include culture. (DY)
Culture to language is like water to swimming. It is essential to connect English learning with its culture. English is not just used for science, just like Chinese is not only for acupuncture. (CJL)

Some liked Western education and religion to be in the curriculum to guide their informal learning and help them make sense of the new knowledge and experience in English:

I hope we'll study Western education so that we understand what our counterparts do and think overseas. For example, do they have the sense of urgency and pressure for exams? (FK)
The propaganda is that all religions are counter-revolutionary. But I feel religion is the foundation of a culture. As such we should know about it. We should not resist and resent it. (G1B)

Disagreement with the official propaganda and desire to study religions revealed students' independent thinking. Further, students did not seem to be intimidated by speaking their minds openly. Such openness revealed the impact of English learning on their thinking:

Since I am in arts, learning foreign culture is inevitable. The language of a country is inseparable from its economic, political and cultural system. If we separate them, we make it meaningless. (ZG)
History is an important part of culture. We tend to memorise names and dates for exams. There is no understanding. It would be good to read from foreign textbooks to develop other perspectives. American culture is too shallow to me, only 200 years. Ours is too heavy, 5000 years. (LX)
Sometimes there are things you would never say in Chinese but you can in English, like "I love you." You have to know the painter before you can understand the painting. You have to know its culture before you know English. I learn English to express myself and understand others. I need its culture. I want to throw myself into it. (ZS)

The point that English could express feelings differently was significant as it testified the different cultural realities the two languages represented. English learning was to learn a new way to perceive, behave and communicate. Despite the seemingly instrumental meaning of English, students were able to appreciate that English was more than a tool.

Some students thought foreign culture unnecessary or even dangerous:

For those who don't want to major in English or go abroad, culture is not useful. (G2B)
English is only a language. I don't want to know about other countries, except NBA. (GJ)

Science majors only need to translate technical information. They don't need culture. All they need to know is technical terms and grammar. (ZG)
To accept foreign culture completely is no good. To worship it blindly is worse. Sex and violence dominate American culture. Children mature in sex too early. This is not good. (CJL)
We must not learn from their self-centred lifestyle. All the bourgeois things are coming in like a fashion. Even the Chinese New Year is losing its popularity as Christmas takes over. (MHW)
Learning culture can make some think that Chinese is not as good as English, as if foreign moon is bigger and brighter. If we all go overseas, there will be brain drain which is bad for China. (ZQ)

Sex was a taboo subject in schools. Students did not appreciate Western attitudes towards sex. Sex and violence were used as examples to demonstrate the deterioration of Western culture. The comments indicated students considered the love for money characteristic of the West, blaming it for rampant materialism in China despite its root in Chinese pragmatic traditions, the materialistic perspective of Marxism and the ideological emphasis on science and technology.

8.3.2 Foreign people

Students were overwhelmingly in favour of foreign teachers:

We should invite foreign teachers. Listening to foreigners is so pleasant. (WW)
The first thing is to invite foreign teachers to strengthen our listening and speaking. (CLJ)
English learning must embrace the world. We need teachers who are native speakers. (FY)
We must have foreign teachers. Even if they are not good at exams they can help us. (YQY)
When foreigners speak, their grammar is simple. It's effortless. They hardly use reversion or subjunctive mood. (CJL)
Our school has a sister school in Phoenix, Arizona. We should make better use of our international contact. Students should be used to guide foreigners when they come to visit. (GHG)

Foreigners were best received when they were informal and spontaneous in creating opportunities for students to use English. Problems arose when they lacked teaching experience and cross-cultural perspective, when they were unwilling to understand of Chinese language and appreciated its culture, and especially, when they became judgmental and critical. However, students were easily fascinated by foreign people and culture for their "outsider" perspective and different approach. After all they did not have to worry about exams or promotions. Students found their informal manner, easy speech and free

style refreshing. It was found that students generally enjoyed meeting foreigners, especially when such meetings were spontaneous and informal:

> Talking with foreigners was most helpful. Their fluent speaking was admirable. My biggest wish is to use English like a foreigner. (YK)
> One time I talked with a maths teacher from Australia. At the beginning I was fine. Then I asked him about education in Australia. I got lost in his reply! (CJL)
> Once I met some foreigners asking for direction. They spoke slowly and clearly. I could understand them. I told them how to get there. They politely thanked me. They were very nice. (WU)
> In Beijing, I saw two foreigners looked lost near Qianmen. They stood there with a map for a long time. I asked them if they needed help. To my expectation, they answered in English. My heart was full of joy. I finally used English that day. (FK)

For many students, the first time they used English was when they helped foreign visitors with directions. This was an example of how formal learning could make connection with informal learning. Some students appeared to be too busy with their exams to benefit from personal contact with foreigners. They did not regard foreigners as those who could actually help them with exams. Yet encounters with foreigners seemed critical in changing the nature of learning. Students were particularly excited if they understood foreigners and were able to use English:

> I met a foreigner at the meteorology college. My uncle lives there. Once I went with a cousin to play football. We saw a foreigner playing. He wore a German football shirt. We said hello. Although he was active, tall and strong, he was not proud when he spoke. He even touched me. I saw a German lady, too. She was nice too. If you greeted her, no matter what she was doing, she always replied, even when she's on her bike. (LHK)
> I like foreigners. I have relatives who came back from abroad and sometimes they bring foreigners home. Every time they come my parents would go out, leaving me alone to talk with them. I find out from them strange things from far away. I use what I learned to communicate. This makes me happy. Sometimes our talk is not easy. I always carry a book and a dictionary. Sometimes I have to draw pictures to keep our talk going. They make me like English more. (G3B)

Before the 1980s, attitudes towards foreigners were suspicious if not hostile. Since then, attitudes were more mediated by personal experience than public propaganda. Perceptions of how foreigners treated Chinese people were particularly important in the development of attitude. When communication took place in equal terms, positive attitudes developed. When prejudice was sensed, negative feelings led to distrust. One student, for example, told of her disappointment with some foreign students at a summer camp:

Foreigners should be interesting and humorous people. When they faced tough situations, they wouldn't show their temper but use their humour to keep cool. But those foreign Chinese were so boring. We tried to play games and teach them Chinese calligraphy and painting. We did paper cutting and flew kites and balloons. They were quiet the whole time as if they did not like being with us. In fact they did not even admit they were Chinese. (LZ)

This raised serious questions on how behaviour of overseas Chinese was interpreted by Chinese students. Between two cultures, the identity and security of overseas Chinese students were often unstable. With limited English and cultural experiences, Chinese students were not in the best position to understand them and help them. Their lack of willingness to associate with the Chinese could lead to negative interpretations of one another extremely painful for both sides.

8.3.3 Foreign education

Students preferred the perceived foreign education to the reality of Chinese education:

American students are happier. They have no worry for exams. They spend time talking and socialising. We know more grammar than they do. They educate for quality, not exams. (ZS)
I like the foreign education for quality. We educate for exams. Those who score high marks are not necessarily able. Out of 30 billionaires in China, a third have little education. This means that our education is not working. University is not the only way to succeed. (CJL)
In China examination is the iron ruler. In foreign education, even physics and chemistry are optional. There are no national exams. If you pass an interview, you go to university. Attention is on practical skills and social activities. If you like writing, sports, painting or drawing, you are supported. In China, no matter how talented you are artistically, you have to do science. Nobody takes arts seriously. If you don't get top marks, you can't go to university. This is brutal. (FK)

In comparing Chinese and foreign education, students described the former in depressive terms. Their appreciation for the latter was based on idealisation. They were acute in identifying some difference but tended to antagonise the negative side of the Chinese system with the positive side of foreign system. In a quantified educational system designed for efficiency, students became products for competition. Stress led to depression, as affective needs and individual differences were ignored. The more students were dissatisfied, the more they idealised foreign education. Their critical thinking vigorously

applied to their school failed to register for foreign education. Students' disappointment with Chinese education made English all the more relevant to them.

8.3.4 Foreign trips

Among the few students who had been overseas was LSH. LSH, a *yangqing*[42] player, visited Japan at the age of eight with a youth delegation. The visit to the US was her second foreign trip. Visits overseas were much celebrated events. LSH described her experience in favourable terms:

> When the principal said they were considering me, I didn't expect much. SD is one of the best in China with many good students. I cannot represent its best quality. When it was decided I could go, I was very happy. Sichuan students have a strong sense of isolation. To be able to fly away from interior China to see the world is a rare opportunity. Now I can say we have successfully represented students in China. We were warmly received in the US. We visited our sister city Phoenix and many schools there. The biggest impression I had was that their students were relaxed. I am sure many work hard, too. But they seemed much happier. I used to think if we work harder we can learn more. On reflection I realise little of what we do is useful in life. The best thing about them is that whatever they learn is useful for life.
>
> Japanese people don't walk but run. Life is busy, but orderly. People behave well. There are a lot of similarities with China because of the heavy influence of the Chinese culture. America is an open society. People love freedom. But children do not always behave. In schools we saw fierce-looking policemen trying to keep order. Chinese students could not imagine that.
>
> Learning English in China will make you an expert in grammar. But you need to be in an English speaking country to hear real English. I am good at imitating so my pronunciation has improved. I think the trend is to use more English in the world, because America is the No. 1. So learning American English is better. I couldn't understand everything my hosts said. Sometimes I had to make my guess based on expressions and intonations. But this is useful in real life, even in exams. One of us was fortunate enough to stay with a host family that loves China. I admire that family. It is hard to meet a family like that. (LSH)

LSH benefited from her trip in many ways. First, her learning resembled acquiring rather than learning. Apparently she was learning many things in English subconsciously. English became a by-product and its learning almost accidental. As she lived in English, she picked up meaning from expressions and intonations, making necessary guesses to negotiate her understanding. This was natural acquiring capacity in operation rather than organised

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[42] A traditional string instrument.

learning strategies in application. Second, her learning was synthetic. In comparing her experience in China, America and Japan, she was able to compare and contrast their differences and similarities. The visit changed her values about hard work. It was no longer true that just because Chinese students worked harder, they learned more, scored more and were therefore better students. She liked American students for their relaxed attitude and happy outlook. She appreciated the pragmatic tradition in the US which defined meaning with usefulness. According to her, American schools were doing the right thing: preparing students for life rather than exams. She enjoyed the orderliness of Japan and found the misbehaviours and police presence in American schools unpleasant. On the other hand, life in Japan appeared constantly busy while in America it was open and free. She thought Chinese schools were good at teaching grammar, but to learn English students must be exposed to an English environment. Third, her learning was reflective. In talking about making guesses and hard work, she was learning about learning. She spoke highly of the influence of the trip on her English learning, confident that her pronunciation improved. She preferred American English, as the US was the strongest nation and American English was more important. She felt happy to find a family that loved China and she was able to represent Chinese students well. As learning took place at many levels, her trip was a critical experience that improved her English and made her more confident and pragmatic.

Another student who went on the same trip to the US was ZS, a student union activist:

> In the selection process the primary considerations were services at school, overall record, social skills, not marks. There was no written competition but teachers' general impression counted. They shared notes before they decided who should go. They thought I was relatively good at English and social skills. I had experience with student work at local and national levels. So I could introduce how our system works, as our goals were not only to learn but also to exchange ideas. The trip was not completely paid by the government so our families had to contribute quite a lot. The amount has not been calculated yet. But our parents hoped that we would have this opportunity. All six people were from our school, with four students, our headmaster and an English teacher as the interpreter.

We went on the invitation of the sister city council to visit universities and schools. In Phoenix we visited Arizona State University, Central High School, Three Points High School among other schools. In New York we visited Columbia University. After New York we went to Los Angeles and visited California Institute of Technology. We visited many classes. They all wanted to know about China, so we talked with students and teachers a lot. The biggest impact was on my thinking. One boy learned that I was the editor for the school journal. He was the editor of theirs. He asked me if our journal was censored, if we were free to say what we want. They attach great importance to the freedom of speech. My mind was broadened. I left China with some ideas about the US but they turned out to be shallow. What I saw was more realistic. We lacked understanding of their thinking. It was very different from ours.

My highlight was going to church with my host family. They were totally engaged in the service with their emotion and mind. It was not economic or political, but the spirit brought them together. This was oceans away from what I thought religion was. They go to church twice a week. I was happy to go with them. They thought it's important if I was willing to go. They always asked if I was willing, even before they gave me things to eat. I wanted to go because I had never been to a church. I understand little but saw a lot. There were many things we could learn from the service. Americans are open-minded. It is easy for them to accept new things and believe in God. Their values are very different. My experience made it easier for me to accept new things.

I also went shopping with them. They buy a lot but they don't go that often to save time. Buying vegetable, for example, is not an important thing in their life. Their food does not have to be fresh. To me their way is efficient. I bought some magazines for myself on computers. I got my parents some vitamins. Some of us had a hard time with the food there. I tried everything on the table and felt all right, even the cheese. New York was pretty dirty and dangerous. It made me wonder how they treat minority and native people.

The trip improved my English. Learning English requires a natural environment. It was the best practice for me. I used English as a tool to communicate, to understand others and to express myself. I was using it all the time! I have a clearer goal now. Before the trip my objective was unclear. Now I am determined to learn to express myself freely and accept new ideas in English. This trip highlighted the importance of new experience. This is why I came to see you. I had never experienced anything like this before. (ZS)

ZS's reflection on the trip had similar features with LSH's in that learning took place at different levels. However, he explained how the most important learning was on thinking. His experience at church, in particular, introduced a new dimension into his life. He realised that he did not have to understand everything in order to appreciate it. Such learning was significant in that it contained the process of unlearning, or learning against the intolerant attitudes developed in formal learning towards different lifestyles, values and beliefs. This opened his mind for new ideas and new perspectives. The openness was reinforced by his positive interpretation of his experiences such as the host family asking him if he was willing while he was used to being told what to do. We noticed that learning

was so intensive on a critical learning experience like this foreign trip that things normally taken for granted were carefully reflected upon, such as shopping in the supermarket and the cultural realisation that Americans cared more for time than the freshness of vegetables. Again, feeling that he was able to use English successfully on the trip gave him renewed confidence and motivation in learning.

The criteria and process of selecting students for the trip attracted comments. An important concern was financial, as the cost of the trip was shared by the school and parents. Students who met all criteria but had poor parents would not be able to make the trip. Some students expressed their disapproval of such visits:

> Recently a few students went with the principal to visit the US. This money could have been better used to improve teaching equipment. Yes, we must open up to the world, but the present condition of our school made this trip unrealistic and wasteful. Look at our playground and those students from poorer families. (CZ)

As going abroad carried social glamour, it attracted both admiration and jealousy and reflected the connection of English with power and prestige. Students' speaking highly of their experiences with foreigners and their culture confirmed the power and prestige associated with English.

8.4 Summary: Conflicting perceptions and practice

The discussion identified some important conflicts in students' English learning:

1) the perception/aspiration/motivation conflicts: public/ personal, instrumental/integrative, pragmatic/idealistic, international/national, etc.;
2) the practice/experience/condition conflicts: formal/informal, examination/experience, quantity/quality, knowledge/skills, grammar/culture, science/arts, etc.

Overall, the analysis of students' reflection on their English learning gave us some glimpses into the unique role of English in students' learning experience and life aspirations in China's social development and cultural redefinition process. As English

captured their aspirations, it seemed to occupy a central position in their value systems, educational experience, social aspirations and cultural identity. It was confirmed that the interaction between students' aspirations and their learning experience was dialectic. Social values and cultural expectations influenced the experience of learning. Learners might begin their learning with an imposed reason, but consequential to their experience with English, they might develop their own aspirations to guide and motivate their learning. Hence public reasons often sheltered personal reasons. The teaching agenda that served the public purpose frequently found themselves in contradiction with the learning agenda of personal reasons. In addition, the mismatch of agenda seemed to prevail between the teaching and learning of English in China. Lingering values and emerging trends converged and separated in English, as students tried to make sense of the reality of their learning. At the collective level, China's strong sense of itself was badly wounded by Western defeat. Her pride was repeatedly frustrated by Western prejudice. Determined to regain its leading position, China found it painful to integrate with the world, facing the reality and swallowing the pride to learn from the West. At the individual level, students resented China's economic backwardness and social corruption. They highly idealised and aspired for the West. Yet their ideals were frustrated by the reality that China was ignored and the Chinese people mistreated in the West. This confirmed that affective and attitudinal factors strongly influenced English learning.

Students' reasons and motivation for learning English were mediated by the reality of China's historical context, its position in the world today and its search for destiny. There were pressing anxieties of exams and high hopes of going overseas, opportunities for personal advancement and problems of national pride, crisis of changing identities amidst of pragmatic beliefs and idealistic aspirations. Within the ambiguous and ambivalent

meaning of English learning, economic and technological connection with its pragmatic benefits seemed to be increasing. Emotional and ideological connection with its political symbols appeared to be decreasing. There was a tendency among students to use collective interests to shelter their personal reasons, as public reasons to build up China simultaneously served personal interest to experience foreign culture, develop foreign contacts and improve personal quality. In the instrumental discourse, the public agenda for China to march ahead internationally harmonised with the personal agenda to race ahead socially. Hence the aspiration to go abroad was articulated with patriotic concern to return. Indeed, students were attracted to the West but they remained deeply loyal to China.

While parents mediating between the public and private agendas strongly influenced students towards pragmatic values, many students used the neutral term of "quality" to describe their reasons for learning English, in reference to improving China's national and their personal quality. As they began to seek beyond China to define their personal meaning, English was no longer necessarily connected with particular countries but became a qualification for membership in the international community. The competition of life and the modernisation of China created a vacuum for new identity. To be only Chinese was old-fashioned and self-confining. To be international was the progressive third way. Thus English became a new bridge to the world. The process of English learning became a process to redefine oneself in relation to the world.

The learning conditions with the focus on examination placed students in China's education tradition and the quantitative system of competition. While students resented their formal learning, English became not just a favourite subject but a liberating force to set them free. The recurring themes of examination and going abroad seemed instrumental

on the surface but they were realised through competition with profound impact on students' social relationships. The competitive nature of English learning in its practice of examination and its aspirations for quality and identity determined that the instrumental surface meaning was deeply relational. Yet except those few who experienced English in its native culture and those few who through reflection realised the nature of their learning, English learning was a matter of toil for exams. Students perceived English with liberating power to help them break away from social limitation and cultural confinement, but their learning was restricted to grammar rules and exam regulations. To resolve the conflict between their perceptions and practice, reflection on the nature of their learning was identified as essential. If learning about learning was a condition for learning autonomy, learning against learning was arguably an indicator such learning autonomy.

The next chapter continues to develop the arguments by surveying and further analysing students reasons, conditions and attitudes in English learning.

Chapter 9 Survey on learning conditions and attitudes

I wish foreigners learned Chinese as much as we learn English! (G1B/SD)

This chapter presents findings from a survey to continue the investigation on the role of English by re-examining students' learning experiences and their life aspirations through quantitative means. Since qualitative findings suggested that students' articulation on the role of English was not only related to their learning experiences and aspirations but in many ways to their perceptions of themselves in relation to China and the world, this chapter surveys students' attitudes towards Chinese and English languages and their identity with Chinese and English cultures. In doing so, it provides a platform to explore themes and conflicts, to verify their validity and strength with a wider selection of students and to examine the extensity and intensity of aspirations and attitudes that both reflected and influenced learning conditions and experiences.

The survey was designed during the second phase of the fieldwork following initial analysis of the qualitative data. It was conducted during the last stage of the fieldwork with the hope to verify emerging themes. Due to time and financial constraints, it was only administered in two schools: SE, a provincial key middle school, and JF[43], a university affiliated city middle school. It was felt that 200 students from each school would be a sufficient number to include a variety of students. Yet the results was not systematic enough to sustain statistical analysis, neither was the discussion from the limited results adequate in developing the themes. This chapter should, therefore, be read as a supplement to the main qualitative study rather than its summary.

Judging from the answers received, most students were able to understand the English instructions and statements. All students in Senior 2 were asked to participate. They were between 16 and 18 years of age. The survey was compiled in English so that participation would directly benefit students' English learning in at least the following ways:

1) It created a unique experience for students to use English in a way they had not before but they were easily able to;
2) It provided a platform for students to reflect on the meaning of English and the nature of their learning experience so that they could develop learning autonomy;
3) It gave students opportunities to know how others understood the nature of English and experienced learning so that they became aware of other perceptions and experiences;
4) It exposed students and teachers to methods of research, encouraged action research and facilitated connections among teachers, students, and the research.

The survey lasted 50 minutes. Except a few unintelligible or incomplete answers, most returned papers were rendered valid. SE was keen on involving teachers and arranged for them to analyse the survey. Since I only received the final results, the figures could not be verified. Learning from this, I insisted at JF that I collect and analyse the results. This chapter focuses on the JF data, with a total of 188 students including 97 girls and 91 boys.

9.1 The values

The survey[44] consisted of four sections, soliciting students' objectives, conditions and attitudes in English learning. There were two optional qualitative sections: one at the beginning to prepare students, one at the end for them to express their views in a less controlled manner. The first section was to gather general information on the students, ranking the values in their interests, favourite subjects, aspirations, favourite countries, etc., to expose key elements of their beliefs.

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[43] In graphics that follow the name of the university to which JF was affiliated was used as agreed in the access negotiation to protect the interest of the school.
[44] For the original design of the survey, see Appendix B.

0. Something about yourself

1) In this part, please tell me something about yourself in Chinese. You don't have to tell me your name:

Your age_____Your gender_____Your school_____
Your hobbies_____
Your favourite subjects_____
Your dream for the future_____
Countries you like to visit 1)_____Why_____
2)_____Why_____
3)_____Why_____

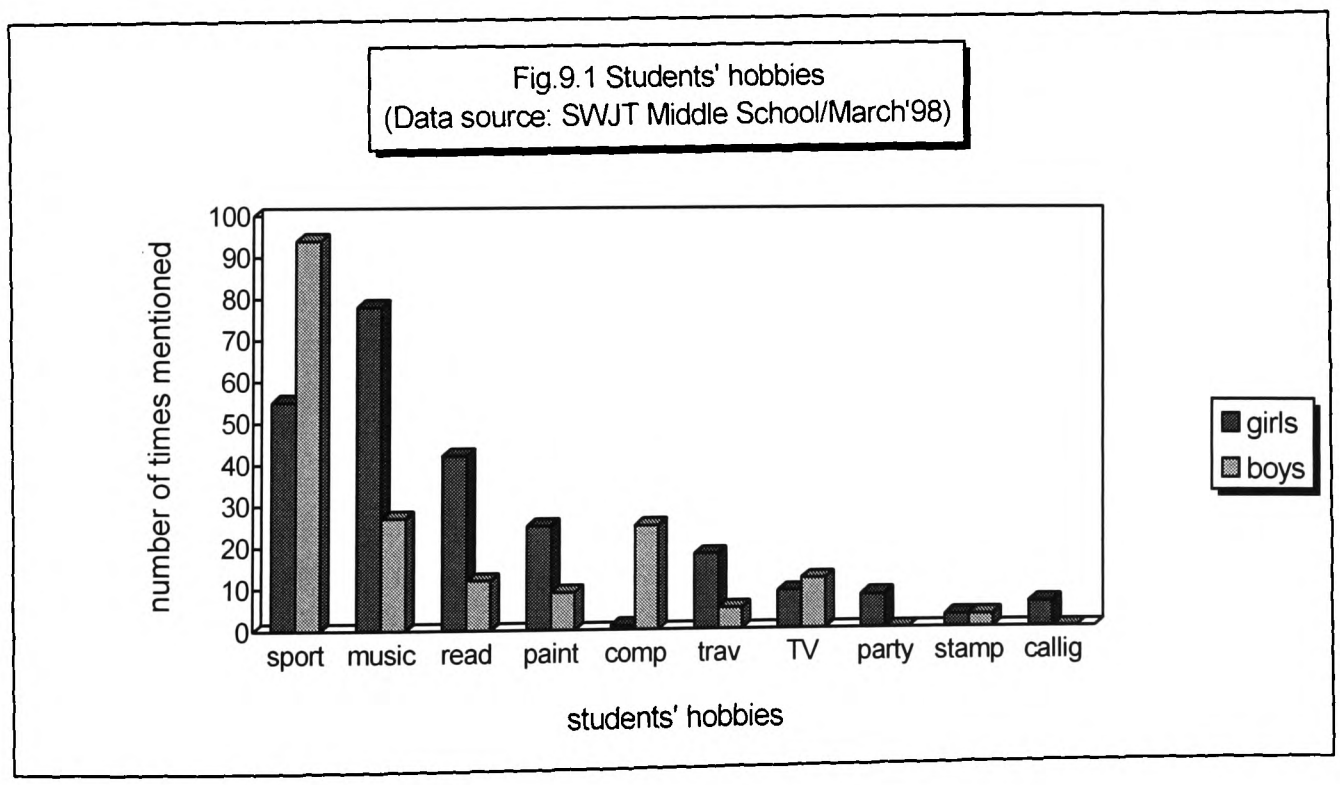
2) If you have a lot of money, how would you spend it?_____

3) Please rank the following according to their importance to you, putting the most important first:
A. Family (*parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, children, uncles and aunts, cousins, etc.*)
B. Friends (*classmates, schoolmates, old classmates, friends outside school, dating, etc.*)
C. Religion (*belief in God*)
D. Education (*universities, degrees, studying abroad, etc.*)
E. Intelligence (*human wisdom, good school work, high marks and grades*)
F. Career (*interesting job, success and achievement, promotion, etc.*)
G. Appearance (*looking good, nice and tidy, smart and pretty, wearing good clothes, nice haircut, etc.*)
H. Wealth (*having a lot of money, owning properties such as big houses and expensive cars*)
I. Health (*no disease*)

Your order 1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____

In the analysis, students were divided into girls and boys to identify distinctive patterns. Although this study did not compare differences between genders, it was deemed important to be open to the possibility of such differences.

9.1.1 Hobbies



Sports and music were by far the most popular hobbies for students, with sports in particular for boys and music for girls. This confirmed that popular sports and music programmes on television such as American basketball and English football were excellent opportunities for English learning, as was listening to British and American pop music. Students' passion for sports and music also confirmed significant media influence of Western entertainment industry on students and their English learning. Reading for girls and computer-related activities for boys were also important hobbies. Travelling and parties were low on the list. Most students did not regard television as an important pastime, although much popular sports and music were experienced through television, indicating they did spend much time watching sports and music programmes. It seemed that their answers were influenced by values from the popular culture that emphasised sports and music and the learning culture that rebuked excessive television watching.

9.1.2 Favourite subjects

Subject	Eng	Chi	Mat	Phs	Che	Bio	His	Geo
girls	56	40	18	11	14	2	22	2
boys	36	20	33	23	20	4	13	7

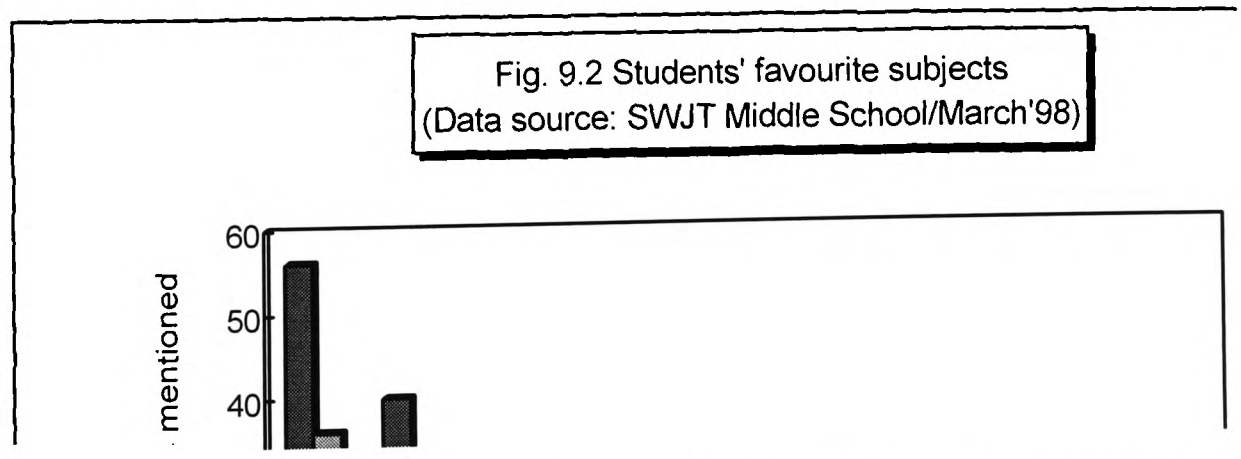


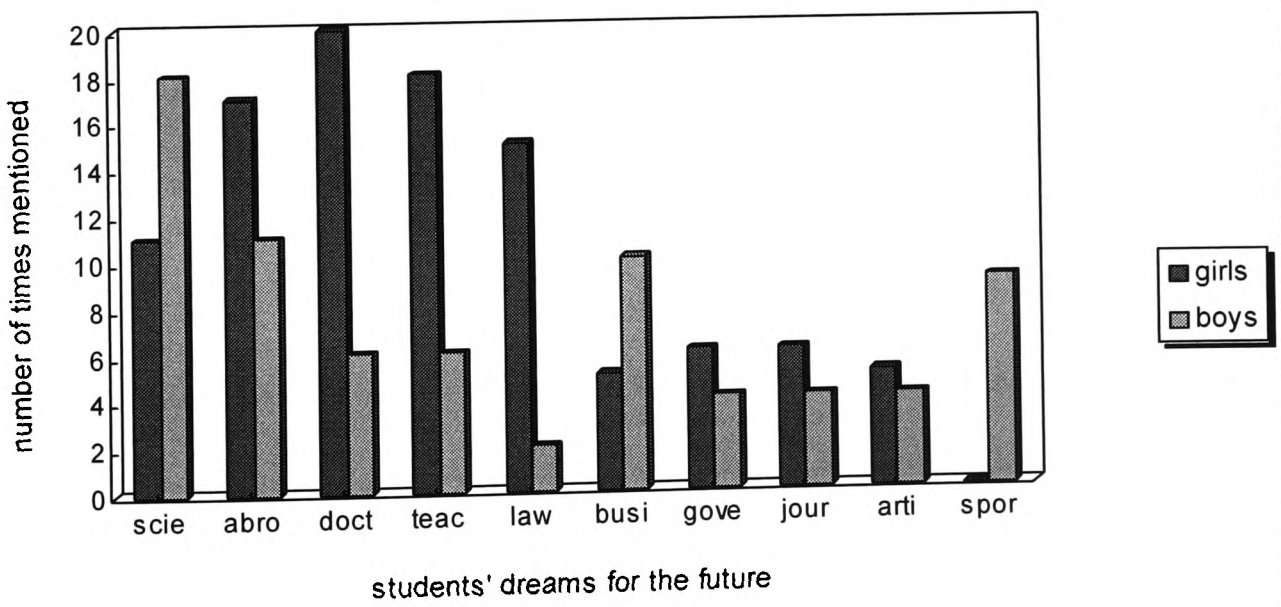
Fig. 9.2 Students' favourite subjects
(Data source: SWJT Middle School/March'98)

English was the most favoured subject by a big margin for girls and a smaller one for boys, confirming its unique status as a subject at school and its significance in students'

aspirations. Boys and girls differed in their second most favoured subject. While boys liked maths, physics and chemistry, girls enjoyed Chinese and history. Boys favoured physical education more than girls. Few liked biology and geography, and among those who did, there were more boys than girls. This supported the cultural expectation that boys were more science-oriented. The fact that English as an arts subject was favoured by both boys and girls testified its importance. The results suggested that subjects of pragmatic value such as English or intellectual value such as maths were preferred. Key courses like English, Chinese and maths enjoyed high esteem, confirming that students' perceptions were influenced by the institutional support for core subjects. Those subjects emphasised by the national curriculum were more likely to be students' favourites. However, the survey failed to confirm qualitative finding that science was favoured over arts. The most favoured two subjects, English and Chinese, were arts subjects. Considering that they were both core subjects compulsory in national exams, their favour suggested that context-defined meaning appeared to over-rule personally defined meaning in students' values.

9.1.3 Aspirations

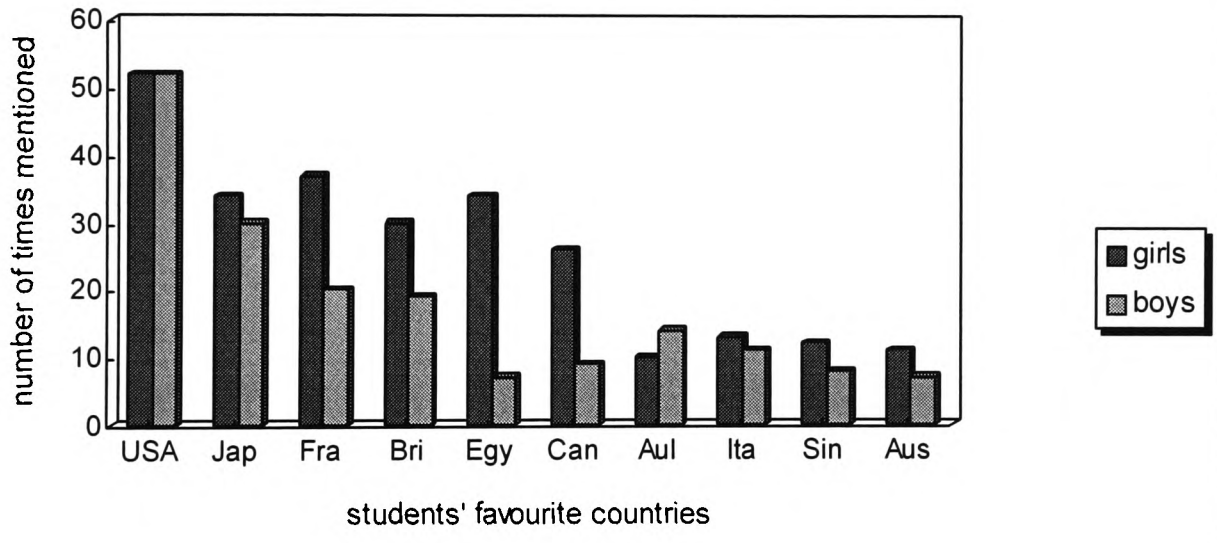
Fig. 9.3 Students' dreams for the future
(Data source: SWJT Middle School/March'98)



The results confirmed the dominance of science in students' values, especially for boys. Both boys and girls eagerly aspired to go abroad, evidencing an intensive personal reason for their English learning. Going abroad attained such prominence that it was only second to science by a small margin, as the most aspired dream for the future. The preference for science indicated the pragmatic belief that science was the "iron bowl" of status and security. The survey strongly confirmed the supremacy of science and going abroad in students' values. In addition, science and going abroad were aspired by both boys and girls. This compared sharply with the less aspired careers where gender difference was much more obvious. Boys liked opportunities in business and sports while girls enjoyed the idea of being doctors, teachers and lawyers.

9.1.4 Favourite countries

Fig. 9.4 Students' favourite countries
(Data source: SWJT Middle School/March'98)

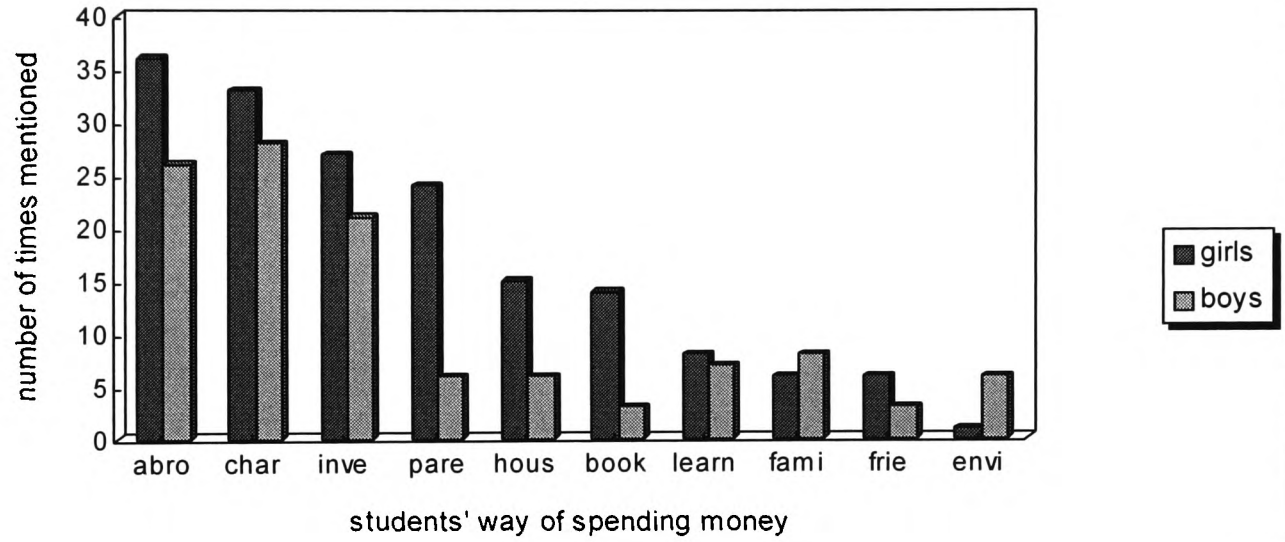


The majority of students favoured Western countries. The popularity of the US among both boys and girls supported qualitative finding that students idealised the US. The difference was that Japan and France as non-English-speaking countries featured before Britain by a substantial margin. Since the survey was participated by a wider variety of students, such

discrepancies were not surprising. non-western countries favoured by students included Japan, Egypt and Singapore. Except Egypt, no third-world country was mentioned. Students' choices had specific and varied reasons. Many liked Japan for its spirit of unity and diligence, France for its reputation of love and romance, Canada for its beauty and space, and Egypt for the Oscar winning film, *The English Patient.* This suggested that the basis of students' decisions was not static. Their choices were subject to change according to circumstance.

9.1.5 Ways of spending money

Fig. 9.5 Students' ways of spending money
(Data source: SWJT Middle School/March'98)

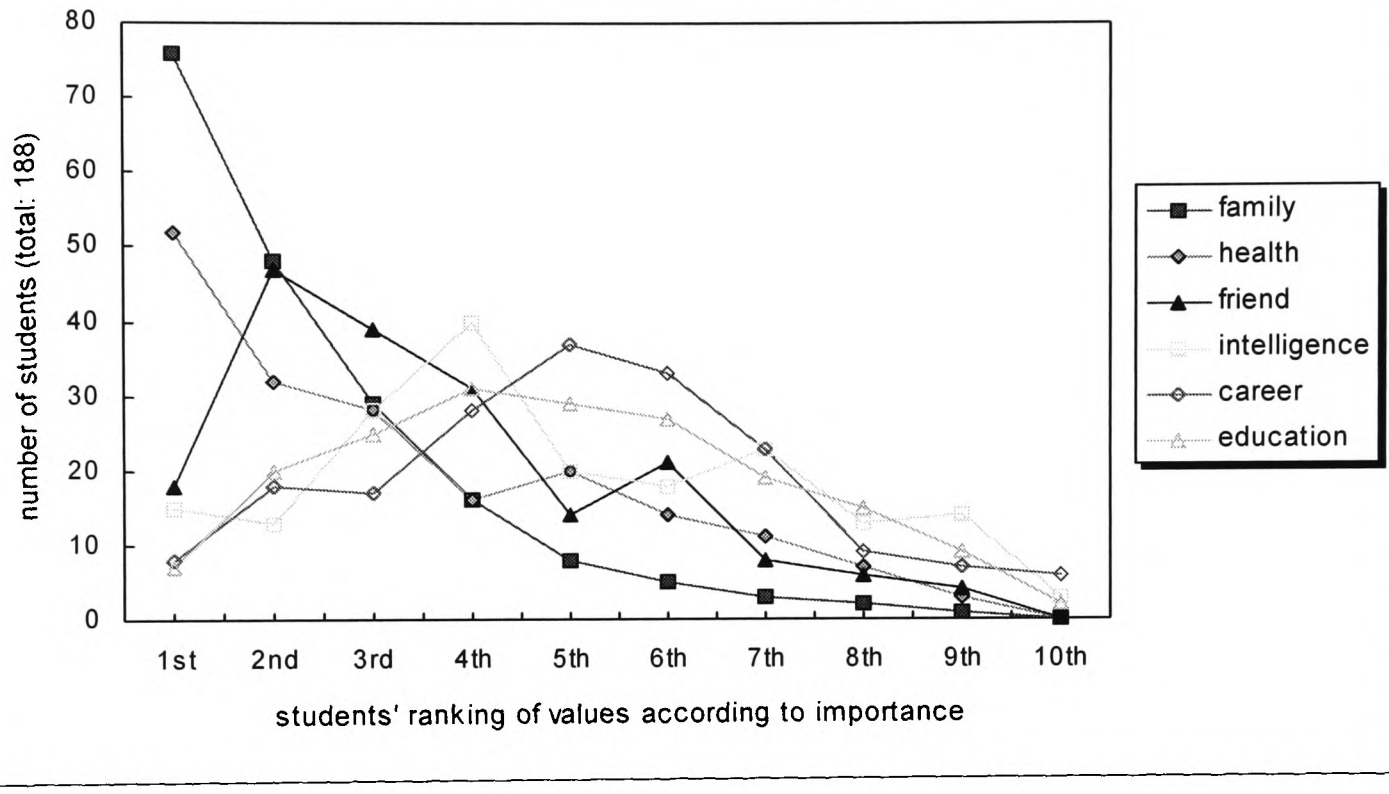


Going abroad was repeatedly confirmed as the most important aspiration for both boys and girls. Almost as many students had a concern for charities. Investment and caring for the elderly were also important to many. Evidently, there was a co-existence of new values and the old. However, going abroad, charities, investment and houses largely replaced parents, family, books, education and friends as their primary concerns. This indicated successful penetration of Western values, with the idea of charities, for example, brought into China by the media focus on the death of Princess Diana. Students' ideas for spending money

varied from buying Siberia back from Russia to making films and promoting Sichuan to the world. This revealed the mediation of nationalism and increasing market consciousness. What was not mentioned was saving the money for education, as many of their parents were doing for them.

9.1.6 The ranking of values

Fig. 9.6 Students' ranking of values
(Data source: SWJT Middle School/March'98)



Family consistently ranked the first in students' values. The line for family was the only one that showed a consistent descending order. Almost half of the students considered it as the most important value. No one thought it the least important. Health was highly ranked, with more than a quarter of the students regarding it as the most important value. Friends came third. At its highest point, a quarter of the students regarded friends as the second most important value. Intelligence, career and education followed. Few students considered wealth or appearance as important. A majority thought religion was the least important, indicating a lack of spiritual awareness. The ranking order pointed at a traditional pattern

that emphasised communal (family and friends) and personal qualities (health and intelligence) as well as personal achievements (career and education). Perishable possessions (wealth and appearance) seemed unimportant. Spiritual qualities (religion) were still irrelevant to most students.

Findings from the first section supported the superficiality of the instrumental perception of English. Clearly, students were motivated to learn English for personal improvement and enjoyment, for employment and education, for family, friends, for the modernisation of China. Yet aspirations as going abroad or engaging in science were largely driven by a sense of personal, family and national honour which was a relational quality. Obtaining good jobs and going abroad brought personal success and family glory which were key social qualities. Secondly, findings confirmed that the meaning of English learning was simultaneously collective and individual. Parental mediation on going abroad and social mediation on examination, for examples, demonstrated the collective meaning of English learning. Yet learning was sustained by personal aspirations and family honours, even though contextual values mediated by parents and society strongly influenced the development of personal values. In addition, the aspiration for friendship could encourage students to reach beyond China for new relationships and identity with the world. Even the concern for intelligence reflected the aspiration to improve personal quality through learning English. Students' values were not, therefore, necessarily instrumental but extremely relational. This explained why formal learning for instrumental purposes could not satisfy their affective needs for personal relationship, quality and identity. It indicated that while many students still regarded English as a tool, English was already changing the way they perceived reality and formed values.

9.2 The reasons

The main survey consisted of 70 short statements from students' essays and interviews. They were chosen according to themes from qualitative data and key concepts from critical social and cultural studies on language learning. Each statement was followed by five choices: strongly agree, agree, no idea, disagree, strongly disagree, with respective numerical values of 2, 1, 0, -1, and -2, hidden on the students' copies to avoid their attempt to score. In the analysing table below, the numbers under the choices are numbers of students making the choices. The numbers under "your comments" are the strength of the statements derived from simple aggregation according to the sum of the numerical values of each statement. Extreme numbers are either in bold type for the biggest summaries, or underlined for the smallest.

For each of the following statements, select ONE answer that best expresses your view.

1. Reasons for learning English

statement	strongly agree	agree	no idea	disagree	strongly disagree	your comments
01 I learn English because it is the main international language.	**84**	82	10	9	3	**235**
02 I learn English because I want to go to university.	42	76	27	33	9	109
03 I learn English because I want to get a good job.	50	**97**	20	15	4	174
04 I learn English because it will give me a good quality.	55	76	35	14	2	168
05 I learn English because people respect me if I have good English.	11	54	50	**49**	15	-3
06 I learn English because my English teacher is very good.	9	42	**61**	43	**32**	-47
07 I learn English because I want to make friends with foreigners.	12	64	58	43	10	25
08 I learn English because I want to go to study abroad.	39	78	37	24	6	120
09 I learn English because I want to live and work abroad.	25	37	58	47	18	4
10 I learn English because I want to use computers and the Internet.	62	92	19	13	2	199
11 I learn English because I like English songs, films, radios and TV.	29	67	41	39	10	66
12 I learn English because I would like to read or write in English.	28	77	40	33	10	80
Average	37	70	38	30	10	94

The strongest reason was No. 1 *international language*, confirming the importance of learning English to be international. Nearly half of the students strongly agreed, and the rest almost all agreed. The strength was also supported by the fact that the least number of students disagreed with the statement. Further, this was the most unambiguous statement in that the fewest number of students had "no ideas". The second strongest reason was No. 10 *computers and Internet*, confirming the association of English with technology and the perception of English as an access to information as key roles of English. Other strong statements included No. 3 *jobs* agreed by the most students, No. 4 *personal quality* disagreed by the fewest, No. 8 *studying abroad* and No 2 *universities*, as found in qualitative data.

Among weak statements, No 6. *good teachers* was the least supported and the most ambiguous. This confirmed students' dissatisfaction with the quality of formal English teaching. Students also found No. 5 *respect*, No 9. *living and working abroad* and No. 7 *foreign friends* hard to agree with, supporting students' claims to return to China. The survey suggested that students learned English to improve their personal qualities but not necessarily to win respect. They wanted to go abroad to study, but not to work and live. They wanted to use English for computers and the Internet, but not for making friends with foreigners. Answers were scattered for No. 12 *reading and writing* and No. 11 *pop culture*, but more students agreed than disagreed. This indicated that while many students enjoyed learning English by making use of popular culture, they did not necessarily learn English for the purpose of enjoying popular culture.

The result indicated that the most important reasons for learning English were to develop international identity and personal quality. Many students also perceived important role of

English in university, employment and studying abroad. Integrative reasons such as making foreign friends and living abroad appeared unimportant. While this reflected the perception of English as a tool, a detailed analysis revealed that the case was not that simple. First, students overwhelmingly agreed with learning English as an international language. This was instrumental if its aims were to qualify for foreign universities or foreign jobs. However, if the student intended to reach beyond China for a new identity, it became relational. The artificial distinction collapsed as instrumental reasons sheltered deeper aspirations, with the prospect of a new life free from the confinement of China's historical, social and cultural conditions. English as an international language offered a common identity with the world. Secondly, students wanted to learn English to improve their personal quality. What they meant by personal quality in relation to their English learning was the key. One might argue that exam scores, jobs and education all symbolised personal quality, but they were not qualities themselves. Qualitative data suggested that when students talked about personal quality, they were referring to something that defined the nature of their personality in their relation with others. It was in seeking such personal qualities in relation to others that English played an intimate role in their learning and their life. Thirdly, if we connected students' weak support for No. 6 *good teachers* to their dissatisfaction with the poor quality of formal learning, we realised that they disliked English classes because English was taught instrumentally to prepare them for exams. In the utilitarian discourse for English, students saw little meaning in learning English beyond universities and jobs. The quantification of education made students, teachers and schools slaves of exam. Students strongly resented such practice. Last but not the least, when we compared No. 7 *foreign friends* with No. 8 *studying abroad*, we found that despite the difference in their strength, both statements received scattered choices. Although English for making foreign friends appeared a weak statement, most students actually agreed with

it. Methodologically, this meant that the value of strength derived by means of aggregating the sums of students' choices failed to represent students' opinions. What made the difference was the extremes: more students strongly agreed that they learned English to study abroad than to make foreign friends. Yet the majority of the students did agree with both statements. In fact, almost as many students agreed with learning English to make foreign friends as to study abroad. In this comparison, the final value of strength was misleading. The truth was that the majority of students agreed that they wanted to make foreign friends, despite the weakness of the statement. Since numbers could mislead analysis, interpretation should go beyond the obvious. Even if there were strong numerical indications for a certain pattern, students' objectives could be surface-level ones. They might claim a motivation for political reasons. For instance, the difference between No. 8 *studying abroad* and No. 9 *living and working abroad* suggested that students wanted to go abroad only to study. Yet to study abroad was politically correct, but not to live and work abroad. Considering that few Chinese students returned from abroad after completing their studies, we would need to engage qualitative analysis to probe the issue deeper. The survey showed that students were still acutely conscious of being politically correct.

Students' reasons for learning English were related to their social attitudes and cultural experiences. They were defined not only by the collective meanings of the society as a whole and the educational context in which they found themselves, but at the personal level by their longings for a better life and a new identity. On the surface, students emphasised social, collective and external reasons that seemed instrumental and politically correct, but at a deeper level, they perceived English as a means to an international identity and a key element of personal quality. The structural emphasis on the collective and instrumental

purposes served to shelter their personal aspirations. The hidden personal meaning was a defining quality of English learning in China in distinguishing it from other ELT situations.

9.3 The conditions

Approximately half of the statements in this section were reversed to discourage students from agreeing for convenience and politeness. Some statements were connected to key concepts from various second language learning models such as motivation intensity in the social-educational model (Gardner, 1985 Nos. 31 and 32 *No if not a subject* and *the least liked subject*), cultural distance in the acculturation model (Schumman, 1978 Nos. 15, 21, 23 and 25 *foreign teachers, English-speaking countries, English TV* and *English songs*), input and output in the monitor model (Krashen, 1981 Nos. 16 and 17 *listening and reading*, Nos. 14, 18, and 19 *speaking and writing*). Others could be related to second language programmes such as the French Immersion in Canada, content-based language teaching in the US (Swain, 1981 No 22 *other subjects*) and international English teaching in Singapore (Maley, 1996 No 26 *outer circle*).

2. Conditions of learning English

statement	strongly agree	agree	no idea	disagree	strongly disagree	your comments
13 I would like to speak English with other Chinese people.	14	73	52	37	12	40
14 I would not like to speak English with foreign people.	12	34	48	70	24	-60
15 I would like to be taught by foreign teachers of English.	49	86	35	15	0	169
16 I don't like to learn English by listening to foreign radio such as BBC and VOA.	6	36	57	64	24	-64
17 I like reading letters, books, newspapers, or magazines in English.	13	79	49	40	7	51
18 I hardly write letters, notes, cards, or diary in English.	8	58	46	67	8	-9
19 I would like to speak more English and study less grammar in class.	48	70	27	35	8	115
20 I would like to have less time for English at school.	7	30	33	75	42	-115
21 I would like to learn more about the US, the UK, Canada and Australia.	62	70	35	16	5	168
22 I would not want to study history, geography, math or science in English.	16	41	35	56	39	-61

23 Watching English TV or video programmes helps me learn English.	73	82	21	8	3	214
24 Playing computer games does not help me learn English.	15	17	43	68	44	-109
25 Singing English songs makes learning English much more interesting.	77	80	20	6	3	222
26 I would not like to learn English from Singapore, India and Africa.	17	46	**70**	42	12	14
27 I would like our school to have English Corner or English Summer Camp.	47	**104**	26	4	3	188
28 I would like our English teacher to use less English in class.	12	16	23	**91**	44	-139
29 I would love to take more grammar notes from the teacher in English class.	19	69	35	43	20	24
30 I would like to spend less time on preparing for exams in English class.	15	76	38	42	13	38
31 I would not want to learn English if it is not taught at school.	5	11	37	85	48	-160
32 Of all the subjects at school, I like English the least.	6	14	32	73	**56**	-159
33 At home I do English homework first before anything else.	16	41	**70**	52	7	7
34 English is one of the most important subjects at school.	**81**	79	10	13	2	**224**
35 English classes at school are often quite interesting.	40	73	41	28	4	117
36 Learning English at home on my own is much less interesting.	8	57	40	61	19	-26
37 My parents do not care much about my English learning.	12	62	25	52	33	-32
38 My parents are pretty good at English themselves.	7	25	24	89	36	-122
39 Some of our classmates speak very good English.	26	91	33	34	1	107
40 National exams are good and fair in deciding who goes to university.	21	61	47	28	21	33
Average	26	56	38	46	19	24

The strongest statement was No. 34 *the most important subject*, confirming qualitative finding in the structural power of ENGLISH in China's educational system and the penetration of English in students' values. The dominance of English as a key subject in the national curriculum was powerfully reinforced in national exams. Effectively, no student could make it to university without learning English[45]. The statement was further supported by the fact that it was the least ambiguous statement, indicating the consistency of students' regard for the importance of English. Among other strong statements were No. 25 *songs* and No. 23 *TV and video*, supporting the growing role of the media and the

[45] Theoretically, students can choose any foreign language out of English, Russian, French, Japanese, German, Arabic or Spanish but the overwhelming majority choose English.

improvement of learning conditions as more foreign products became available. No. 27 *English Corner and Summer Camp*, No. 15 *foreign teachers* and No. 21 *English-speaking countries* signified the strong support for extra-curricular activities, cultural content and foreign teachers. Students strongly favoured experience-based learning in connecting knowledge and skills developed from formal and informal learning.

Among the weakest statements were No. 31 *no if not a subject* and No. 32 *the least liked subject*. It was confirmed that students' motivation in learning English was intense. Their tendency to like English was further supported by their agreement with No. 35 *English class interesting*. This contradicted with qualitative finding that they considered their English class boring, suggesting that English was probably too important to be disliked. The weak support for Nos. 20 and 28 *less English* and the strong support for No. 30 *less exam* suggested that students wanted more English and preferred teachers' speaking English to talking about grammar in Chinese. However, some students wanted to take more notes as indicated by their support for No. 29 *more notes*. This contradicted qualitative finding that they disliked the complicated pseudo-grammar rules. The culture of learning in wanting things written down and the reality of exams might be some causes. Teachers' role became more important when most parents knew little English as indicated by the lack of support for No. 38 *parents good at English*. The disagreement with No. 24 *computer unhelpful* indicated the growing importance of computers in English learning.

The most ambiguous statements were Nos. 26 and 33 *periphery* and *homework*. Students did not know if they wanted to learn English from countries not perceived as powerful core English countries. This confirmed that they favoured American or British English and developed countries. However, it contradicted their view of English as an international

language, unless being international meant being internationally powerful to them. English structure and usage according to British and American norms were taught and tested in China. English from peripheral countries and social minorities was perceived as substandard. Students did not always do English homework first, probably because of greater pressure from other subjects and their boredom with English homework. Given its nature being constantly doing and memorising exam papers, it was not surprising that they were not that eager. Few students had any ideas on Nos. 16, 17, and 18, *listening to radio, reading and writing*. This signified that many of them failed to avail themselves of the growing opportunities to use English in daily life. As qualitative data demonstrated, their formal learning did not teach them how. Mediated by teachers and parents, they might regard English radio and books as irrelevant to exams. The ambiguity towards Nos. 13 and 14 *speaking English with Chinese and foreigners* confirmed this fear and the cultural intimidation of speaking English. Considering that some students spoke good English, as supported by No. 39 *classmates speak good English*, it was not impossible to overcome such difficulties. The ambiguity with No. 40 *exam fair* confirmed their doubt with the role of examination in their educational experience.

The result suggested that improving conditions for English learning did not necessarily facilitate the shift of focus from knowledge to skills. In fact, it was frustrating for students to tolerate traditional formal routine while being increasingly tantalised by informal opportunities. Students seemed to prefer informal learning based on experience, but the pressure of examination drained their energy and time to such extent that they could not pursue personal learning. They might realise that there were other avenues for English learning but, lacking necessary support, many were unable to identify and act upon opportunities, let alone create them. Dependent on formal learning, their contact and input

from natural English were limited. The culture of learning that defined comprehension as word-by-word understanding discouraged them from making contact with natural English. As a result, they feared natural English. These were further indications of the negative influence of formal learning. Recent decades saw the swinging of extremes from sending students to the countryside for re-education in the 1960s and 1970s to shutting them up in classroom to prepare for exams in the 1980s and 1990s. A balance between formal and informal learning would use their life experience and social service to enrich their classroom learning and vice versa. Contact with the natural, social and cultural reality would help stimulate and sustain motivation for learning. While teaching defined by examination and organised for efficiency prevented teachers from meeting students' individual needs, there was room for students to negotiate between the collective need and their individual needs. For the creative and the daring, limiting conditions provided bumper opportunities for developing learning autonomy.

9.4 The Attitudes

This section explores students' linguistic and social attitudes concerning English learning.

9.4.1 The linguistic

Qualitative finding indicated that students' perception of English was related to their perception of Chinese, particularly in their wrestling between patriotic ideology and pragmatic thinking.

3. English and Chinese

statement	strongly agree	agree	no idea	disagree	strongly disagree	your comments
41 English is important because it helps China develop its economy and society.	57	93	22	14	0	193
42 English is important because it helps China increase its international trade.	40	**106**	25	11	1	173

43 English is important because it gives us information, science and technology.	53	99	24	10	0	**195**
44 For modernisation, English is more useful than Chinese.	22	55	39	**42**	**26**	5
45 Chinese should become an international language in the world.	**67**	53	28	23	5	154
46 English should be allowed to become a second language in China.	38	93	37	11	6	146
47 English is becoming too important and powerful in China.	35	99	25	22	4	134
48 In many ways Chinese is a better language than English.	43	84	32	24	3	140
49 Our schools and universities must do more to teach us Chinese language.	32	62	**65**	22	3	96
50 We should spread Chinese culture by teaching Chinese language to the world.	35	73	62	9	2	130
Average	42	82	36	19	5	137

Students supported most statements in this section, particularly Nos. 43, 41, 42 *information, science and technology, economy and society*, and *international trade*. This confirmed the collective agenda of English learning and emphasised the instrumental role of English. English was regarded as important primarily for the country and associated with modernisation. As a tool, English was neutral. Questions such as whether it led to development and if so, how, was ignored. Related to this was students' overwhelming support for No. 43 *science*. The penetration of English mediated intellectual thinking towards industrialisation. Science was elevated to define modernisation, which permeated political thoughts, social values and the national curriculum. The frequent shifting of ideologies effectively discouraged students from studying humanities and social sciences, which were politically discriminated against for their anti-instrumental nature. Students' support for No. 45 *Chinese international* confirmed their aspiration for Chinese to spread internationally. Meanwhile, they also supported No. 46 *English second language*. Such support confirmed their patriotic pragmatism, suggesting that internationalisation was perceived as bi-directional between China and the world. The support for Nos. 48, 47, 50, 49 *Chinese better, English too important, spread Chinese,* and *more Chinese* confirmed their patriotic idealism, emphasising loyalty to Chinese, their concern for the power of English, their desire to internationalise Chinese, and their willingness to learn more

Chinese. The weakest statement, No. 44 *English more useful* confirmed students' patriotic feelings. However, a quarter of the students agreed with it, showing prevailing instrumental influence. The ambiguity of No. 49 *more Chinese* indicated that while some students wanted to learn more Chinese, other disagreed because it was not perceived as a useful subject.

The result confirmed students' dialectic attitudes towards Chinese and English between patriotic pragmatism and patriotic idealism. They were concerned that Chinese language and culture were not appreciated abroad and wanted to spread it to the world, but they also liked English to become a second language in China. They regarded Chinese as a better language but perceived English as more useful for modernisation. For practical reasons students preferred English, yet they held patriotic feelings for Chinese and thought English was becoming too powerful. They perceived internationalisation as two-way traffic: to absorb science and technology from the West and to introduce Chinese language and culture to the world.

9.4.2 The sociocultural

It emerged from the qualitative analysis that sociocultural context strongly mediated students' perception of English and influenced their learning. This section examines students' attitudes to determine the content and extent of their dissatisfaction.

4. Social attitudes

statement	strongly agree	agree	no idea	disagree	strongly disagree	your comments
51 English will help many people in China to improve their living standard.	25	109	39	12	0	147
52 The spread of English is, first and foremost, good for the US and the UK.	17	94	63	7	0	121
53 You do not have to be rich to be successful in China.	7	47	30	**66**	**34**	-73
54 In China it is not what you know but who you know that is the most important.	14	58	**79**	23	6	51

55 People do not tell lies in China very much at all.	13	43	49	64	16	-27
56 People in China are not helping but using each other more and more.	13	45	33	**66**	28	-51
57 Life is improving for most people in China even when price is going up.	26	89	49	20	1	119
58 In China, foreigners and Chinese are treated the same.	17	76	42	44	4	58
59 There should be more American programmes on Chinese TV.	36	77	33	35	5	94
60 We should build as many cars and roads as we can in China.	37	70	33	34	12	86
61 People are very nice to animals and plants in China.	29	62	34	46	15	44
62 China does a good job in keeping our mountains, rivers and lakes clean.	25	72	29	45	17	43
63 Fewer foreigners should be allowed to travel, work, study or live in China.	29	77	35	30	13	79
64 Marriages between Chinese people and foreigners should be encouraged.	34	81	61	7	1	140
65 There are many things China can learn from foreign countries.	**50**	**111**	17	7	1	**202**
66 Foreign countries have a lot to learn from China.	45	100	32	7	2	179
67 Foreigners should learn Chinese as much as we learn English.	49	81	38	15	3	158
68 In the US Chinese people are well liked by most American people.	14	63	72	28	4	55
69 The more I learn English, the more I like foreigners.	26	55	55	43	6	52
70 The more I know about other countries, the more I want to learn English.	44	91	33	13	4	158
Average	28	75	43	31	9	82

The strongest statement No. 65 *China can learn from foreign countries* highlighted students' open attitudes towards foreign countries. The consistency of support in its being the least ambiguous statement indicated students were not satisfied with elements of China's social and cultural reality. They welcomed English with its perceived democratic and liberating elements. However. almost as strong were Nos. 66 and 67 *foreign countries can learn from China* and *foreigners should learn Chinese*, confirming students' national pride and its dialectic nature. The support for No. 70 *knowledge of foreign countries helps English learning* indicated their interest in culture learning. Students agreed with No. 51 *English improves living*, a reflection on their belief that English was a tool to improve living standard. A majority of students supported No. 64 *marriage with foreigners good*, which signified growing openness towards foreigners. Many agreed with No. 52 *English*

serves US and UK. There was, however, little indication for negative attitudes towards English. Students agreed with No. 57 *life is improving*. They warmly embraced the internationalisation and industrialisation of China in their support for Nos. 59 and 60 more *American TV programmes* and *more cars and roads in China.*

Most students disagreed with No. 53 *rich is not successful*, indicating the rapid change of values towards materialism. Other weak statements included No. 56 *people use one another* and No. 55 *people do not lie*, confirming that students realised the erosion of moral standard. The most ambiguous statement was No. 54 *who you know is important*. The statement referred to the social practice of "going through the back door", using special connections to secure personal favour, a much abhorred yet widely practised pattern of relationship. As a highly relationship-oriented society, Chinese sociocultural dynamics operated on a network of personal connections that functioned through mutual favouritism. This network looked after one another's interests and protected each other. But it often encouraged corruption as helping one's family and friends was interpreted as honourable. Students had mixed attitudes towards the practice. They also found No. 68 *Chinese people liked by Americans* ambiguous, indicating that they were unsure how they would be treated. The media was increasingly open on racism in the West. The reality of losing one's social network and cultural background and becoming a potential subject for abuse was harsh. Scattered replies on Nos. 58 *foreigners and Chinese treated the same*, 63 *fewer foreigners should be allowed in* and 69 *English makes me like foreigners* indicated that opinions varied. The obscurity of the word "foreigner" might have contributed to this when its general connotation for outsiders was drastically different from its specific definition for the rich and powerful.

The result suggested that while students were aware of the social problems in contemporary China, their attitudes towards such problems were mixed. Their dissatisfaction was not as severe as qualitative data indicated. Despite the problems, their worldview was largely positive. To them, life in general was improving for most people. English would definitely make it even better. With an open and dialectic attitudes towards the world they wanted China and foreign countries to learn from one another. They supported relation with foreign people through friendship and marriage and welcomed Western culture from the media and the industrialisation of China. This signified that they were effectively captured by the value of English despite their patriotic concerns. The specific meaning of the term "foreigner" in the privilege and power it represented instead of its general meaning for people from the outside stimulated students' interest in foreign language, foreign people and foreign culture. To be "foreign" was thus uniquely different in China than in the West. English as a "foreign" language effectively mediated its values among its learners despite its instrumental projection.

9.5 Summary

The survey, in general, confirmed many qualitative findings. Conformities and conflicts in public and personal agenda in the purpose of learning were revisited. Context and conditions in the practice of learning were highlighted. Convergence and contradictions between pragmatic and idealistic attitudes to learning were investigated. Dynamics and dilemmas that motivated or hindered the process and product of learning were identified. Two ideologies underlining the themes of examination and going abroad and the conflicts of learning perception and practice were pragmatism and idealism. Institutionally, pragmatism was realised through examination as the mode of instruction and evaluation. Idealism rested upon aspirations for better education, employment and life opportunities

overseas. Socioculturally, pragmatism was defined by economic construction and modernisation fanned by science and technology. Idealism was expressed with a general dissatisfaction towards Chinese culture and a state of anomie that led to idealisation of the West. The instrumental perception was consequential of the pragmatic thinking following the political upheavals in recent history. It was also a product of Marxist ideology which defined reality in materialistic terms with which foreign languages became weapons for class struggle. At the personal level, pragmatism was marked by an ideological detachment of students and their increasing reluctance to be involved in politics following the student movements of the 1980s. Their lack of interest in social sciences and humanities reflected this detachment, as did the structural emphasis on science, the perception of English as precise science and the method of learning English through systematic analysis of grammar and statistical control of examination. The dominance of science and technology encouraged the idealisation of the US and increased the role of English.

In perception, the relation between pragmatism and idealism was a dialectic and dynamic one. Instrumental reasons and practical purposes interacted with patriotic ideals and cultural symbols. Collective agenda mediated personal aspirations. Contradictions and discrepancies influenced different perceptions of English articulated in terms of developing personal quality by students, preparing for examination by teachers, obtaining opportunities for education and employment by parents, and achieving modernisation through science by the official discourse. Instrumental perceptions depoliticised the nature of English learning. Even if foreign interests were served, it was secondary to improving personal quality and modernising China. Yet even instrumental values were exercised in competitive process and realised in social relationships. Thus pragmatic pretexts were often used to shelter idealistic purposes.

In practice, English was important both as a key subject for organising control and a channel for developing personal quality, identity and ideals. The control was through examination regarded by authorities as the objective standard for competition and evaluation. The ideals produced the perception of English as the superhighway to the opportunities of the West and as the standard according to which students increasingly redefined themselves in relation to the world. Yet the key role of English in internationalisation was not adequately addressed by learning where the primary concern was for exams. Students' open attitude to the world and their favour for experiential learning were ignored. Neither were they prepared to learn from increasing opportunities as China opened up to the world. The rich historical, educational, linguistic, social and cultural contexts presented students with many opportunities as well as unique problems. On one hand, the educational system defined by the quantification of examination restricted students' learning. On the other, the confinement of the system posed challenge for those so inclined to break away from the rigidity to develop learning autonomy and reap awards of courage, creativity and innovation.

The survey was problematic in many ways. First, with its ambition for comprehensiveness, it failed to sharpen the focus of the themes. A more reasonable design would be a more focused survey to probe specific questions related with the themes. However, it would require much time for themes to emerge from analysis. Another option was to administer a general survey first and then probe emerging themes through qualitative work. Second, students had a tendency to agree much more than disagree. Out of the 70 statements, only 17 attracted negative values. This might be cultural as it was easier to say yes simply to be nice. In addition, distinctions between "strongly agree" and "agree", between "strongly

disagree" and "disagree" were not clear. Students' choice were often random. The design could be simplified by minimising the numbers of choice and statements. Third, the survey and the analysis assumed that students' understanding of the statements were the same. This was obviously not the case in reality. Different students would understand the same statement differently. They would apply different criteria to determine the choice and degree of their agreement. In particular, of those who chose "no idea", some might have no ideas because the statement was ambiguous; others would choose it because they could not understand the statement. Therefore, the numerical values of strength only gave rough estimates of students' opinions at the time. They did not measure their opinions to any precision. Fourth, some of the statements were repetitive (19 and 29 *grammar*). Others could be combined (20 and 28 *more English*). Still others could be improved (69 *English makes me like foreigners*) or replaced by others (*American or British English*). Finally, comments students left and their replies to the last part of the survey by post and email were not included in the analysis due to time constraint.

The concluding chapter will discuss the study and its findings in relation to the latest development of relevant researches to suggest further questions and directions for investigation. It will evaluate the study to draw out the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.

Conclusion

As the commercialisation of English reaches new height, scholars in applied linguistics soon find themselves rendering with international businessmen the meaning of English in monetary terms. The commercialisation as a model of the quantification of learning is making its way into China, adding pressure and tension to the already over-loaded one-log bridge. This final chapter seeks to place English in students' learning experiences and their life aspirations by presenting main findings of the study, making connections between these findings and relating them to findings of the latest researches in relevant topics. In evaluating the research, it attempts to present some implications, concerns and lessons of the study before identifying my position and roles. Throughout the chapter suggestions of possible directions are made for future research.

Encounters with English and experiences of English learning

The study found that while students are increasingly exposed to natural English from the media and personal encounters with native English speakers and their culture, the focus of their English learning remains on examination. Students' discourse on learning reflected this focus. Terms they used to describe their learning experiences were highly contextualised in relation to examination. For example, by "grammar", students referred to the content of their learning: structure and usage rules specifically summarised by teachers for the pragmatic purpose of examination. By "natural environment", they alluded to the condition of learning: the lack of opportunities to use English. Likewise, their use of terms "listening", "speaking", "reading" and "writing" closely reflected the intensive nature of English learning pertaining to the focus on examination. The social emphasis on competition is fulfilled in examination as the centre of learning. The cultural stress on

effort is realised in memorisation as the method of learning. The intellectual dominance of science is reflected in systematic analysis as the routine for learning.

While the repetition of basic language units strongly represents the habit-formation and the isolation principle of the transmission tradition, elaborate analysis of grammatical rules follows the problem-solving of the scientific method. To prepare students for examination, grammar knowledge and practice on its accurate application are the objectives of learning. Language materials are isolated to manageable units for logical analysis and mechanical drills. Hence learning is likely to occur at the micro-level of words, phrases and sentences. Teachers lecture with authority in their articulation of rules. There is always a rule and teachers seldom admit not knowing it. When they attempt to use English, it is often for symbolic reasons as a token gesture rather than satisfying a communicative purpose.

While researches on testing largely focused on models and techniques, this study began to identify the nature of examination as the quantification of education through competition for efficiency. This contradicts with the nature of language learning and creates conflicting mandates between national examination which stresses grammar knowledge and national curriculum that emphasises communicative skills. Teachers are required to teach for quality. But examination drives teaching to quantity. To shift the focus from knowledge to communication, examination would have to be reformed. But examination as a socio-political force does not encourage change. This is because the pedagogical and social significance of English is realised through examination. By quantifying learning, examination defines the nature of learning as competition. Examination results are used as instruments of selection to qualify and place students for university, to promote and reward teachers, to rank schools for public funding and to reproduce order and discipline. As

examination becomes an instrument to organise and evaluate learning, the institutional power of English is consolidated by examination in which English is a key subject. Pragmatic attitude and visible results are emphasised. Learning is quantified as a commercial process of production and marketing. Hence there is an urgent need for critical social and cultural studies of examination to define its nature and implications to learning.

It was also found that the focus on examination has its socio-cultural conditions and connections. Most students and teachers in China lack adequate contact with native speakers for linguistic input and role models. Teachers fluent in English and creative in teaching are seldom appreciated and rewarded by the educational system. As a result, they do not stay long enough to make any impact before going overseas or finding jobs with foreign firms. Teachers can be reluctant to speak English for personal reasons. Students who are quick in picking up English phrases from films often seem better at speaking. This is embarrassing for teachers struggling with speaking English. By focusing on grammar, their authority is maintained and face saved. In addition, teachers came from a system that emphasised grammar. Many of them were produced by examination themselves. They rationalise examination as an efficient way of teaching and an objective tool for evaluation. In the light of China's highly competitive context, the skill to compete in examination is an important one. Students can develop their communication skills outside the class. Hence formal and informal learning assume different roles, with structural emphasis by formal learning and cultural emphasis by informal learning. Students favour informal learning with opportunities to personalise learning through music, sports, the media and the Internet. But they are not prepared to find such opportunities and have little time to benefit from them. As they are exposed to more input of natural English outside the school, they experience increasing frustration with formal learning.

Perceptions of English and aspirations in English learning

It was found that the place of English in China can be defined at multiple levels. There are the structural role in the educational system quantified for efficiency by examination, the social role in the popular rush to get ahead through universities and going abroad, the cultural role in the idealisation of the West and the aspiration for a new identity with the world. Students perceive English as one of the most important subjects. And it is. At the secondary and university levels, English is the only compulsory subject for all students regardless of their specialisation. In middle schools, this is realised in its daily hour allocation in the national curriculum and in its official designation as one of the three key subjects in which all students must be examined. As students advance, English become the only subject closely monitored and vigorously regulated by frequent national examination. The dominance of English increases in universities, where repeated failure in English would single-handedly disqualify students from academic degrees. No such requirement exists for any other subjects, including Chinese or maths. This effectively puts English into the centre of language education, despite its lack of official status in China.

Under the influence of social and parental mediation, students perceive English as a ladder for education and career advancement, an expressway to new ideas and latest information, a bridge to a higher living standard and a new way of life, a channel for international communication and foreign connections. Collectively, English is a tool for modernisation through science and technology, an instrument for internationalisation through global trade. Personally, English is a tool for economic liberation and social mobility. Such instrumental perceptions necessarily reflect the pragmatic perspective in China's contemporary intellectual thinking. As the pragmatic aspiration to save China through science remains

dominant and yet unfulfilled, the political discourse keeps shifting back and forth between nationalism and globalisation, between communist ideals and capitalist reality. This determines that the status of English in China is hardly stable.

As changing ideologies further encourage students to focus on the pragmatic meaning in national modernisation and personal improvement, at a deeper level, it is found that pragmatic concerns often shelter relational meaning in English learning. As China engages itself deeper into economic reforms and open door policy, English is not only associated with national modernisation and global trade at the public level, but increasingly with personal freedom and social mobility at the individual level. It is considered not just as the language of the US and the UK but a language of the world. In this, English is gaining significance as a new way to identify oneself and to relate to the world. While students are mediated to associate English with power by teachers, parents and the media, there is strong evidence for the influence of their own social and cultural experiences, especially through English learning itself. A sense of success is attached to the learning of English, and through it, the perceived international recognition and connection, foreign scholarships and investments, British degrees and American jobs. English brings status for the elite and possibilities for the under-privileged. For the rich and poor, it is a bridge to knowledge and information, science and technology, success and the world. English marks a breakthrough from traditional culture and has become an essential element of personal quality.

Interactions between experiences and aspirations

The study found that the interactions between students' experience of learning and their perceptions of English are dynamic and dialectic ones. The focus on examination encourages students to perceive English in an instrumental way. The instrumental

perception restricts them in their learning. Increasing opportunities to encounter natural English such as the English Corner and meeting foreigners stimulate their imagination and develope aspirations beyond examination. Such aspirations are only strengthened by their dissatisfaction with their learning, with China's social problems and cultural traditions. They are confirmed and developed by their idealisation of the West, which further increases their dissatisfaction with reality. While successful learning encourages students to appreciate values defined in English, power and prestige associated with English permeate students' perceptions at pragmatic and idealistic levels to produce aspirations that motivate their learning. Hence the role of English in mediation determines that its place is more than an instrumental one. The instrumental functions only shelter its mediation role. Thus mediation is a particularly important feature in the interactions between experiences and aspirations in defining the place of English and the role of English learning in China. With strong social and cultural mediation, students form aspirations that motivate and sustain their learning. Without such mediation, students lack motivation and become resentful to the learning routine. This explains why the conflict between formal learning and informal opportunities is a result of the split between the structural and cultural meaning of English, between what it *does* and what it *is*. As English cannot be separated from the values it represents, its instrumental role cannor be separated from its social, cultural, educational and intellectual roles. Separation could lead to learning fatigue and intellectual anomie.

It was found that such separation could lead to agenda sheltering, when public agenda for modernisation shelter private purposes of personal advancement by means of examination and going abroad. It seems that sheltering has its roots in the debate between science and democracy, where science has the upper hand in China. Marxism reinforces the elevation of science by defining human advancement and social progress in terms of growing

production force in which scientific research and technological development are the driving forces of history. The instrumental nature of science means that scientific pursuit is politically correct. Deng Xiaoping classified scientists and engineers as the elite of the working class. Many Chinese leaders today have technocratic background. To students, a practical way to maintain correctness and security in the changing political atmosphere is to be specialised in a particular field of science and become politically immune. Social science, on the other hand, is perceived as wishy-washy and politically risky. Students in arts suffer low self-esteem because they are not considered bright enough for science. Some students in science would like to study arts, but parental advice and peer pressure are intolerant to such ideas.

If the advancement of science for modernisation is a key public agenda for learning English, going abroad is a key personal objective conveniently sheltered under the public umbrella of helping China's modernisation. Hence personal meaning is protected by public meaning, integrative drive is prompted by instrumental reasons, internal motivation is inspired by external mediation. As aspirations reflect the mediation of sociocultural conditions and the experience of English learning, the aspiration to go abroad gives English its special role in China, in which going abroad is perceived not so much as experience and education, but as success and achievement in its own right. Considering the lack of freedom in China, the aspiration to go abroad reflects, to some degree, the human longing to be free. Hence English becomes a mediator for democracy and a shelter for freedom.

Learning autonomy

To encourage interactions between learning experiences and aspirations, it was found that learning autonomy is significant in bridging the gap between formal and informal learning.

In addition, learning autonomy is developed through students' reflection on the experiences of their learning. Through reflection, students learn about learning. Even English itself becomes a by-product that they pick up almost accidentally as they strive to explore the environment to discover new ground. Once learning becomes autonomous, the divide between acquiring and learning is overcome. This finding from the Chinese context reflects an emerging focus in recent ELT researches. Wenden's (1998) study in the US recognised the ongoing need to help learners reflect upon their learning experiences and strategies to refine their beliefs and knowledge about learning. According to the study, insights gained from reflection would assign an active role to the learner and encourage self-directed learning. Lee's (1998) study in Hong Kong identified three areas of self-directed learning in which students could take active responsibility: self-inspired objectives, self-monitored process and self-assessed results. Since Chinese culture of learning tend to emphasise collective agenda and passive reception, it can be hard to encourage learning autonomy. However, this study found that the dominance of public agenda, the limitation of learning conditions and the restraining aspects of the sociocultural context do not necessarily prevent the development of learning autonomy. This is particularly true for some students who become more creative and motivated in spite of unfavourable conditions. Wen and Johnson's (1997) study on attainment among English majors in university in China confirmed the importance of students' control over learning and their beliefs about learning. According to their study, learning strategies had strong, consistent and positive effect on success.

If autonomy is significant, its promotion should be an important element of curriculum design and instruction. Cotterall's (2000) study in New Zealand was particularly relevant in formulating principles to guide course designs for learning autonomy. Such principles will

need to be applied, tested and refined in different learning conditions. Along this line, Littlewood's (1999) study in Hong Kong developed the concept of learning autonomy by matching different aspects of autonomy with the characteristics and needs of learners in the specific context of East Asia. Once the Hong Kong culture of learning was summarised in terms of collective, authoritarian and effort orientations, the aspects of autonomy rooted in these orientations were considered. How autonomy could be most effectively developed was then speculated. To follow up, we will need to identify features of the local culture of learning and the needs of individual students in their own voice. We can also describe positive and negative cases of learning autonomy.

Student voice

One important aspect of this study is the attempt to bring learners' perspective into the focus of research. The extensive use of students' descriptions of their learning experiences and their reflections on learning were triangulated with a survey on the conditions and attitudes pertaining to their learning. The survey largely grew out of students' discourse of learning. It verified their statements and tested the strength of emerging themes. In a recent paper revisiting the notion of motivation in second language learning (Gardner and Lambert, 1972), Spolsky (2000) noted that scholars dissatisfied with using the traditional questionnaires to gather data now favoured more discursive methods. He argued for the triangulation of methodology, and in particular, using personal statements of learners to enrich the research. While Spolsky provided cases of Palestinian Arabic and of the former Soviet immigrants learning Hebrew to demonstrate the importance of different perspectives, this study provides a further example with the case of Chinese students learning English to illustrate the possibility of studying language learning from different angles. It was found that students' own voice is not only sufficient in describing their

learning but effective in revealing the relationships between their learning experiences and perceptions. This supports the argument that educational researches need more learner perspective. Indeed, recent studies proved that there were more important roles for students than many of us were willing to consider. Two practical ways to respect students' voice and invite their participation would be the application of learning diaries (Goh, 1998) and learner observations on teaching and learning (Eken, 1999; Wang and Seth, 1998). Such efforts will promote reflection and encourage collaborative exploration among students, teachers and researchers.

Suggestions for future research

This study confirmed the dialectic mediation between social attitudes and English learning. The history of English in China witnessed constant debates between the conservative and the reformers, the nationalist reformers and the internationalist revolutionaries. Even if English leads to modernisation, it lets in foreign influence at the same time. In the process of modernisation, English promotes inequality as well as equality, privileges as well as democracy. The meaning of English simultaneously resides in the ideology of modernisation through science and technology, the ideals of nationalism and internationalism, and the pragmatic reality of personal improvement. It dwells in considerable parental mediation on their children as a projection of success based on their own life experience. It rests upon the logic of efficiency organised through examination. It was found that the change of status for English due to shifting ideologies encourages the emphasis of the instrumental role of English which detaches English from ideology. This coincides with the ELT professionalism of linguistic imperialism that depoliticises English.

If the power of English was established in China by the British imperialism, its political role prevented it from penetrating Chinese culture and society until nationalism was defined by modernisation and English assumed its status as the language of modernisation. The mismatch between the teaching agenda for modernisation and the learning agenda for personal development is not only a result of social upheavals and cultural clashes but the mediation of English learning itself which reshapes students' interpretation of their experience and changes their understanding of reality. Future studies will need to identify differences between Chinese and English interpretations, describe the changing process and define the roles of English in the process. In this direction, Jiang's (2000) survey of word associations between native Chinese and English speakers was a good beginning. As different languages and cultures intermix, questions must be asked about the effect of a new language on the social, culture and intellectual well-being of its learners. For example, how English produces identity shifts and conceptual changes while mediating new aspirations will have important implications for learning.

This study signals growing concerns for the possible influence on the development of Chinese by the penetration of English and the development of English as it continues to spread in China. While such concerns can be dismissed as insubstantial, students' opinion of Chinese and their standard of Chinese are declining. Thus far there is little concerted effort from the government to promote Chinese, either. Recent regulation of product labels and advertisements stated that all products and commercials should be published in Chinese. But this only proves that the institutional focus on English is putting Chinese into risks. As linguistic human rights (Phillipson, 1995) and cultural synergy (Cortazzi and Jin, 1996b) enter the mainstream of language learning debate, humanitarian concerns for students' right to education through the medium of the native language and its possible

roles in promoting second language learning, reducing social conflict and enhancing cultural understanding are no longer merely political. Lambert and Taylor's (1996) study among Cuban American families reminded us of the sharp difference between subtractive and additive forms of bilingualism and biculturalism. According to their study, working class mothers encouraged their children to learn English in order to succeed, even at the expense of Spanish language and culture. In contrast, middle-class mothers associated success more with Spanish competence. This suggests that economic stability and social security are related with parental and students attitudes towards languages. While this study found that there is a growing tendency that English is learned at the expense of Chinese, it poses more questions such as to what extent English learning is subtracting Chinese and how subtraction is related to different economic, educational, social, cultural and ethnic conditions. Another direction will be applying the cultural synergy model to explore how to promote additive bilingualism and inclusive biculturalism as modernisation runs its course in China.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000) had strong relationship with language learning. According to him, we often used symbolic tools to mediate our relationship with others and with ourselves and thus change the nature of these relationships. These tools created by human cultures were modified by succeeding generations for future generations. Language was an important tool to mediate the relationship. This study indicates that of all its roles in being a tool, English is a mediating tool for relationships. However, mediation is dialectic between English and relationships. Even the most practical concerns for examination and going abroad at the personal level and modernisation at the national level are deeply relational in nature as determined by China's historical and cultural reality. At the same time, the learning of English itself mediates the interpretation and reproduction of

such reality. The study found that the instrumental meaning of English as a tool is symbolic, as pragmatic agenda only shelter deeply personal and relational aspirations. Another connection with the sociocultural theory is with its conception of human mind as a higher, culturally shaped system in which the integration of symbolic artefacts permeated thinking. Voluntary attention, intentional memory, planning and evaluation of the effectiveness of learning were some of the higher mental capacities. The study found that effective learning of English helps students develop critical thinking and independent spirit through the mediation of English. As autonomy is a key to effective learning, English learning is elevated to a higher ground when such mediation takes place. By investigating how the learning of English mediates its learning, this study poses questions on the modification of language policies and education practice so that English teaching best mediates learning autonomy, international awareness and cross-cultural understanding.

The concept of activity in the sociocultural theory (Lantolf, 2000) maintained that human behaviour resulted from the integration of socially and culturally constructed forms of mediation into human activity, whether the activity was psychological or social. Activity was not merely doing something, but doing something with a biologically or culturally constructed need. Needs only became motives when they were directed at a specific object. Motives were only realised in actions that were goal-oriented and carried out under certain conditions through mediative means. Thus an activity comprised three levels: motivation, action and conditions:

> Activities can only be directly observed by others at the level of conditions. The motives of particular activities cannot be determined solely from the level of concrete doing, since the same observable activity can be linked to different motives and different concrete activities can be linked to the same motives. (ibid.: 8)

These words summarise an important limit of this study. While the conditions of English learning is directly observable, students' aspirations cannot be determined simply by what

is observed. It is believed that the use of student voice in describing their experience and perceptions provides an access to their motives and goals as they are mediated by the sociocultural reality. Whether or not they reveal the genuine nature of their aspirations remains unobservable. Since the findings are best described as proximal on the account of learning experience and particularly perceptions, they must be taken with caution. What this study describes and discusses are some cases of English learning activities I experienced or heard on my fieldwork analysed to the best of my ability. Such individual cases are not to be taken necessarily as representative of the wider reality, nor should they be used as basis for generalisation on English learning in China. As case studies, however, they do legitimately raise areas of concerns for further investigation and theorising on a wider basis in the Chinese context.

Implications and concerns

With the number of students learning English and the intensity of motivation and efforts, China can soon have millions of English speakers. The emergence of a regional dialect of Chinese English seems likely. The dissemination and mediation of English has serious sociocultural implications. The idealisation of English-speaking countries in the West is one of them, as demonstrated by the increasing flood of refugees from China into these countries. The teaching of English encourages the appreciation of its culture and an idealisation of the US and the UK. Yet these countries cannot support such idealisation when refugees arrive on their shores. While this is not only an educational problem, ELT workers can ease the situation by teaching with more wisdom and affective concerns. To discourage students from idealising the West, its social problems can be exposed. The cultural advantages of the local societies can be recognised. Local language and culture can be respected. There is thus a need to create a concern for all native languages, to encourage

critical engagement with cultural content that makes cross-cultural and educational sense, to foster a balanced attitude between native and English cultures that facilitates open discussions on the strength and weakness of both. ELT workers need to be aware of the social and cultural implications of their work. To equalise modernisation with English promotes not only anglocentric values but idealisation of English culture the responsibility of which neither the teachers nor their countries are able to face.

The cost China is paying as a result of English learning is another concern. With the coming of the new millennium, China's international connection is increasing. The waves of brain drain to the US, Canada, the UK and Australia, especially students and scholars who are recently joined by nursing and IT immigrants are reaching new heights. As economic situation improves, middle school students from China are arriving to visit and study in America and Britain. Their number increased so quickly that the Chinese government drafted urgent regulations to prohibit students under university age to study overseas. But such regulations failed to stop the flow of students into foreign schools. The increasing internationalisation of China encourages key middle schools to feed their graduates directly into foreign universities, who warmly welcome the money they bring. Cities in China compete against one another to designate "bilingual zone" with both Chinese and English signs to improve their bids for hosting international events such as the Olympics and the University Games. By raising the awareness of the sociocultural implications of English learning in China, this study contributes to the understanding of the possible problems of the promotion of English in China.

Other implications of the findings include the roles of foreign teachers and information technology in English learning. Chinese students expect foreign teachers to be different.

Part of their attraction is the fact that they are independent of the system. Students consider informality as a marking difference between Chinese and foreign teachers. Foreign teachers do not particularly enjoy being used to entertain students and create public image for impression and reputation. Students like foreign teachers, but most schools do not have the budget or power to hire them. Since it was found that students are fascinated by foreigners especially when their encounters are not a routine, it may be feasible to consider hiring foreign teachers for different provinces and cities and have them travel between schools rather than placing them in one particular school. This will assure that more students benefit from direct contact with native speakers. The rarity of encounters will make them critical learning experience to stimulate motivation. The popularisation of information technology also create opportunities and problems for English learning. On the one hand, it brings a new mode of learning, creates new English environment and dramatically increases the amount of information available in English. On the other hand, teachers familiar with text-based information processing are challenged when students are faster at processing image-based information. The challenge creates new conflict between teaching and learning. Hence there is a growing need to train teachers in information technology and make it easily available to them. Future researches will need to identify and define the special roles of foreign teachers and information technology in English learning so that they can promote learning autonomy and intercultural understanding.

Lessons from conducting the research and my roles in the process

There are important lessons to be learned from areas of possible weakness in this study. First of all, should I have opportunities to do this study again, I will keep a narrower focus to concentrate analytic attention on developing progressive argument on one theme. In this regard, after the study identified some important themes, more focused questions for future

investigation will concern the nature of examination in students' learning experience, parental mediation on students' perceptions and aspirations, the role of native speakers in English learning in China, etc.. Secondly, my relative lack of research experience and the severe restriction of resources have inevitably affected the process and quality of data collection and analysis. Despite my best efforts, I am still only beginning to learn strategies to collect and analyse data systematically. More research practice is needed to develop confidence in research methods and sensitivity for what the data has to say. Thirdly, while this research began by reviewing the historical legacy of English learning in China and the theoretical framework of related researches, it could perhaps be strengthened with a more vigorous engagement with front-line researches in the psychological, sociological, and in particular, the educational and cultural studies of English language learning. Future studies can consider a debate format to establish closer connections with related researches for a more balanced argument. Last but not the least, while the survey findings verified some qualitative findings, they were not systematic enough to develop the discussion. One option will be to administer the survey at the beginning of the process to help identify themes and establish the focus for qualitative work.

Finally, I believe this work has contributed to the study of English language learning by emphasising the student voice and introducing my "semi-stranger's" perspective as an English learner and teacher in China and researcher from the West. The co-existence of cultural closeness because of my background in China and intellectual distance due to my studies overseas provides the cross-cultural resource and international experience for studying the international role of English. Such resource and experience have helped me to take cross-cultural and international positions. For example, I experienced English learning through examination in the 1970s and joined the rush to learn English for modernisation in

the 1980s. As I learned and taught English, I developed a love for English and became subject to its mediation. Increasingly I was dissatisfied with the reality of social and cultural life in China and aspired for freedom and democracy in the West. Yet, having benefited from English in studying overseas, I experienced the reality of the West and the disillusionment of my idealisation. As I synthesise my experience in China and the West, I develop a love for all native languages and become concerned with the linguistic rights of Chinese, the international spread of English and the commercialisation of English learning. At the same time, much as I aspire for China's modernisation, I realise the danger of idealising science and technology, market and commercialisation. Therefore, I see my role as to help students realise the nature of English learning and its relationship with Chinese learning, to promote the learning of both Chinese and English and the pursuit of a modern China defined in its own terms with cross-cultural understanding and international identity. In this regard, it is encouraging to find in the student voice that many of them are open-minded about the future and internationally oriented in their aspirations despite the confinement of the system. This study will more than serve its purpose if it contributes towards the building of bigger, wider and more bridges that will carry the army of students back and forth between China and the world.

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An Army Crossing a One-Log Bridge:
A Study of English Language Learning in Middle Schools in China

APPENDIX

Visits to other schools

Schools visited included university-affiliated, factory-affiliated, rural, private, ordinary and special schools. Two examples are presented to illustrate my experience. My plan was to visit as many different schools as possible. Data generated from my visits expanded the discussion, complemented it with perspectives of different students and prepared me for the survey. These schools were introduced with no analysis as the purpose is to establish a wider context to my study at SD. My visits illustrated that the value attached by students to English seemed to increase from rural schools to city schools and from ordinary schools to key schools. At rural schools, English was much less of a concern. In urban schools, especially key schools, English was a "superpower" subject more related with the reality of students' daily life.

XD: The New Capital, an innovative school

When I learned that XD Middle School was sending dozens of students to Canada every year, I decided to go for a visit. As I approached, the contrast between the street outside and the school was striking. Outside I was in China with the dust and noise all around me. Once inside I could be anywhere in the West. As I was ushered into the Principal's office, I was told it was going to be a short meeting. Yet as soon as the Principal began to speak, I realised this was not the case.

Mr. L began by lecturing me on China's education. According to him, there were many shortcomings with the system. In moral education, the stress was on political theories but not morality. Many students would smoke, spit, lie, envy or abuse others. In intellectual development, it split the red (socialist world view and patriotism) and the white (intellectual development). The focused was on knowledge. Students lacked creativity and flexibility. Self-serving formalities such as exams became the focus. This ignored the development of abilities and students' potential for living meaningful lives on their own. The evaluation of students was an ill-ended process in which their life was determined by a single exam.

Mr. L thanked Deng Xiaoping for the changes in China. He was a graduate of 1966 and actively participated in the Cultural Revolution before becoming a university student in 1977. He said his generation was fortunate because they experienced much and saw many changes. "Because of Deng, I can sit here today with a wonderful school. Because of Deng, you could study overseas." He thought China had more freedom of speech now. "Americans lack patience. One must be patient as education takes time. Changes would come, but good changes take time."

My. L saw himself as a reformer. "I can't influence on a big scale but I can create my own climate. I am not scared because I don't worry about promotion." He wanted his school to become famous with international reputation. "The key is personnel management. People are difficult to manage, especially intellectuals. But when we have bonus to give out, teachers give up their opportunities for others. They know they will get recognised and rewarded." A Chinese saying went "Flowers inside only smell nice outside"[46] Mr. L wanted both the flowers and the fragrance inside. He did

[46] Outstanding people were only popular from outside.

not like people who reported on others. "If their words are true, they shouldn't mind speaking directly to the people." He was happy to see how much XD changed since he became the principal three years ago. As a teacher, he sent hundreds of students to universities. He gave up promotion in order to stay. "I don't care how others speak of me. I make my decision."

Mr. L liked connections. "Education was just part of the social chain. If any part goes wrong, there will be problems. Electricity office may cut the power if they are not happy. Water company will cut water. This is the reality. East or west, relationship is essential." Mr. L thought it was impossible to use money to establish and maintain relationships: "It had to be mutual respect."

As the principal of a school with 2900 students and 179 staff, he was fortunate in having the support of his leaders. He was a member of the local Communist Party Committee for four terms. He liked the ancient wisdom of Zhege Liang: *tianshi* (good timing), *dili* (good location), *renhe* (people harmony). "In dealing with leaders, strategy is the key. You may need to retreat in order to advance. You may need to nod to what you disagree. It's worth it. Politics is a game. That's why I prefer to stay at school. When the government wanted my students to clean up the streets, I told them it was illegal. Nobody dared to say a word. But I did. I have a clean school. There's nothing they can do about it. We are self-responsible."

In working with foreigners, Mr. L preferred Zhou En Lai's manner, *bubeibukang*[47]. He believed in mutual respect and understanding. His English learning in college helped him work directly with foreigners. On his visit to the US in 1993 with the Chinese Education Delegation, he was surprised to find many American teachers had masters degrees. As soon as he came back, he sent 19 teachers for their masters. He also liked the American emphasis on creativity and aggressiveness. "American students are not shy. They are encouraged to show their best. Their education makes it explicit they want to maintain their leadership in the world. In China education is defined by exam marks. It is wrong that all schools use the same textbook." Mr. L did not want drugs, sex, guns and violence in his school, but he liked American textbooks and students.

At this time, Mr. C, Head of Teaching Affairs, came in. Some parents were inquiring about sending their children to Canada. While Mr. L was out, Mr. C told me that Mr. L was from a good family background. Politically he was solid, with good connections "up and down, left and right." Even if his plan was rejected, he would not give up. He was willing to step back in order to leap forward. It was good relationship with leaders that made it different for his school.

I asked Mr. L about his secret programme to send students to Canada. He said parents had to pay. Most parents would have £10,000-£20,000 saved to buy their house and educate their children. Children's education was the most important. It would work out fine if 10 or 20 students were sent each year. Mr. L chose schools with good reputation run by well-established charities, such as the Mennonite churches. Canada encouraged students from overseas because it pumped money into its economy. Mr. L did not think American government understood Chinese realities. Sanction in trade because of the impeachment of copyright was naive. "The Chinese government has little to do with it. It's all smuggled in from Taiwan and Hong Kong anyway. They do not see the progress made in China. Our partner schools must have positive attitudes towards China."

Mr. L said the large number of out-of-the-plan students were the biggest source of income for XD. They either did not qualify for middle schools or wanted to go overseas with his programmes. No other school gave this option. A lady was led into the office to get a figure from Mr. L to make payment for her child. Mr. L wrote down a figure. She was apparently not too pleased and tried to bargain. Mr. L refused to give in. "Chinese parents take their children's life as their personal responsibility too much. When new students came, parents carried their stuff and made their beds.

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[47] Neither obsequious nor supercilious.

They did all the house work to make time for their children to study. Students end up with little independence." He thought if the school was well run, parents would pay happily.

Mr. L said grammar was the focus in English teaching. Even if the textbook stressed listening and speaking, once it's handled by teachers everything became grammar. "China's reality requires that teachers teach for exams. Good teachers came from foreign language institutes, but after a few years they start to teach grammar as well. That's why we have American teachers. Every student had to pass a speaking test with them." Mr. L was not happy with English teaching at his school but he thought it was better than others. His students passed national exams easily and had qualified for foreign scholarships. One student was studying in California.

Mr. L said his school's Ping-Pong team just returned from the UK. When the British delegation came to Sichuan, the Provincial Sports Committee recommended XD because it had produced Olympic medallists for China. The British paid for the trip. They had seven games in the UK and won all of them. Students had to study very hard after the visit, but they all loved it.

Recently XD teachers, cooks and cleaners each got a computer. "Teachers in other schools were jealous. Their principals were unhappy. They realised I got ahead of them again. The province said I did a good thing for Sichuan's education. I knew I had the support." He was confident that within a few years he could revolutionise teaching by incorporating information technology.

Mr. L got more relaxed as lunch drew near. He said that in China life was tiring, not just physically, but mentally. His heart was often deeply burdened. "China is a place where the look on the face of leaders can determine people's lives. Sometimes I wonder why I'm here." As he walked me to a hot pot restaurant, he received greetings from many. Next to our private room, a friend of his was entertaining some guests. He introduced this friend as his schoolmate, who ended up paying for our lunch. As he talked, Mr. L kept putting frog legs and monkey brain into my bowl.

DF: The Bumper Harvest, a rural school

DF was a two-hour bus ride into the country. The school had much more land than most city schools. Students were running in the woods when I arrived so I decided to go to the woods for a walk. Buildings were run down, and classroom furniture was basic. When finally somebody noticed that I was a stranger, he asked me who I was looking for and went out of his way to help. Typically the principal was not in, so he sat me down, made me tea, and went to look for him.

The principal came in with a water thermos. He looked at the introduction letter and asked me why I wanted to see schools in the countryside. I said I was interested in how different it was from city schools. He smiled and told me it was very, very different. However, students would be happy to see me as I could tell them about my life overseas and how to learn English.

DF had suffered a lot because of its location. It is between Chengdu and Xindu so nobody was effectively responsible for it. Had it been far away from the city, it would have received special aid. But DF was not far enough to qualify. "Good" students all went to "better" schools in the city. DF had its advantages: Class size was small, between 20 to 30. But small class size did not necessarily guarantee more attention as it was a sign of unpopularity and neglect. Students in small classes often suffered from low self-esteem as they received little support.

A young man took me to an English class in Senior Grade 2. He re-arranged the classroom so students could sit around in a semi-circle. There were ten girls and five boys. One girl stood up at least five times to ask me questions on how to learn English. I told her that English was more a

way of life than a subject to study. Another girl challenged the way English was taught, even when her teacher was present. But he only smiled. None of the boys said anything. When I called on them, they just sat there looking at me, smiling. A girl sitting next to a boy started pulling his arm. He refused to move. She announced to the whole class that he was lazy. His face turned red, but was still smiling. Finally, she asked how he could possibly become a good carpenter being so lazy. Students burst out laughing saying he did not need to work as his family had made a lot of money.

I had assumed that students had a clear conviction of the usefulness of English for themselves and for their country. DF students taught me that was not the case, not because they were ignorant, but because in their life they came into little contact with English.

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A Study of English Language Learning in China©

Questionnaire for Students

0. Something about yourself

1) In this part, please say something about yourself in Chinese.

Your age_____Your gender_____Your school_____

Your hobbies_____

Your favourite subjects_____

Your dream for the future_____

Countries you would like to visit

1)_____Why_____

2)_____Why_____

3)_____Why_____

2) If you have a lot of money, how would you spend it?_____

3) Please rank the following according to their importance to you, putting the most important first:

A. Family (*parents, grandparents, brothers and sisters, children, uncles and aunts, etc.*)
B. Friends (*classmates, schoolmates, old classmates, friends outside school, dating, etc.*)
C. Religion (*belief in God*)
D. Education (*universities, degrees, studying abroad, etc.*)
E. Intelligence (*human wisdom, good school work, high marks and grades*)
F. Career (*interesting job, success and achievement, promotion, etc.*)
G. Appearance (*looking good, nice and tidy, wearing good clothes, nice haircut, etc.*)
H. Wealth (*having a lot of money, owning big houses and expensive cars*)
I. Health (*no disease*)

Your order 1_____2_____3_____4_____5_____6_____7_____8_____9_____

For each statement, select ONE answer that best expresses your view. Your comments are most welcome.

1. Reasons for learning English

statement	strongly agree	agree	no idea	disagree	strongly disagree	your comments
01 I learn English because it is the main international language.						
02 I learn English because I want to go to university.						
03 I learn English because I want to get a good job.						
04 I learn English because it will give me a good quality.						
05 I learn English because people respect me if I have good English.						
06 I learn English because my English teacher is very good.						
07 I learn English because I want to make friends with foreigners.						
08 I learn English because I want to go to study abroad.						
09 I learn English because I want to live and work abroad.						
10 I learn English because I want to use computers and the Internet.						
11 I learn English because I like English songs, films, radios and TV.						
12 I learn English because I would like to read or write in English.						

Do you have any other reasons for learning English?_____

2. Conditions of learning English

statement	strongly agree	agree	no idea	disagree	strongly disagree	your comments
13 I would like to speak English with other Chinese people.						
14 I would not like to speak English with foreign people.						
15 I would like to be taught by foreign teachers of English.						
16 I don't like to learn English by listening to foreign radio such as BBC and VOA.						
17 I like reading letters, books, newspapers, or magazines in English.						
18 I hardly write letters, notes, cards, or diary in English.						
19 I would like to speak more English and study less grammar in class.						
20 I would like to have less time for English at school.						
21 I would like to learn more about the US, the UK, Canada and Australia.						
22 I would not want to study history, geography, math or science in English.						
23 Watching English TV or video programmes helps me learn English.						

24 Playing computer games does not help me learn English.						
25 Singing English songs makes learning English much more interesting.						
26 I would not like to learn English from Singapore, India, and Africa.						
27 I would like our school to have English Corner or English Summer Camp.						
28 I would like our English teacher to use less English in class.						
29 I would love to take more grammar notes from the teacher in English class.						
30 I would like to spend less time on preparing for exams in English class.						
31 I would not want to learn English if it is not taught at school.						
32 Of all the subjects at school, I like English the least.						
33 At home I do English homework first before anything else.						
34 English is one of the most important subjects at school.						
35 English classes at school are often quite interesting.						
36 Learning English at home on my own is much less interesting.						
37 My parents do not care much about my English learning.						
38 My parents are pretty good at English themselves.						
39 Some of our classmates speak very good English.						
40 National exams are good and fair in deciding who goes to university.						

Is there anything else you want to tell me about your English learning?_____

_____

3. English and Chinese

statement	strongly agree	agree	no idea	disagree	strongly disagree	your comments
41 English is important because it helps China develop its economy and society.						
42 English is important because it helps China increase its international trade.						
43 English is important because it gives us information, science and technology.						
44 For modernisation, English is more useful than Chinese.						
45 Chinese should become an international language in the world.						
46 English should be allowed to become a second language in China.						
47 English is becoming too important and powerful in China.						
48 In many ways Chinese is a better language than English.						

49 Our schools and universities must do more to teach us Chinese language.						
50 We should spread Chinese culture by teaching Chinese language to the world.						

Is there anything else you want to say about English and Chinese?_____

_____

4. Social attitudes

statement	strongly agree	agree	no idea	disagree	strongly disagree	your comments
51 English will help many people in China to improve their living standard.						
52 The spread of English is, first and foremost, good for the US and the UK.						
53 You do not have to be rich to be successful in China.						
54 In China it is not what you know but who you know that is the most important.						
55 People do not tell lies in China very much at all.						
56 People in China are not helping but using each other more and more.						
57 Life is improving for most people in China even when price is going up.						
58 In China, foreigners and Chinese are treated the same.						
59 There should be more American programmes on Chinese TV.						
60 We should build as many cars and roads as we can in China.						
61 People are very nice to animals and plants in China.						
62 China does a good job in keeping our mountains, rivers and lakes clean.						
63 Fewer foreigners should be allowed to travel, work, study, or live in China.						
64 Marriages between Chinese people and foreigners should be encouraged.						
65 There are many things China can learn from foreign countries.						
66 Foreign countries have a lot to learn from China.						
67 Foreigners should learn Chinese as much as we learn English.						
68 In the US Chinese people are well liked by most American people.						
69 The more I learn English, the more I like foreigners.						
70 The more I know about other countries, the more I want to learn English.						

Do you have anything else to say?_____

_____

5. Free writing *(optional)*

Last, but not the least, please write a short one-page essay in Chinese or in English. Here are some ideas:

1) An article named "English and me"

2) A letter to a brother/sister/friend who is studying in America, Britain, or Canada

3) A diary entry beginning with "*I got my English test paper back today and found myself the first in my class....*"

Thank you for your help. You can send me your essay in a letter:

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