

Bringing Interculturality into the Chinese-as-a-Foreign-Language Classroom

Jiayi Wang

The concept of culture has been widely problematized in intercultural studies. Recently, there has been an increasing call to examine how people use the term “culture” in discourse (e.g., Dervin [2011](#), [2012](#), [forthcoming](#)). Dervin, for example, explains that by concentrating on *interculturality*, we can shift our focus from regarding culture as a blanket explanation of everything to examining “how culture is used in discourse and actions to explain and justify” people’s “actions and thoughts” (Dervin [2012](#), p. 187). In a similar vein, Sarangi adopted a discursive approach to analyzing intercultural interaction, questioning the “cultural” emphasis in miscommunication analysis and proposing to move from “what is culture” to “what we do with culture” (Sarangi [1994](#), p. 415). For this study, *interculturality* is defined as the promotion of a critical understanding of culture discourses.

Intercultural language education, which advances critical intercultural language teaching and learning, has begun to draw increasing attention from scholars (Dervin and Liddicoat [2013](#); Nugent and Catalano [2015](#)).

J. Wang (✉)
University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK
e-mail: jwang11@uclan.ac.uk

For example, Cole and Meadows's (2013) study used critical discourse analysis to demonstrate how a teacher's switching between standard and other-than-standard Indonesian in a language workshop helped deconstruct the nationalist essentializing in the language classroom.

In Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) contexts, Wang and Rendle-Short (2013) used conversation analysis in the teaching of the Chinese conversational opening *ni hao ma* (lit. how are you) in the Chinese Mandarin language classroom. They found that students were more likely to use *ni hao ma* appropriately in their telephone openings with their CFL teacher if they were guided to examine the differences between *ni hao ma* and the English conversational opening *how are you*, especially through an analysis of the respective adjacency pairs of these phrases. This study demonstrates the value of taking an "interculturality" approach to teaching and learning Chinese. I will further address this approach in the section below.

Nevertheless, to my knowledge, fostering critical intercultural understanding (referred to as interculturality in this study) in the CFL classroom has rarely been explored in the literature. The present research thus addresses this lacuna of research by reporting on a case study on how to foster interculturality in CFL classes. Specifically, it explores the ways in which a teacher can help students develop criticality and reflexivity (Dervin 2013), move beyond over-simplistic categorization (Riitaoja and Dervin 2014), and deconstruct essentialism in a classroom setting.

CULTURE IN TEACHING AND LEARNING CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Teaching Chinese as a foreign language (TCFL) at universities in English-speaking countries began over a century ago. It was introduced at Yale in 1871 and in London at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) in 1917 (Tsung and Cruickshank 2012, p. 1). However, until recently, issues of "culture" in Chinese language education have not been specifically explored. With increasing attention being directed toward culture in foreign language education in general (e.g., Byram 2009; Kramsch 1995; Nugent and Catalano 2015), a few researchers have begun to address it in the CFL context (Chen 2008; Jin 2014; Xing 2006).

Before narrowing the focus to culture in the teaching and learning of CFL, it is useful to briefly summarize the main ways in which culture is handled in

language classrooms. Overall, there are three interrelated yet distinct approaches: (a) *teaching culture as content*, (b) *teaching language-and-culture*, and (c) *teaching culture through language* (see, e.g., Zhu 2014, pp. 3–10 for a summary).

The first approach, also called as the “additive model” (Chen 2008), is widely adopted in TCFL practice at the *degree* level in the UK. In this approach, explicit information about Chinese culture is added to a language programme. For example, students study Chinese language in conjunction with content-based modules, such as Chinese society, history, and economics, which are often taught in English. In doing so, culture tends to be treated as more or less explicit knowledge that can be taught *independently* of language. While it provides background information for CFL learners, given the subtleties involved in the explicit and implicit aspects of culture (Chen 2008), this approach may lead to essentialist thinking about Chineseness.

Regarding culture and language as *inseparable*, the second approach, “teaching language-and-culture,” is often conceptualized as an integrated approach (e.g., Chen 2008; Zhu 2014). While it has been studied from numerous perspectives in terms of what to integrate and how, many language teachers have called for such an approach since the 1980s. Viewing cultural awareness as an integral part of communicative competence, Byram and colleagues’ works ushered in the *cultural turn* in foreign language teaching in the 1990s. Examples of the use of this approach can be found in some non-award-bearing CFL courses in the UK and short-term intensive study abroad programmes in China. The key feature of the integrated approach is, by definition, the integration of language and culture. Culture is handled implicitly, and the focus is on language use in communication (Chen 2008).

More recently, there is an emerging call for an “intercultural” approach (Zhu 2014), that is, teaching culture *through* language. To a certain degree, this resonates with the call to move to interculturality (Dervin 2012) that we discussed earlier in that this perspective advocates “teaching methods and techniques that de-emphasise ‘norms’ and favour learner-oriented approaches” and draw students’ attention to heterogeneity and change within culture (Zhu 2014, p. 7). However, if we integrate the *interculturality* perspective (e.g., Dervin 2011, 2012; Sarangi 1994) into teaching, we may go a step further. Teachers may, for example, help students to see how culture is constructed in discourse. A critical analysis of students’ own and others’ use of discourses of Chineseness (Skyrme 2014) may better prepare them to avoid the essentialist pitfalls in the future.

It is worth pointing out that although the underlying ideas that have motivated these three approaches to handling culture in language classrooms seemingly contradict one another, they are not mutually exclusive in practice, and may be used in combination. For example, at an early stage of CFL teaching, some background information on China and the Chinese language can help CFL learners to obtain an overview, but teachers may need to be cautioned against labeling information such as concise country profiles as “culture.” Throughout the process of CFL teaching and learning, teaching and learning certain norms will be unavoidable (e.g., how to greet someone politely in Chinese), yet students should be made aware that the universality of such “normative knowledge” is heavily dependent on the situational context and that norms are inherently ambiguous (see, e.g., Pan and Kádár 2011 for a book-length discussion of the ambiguity of Chinese politeness). At a more advanced stage, teachers may guide learners to critically analyze their own and others’ discourses of Chineseness (see Xu and Moloney’s chapter in this volume for an example of an intercultural learning task, which calls for intercultural critical thinking), and by doing so, the essentialist trap can be avoided (Cole and Meadows 2013).

Most CFL learners in British universities are European students. Some of them have never learned the Chinese language and have never been to a Chinese-speaking country before they went to university.¹ For them, the myth of the *other* surrounding Chinese culture and language alone may be a major motivation to choose Chinese as a degree course. The aim of this study, therefore, is to explore how a teacher may help students move beyond essentialist views of Chineseness and develop a critical understanding of culture discourses in a CFL classroom.

BRINGING INTERCULTURALITY INTO THE CLASSROOM: A CASE OF CFL TEACHING

This case study aims to demonstrate the use and value of the “interculturality approach” by describing teaching and learning events in detail. I report on the ways in which a teacher can bring interculturality into classroom settings. Multiple sources of information were gathered, and these ranged from teaching materials to student reflections and discussions. The author was the teacher. The CFL learners in this case were 14 final-year undergraduate students enrolled in a degree programme in Chinese at a British university.

All of these students were given aliases. Interpreting was taught as a part of the core language modules, partly because of the overall emphasis on employment skills in the final year of the degree. While the students did not necessarily become professional interpreters after graduation, considering their Mandarin language skills, their potential employers might ask them, for example, to facilitate a business meeting more or less as an interpreter. Moreover, with the third-party perspective taken, that is, the interpreter's perspective, studying problematic intercultural communication in class is likely to be rewarding. By no means does this imply that the third-party perspective represents a neutral view. Rather, this may prevent students from simply taking sides with either of the conflicting parties.

The teaching materials were prepared by the teacher, drawing on both simulated examples from textbooks and authentic examples of intercultural interaction that took place between Chinese and British, as well as Chinese and American, professionals in a variety of settings. Given the overall "lack of adequate teaching materials in Chinese language teaching" in the UK (Zhang and Li 2010, p. 93), these materials were specifically compiled with the aim of shedding light on interculturality. Specifically, they were used to help the students to first unearth cultural assumptions in authoritative discourse and then to understand the process of othering, discovering the ambivalence and complexity inherent in the constructions of the Chinese Other.

With respect to classroom interactions, two weekly CFL lessons that explicitly addressed the issues related to culture were audio-recorded. The discussions relevant to the topic of this chapter, both in Chinese and in English, were transcribed. The transcripts of the classroom interactions were coded and analyzed in the qualitative research software NVivo around the theme of critical intercultural understanding. These lessons were taught in the middle of the final year of the CFL students' degree study. The first lesson was about cultural awareness, and the second lesson focused on intercultural mediation. Cultural awareness is the in-depth exploration of one's own and others' cultural background. This process involves the recognition of biases, prejudices, and assumptions about individuals who are different. Intercultural mediation is loosely defined as bridging the gaps of understanding in an intercultural conflict. Culture is often used as an explanation of difference, so in this chapter, following Finch and Nynas (2011, p. 2), intercultural mediation is specifically understood as being able to "avoid 'ethnicizing' or 'culturalizing' of an intercultural conflict."

RAISING CRITICAL CULTURAL AWARENESS: UNEARTHING CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS IN AUTHORITATIVE DISCOURSE

The first week on cultural awareness aimed to help the CFL learners unearth cultural assumptions in authoritative discourses, such as textbooks. The teacher encouraged the students to write a short pre-class reflection on the broad topic of cultural awareness, in either Chinese or English, as a part of their preparation for this week. One of the students' reflections which is quoted below was shared in class:

The process of becoming culturally aware, which is outlined by Bennett's "Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity", includes 6 stages of awareness: ethnocentrism, defensiveness, minimization of the perceived differences, acceptance, adaption and adoption and integration. I was able to develop my cultural awareness during the time I spent studying the Chinese language. While learning the language, I have been given valuable insights into various cultural perceptions, behaviours, customs, beliefs, values and social customs. Furthermore, my personal study of China, such as by consuming popular culture via watching television or by reading about history, and my time spent in China continued to help in solidifying my understanding and awareness of the culture. Although I do not believe that I have adopted and integrated the Chinese culture into my own cultural identity, I do feel that I have been able to adapt my own behaviour and that with time, my cultural awareness will continue to improve.

As an advanced Mandarin learner, Peter, like his classmates, had spent a year abroad in China during the third year of his degree. However, unlike most of his classmates, Peter had chosen the intercultural business communication course offered by the Business School as an elective module, so he already knew some intercultural communication theories. Sharing his reflection with the class served as a warm-up exercise leading into the main learning activity: unearthing cultural assumptions in authoritative discourse.

In particular, the first video episode from "Unit 6: Cultural Awareness" of a very popular textbook (Lonergan 2006) was played for the students. It contained a short introduction (which explicitly stressed the need to be aware of cross-cultural differences) and a studio drama. In this drama, a European businessman and his Chinese host are concluding their meeting.

Everything has gone very well, but “a cultural misunderstanding” occurs (Lonergeran 2006, p. 71).

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- 1 Host: 我很高兴, 您此次行程很顺利。
- 2 Interpreter: I'm very pleased that your trip has been so successful.
- 3 Guest: Well, without your help it would have been impossible.
- 4 Interpreter: 多亏了您的帮助。太感谢了。
- 5 Host: 这没什么, 是我的荣幸。
- 6 Interpreter: Not at all. It has been a pleasure.
- 7 Guest: You have been very kind, and your hospitality was wonderful.
- 8 Interpreter: 您还非常的热情好客。
((As guest stands up to leave, he makes an off-hand comment on the picture on the wall.))
- 9 Guest: That's an interesting picture!
- 10 Interpreter: 那幅画很有意思。
- 11 Host: 您喜欢吗?
- 12 Interpreter: Do you like it?
- 13 Guest: I like the style. Is it contemporary?
- 14 Interpreter: 我喜欢它的风格。是现代作品吗?
- 15 Host: 有三四十年了, 这位画家刚去世不久。生前是中国美术界挺知名的人物。
- 16 Interpreter: It was 30 or 40 years old. The artist died recently. He was quite well known in the Chinese art circle.
- 17 Guest: We don't have anything to compare with it in the west. My wife likes that type of painting. Anyway, I must go back to the hotel and pack.
- 18 Interpreter: 我们西方就没有这一类风格的作品。我妻子一定会很喜欢的。我现在要回酒店收拾行李。
- 19 Host: 请收下吧, 不成敬意。我派人送到您酒店去。
- 20 Interpreter: Please, it is my gift to you. I will have it sent to your hotel.
((The guest is surprised at the offer. He doesn't want to take the painting.))
- 21 Guest: I couldn't possibly accept such a gift.
- 22 Interpreter: 我实在不敢收。
- 23 Host: 不行, 你一定要收下。
- 24 Interpreter: No. Please. I insist.
((The guest appeals to the interpreter.))
- 25 Guest: I feel awkward about taking the painting.
(Adapted from Lonergeran 2006, pp. 69–71)
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After watching this video clip, the students were asked to discuss, in groups of three or four, what went wrong and why. Most of them noted that the host interpreted the ritual compliment as an implicit request (Can you give it to me?), while the guest was “simply trying to be polite” (Andrew, Lily, and Rachel).

The second video episode of this unit was then played. It consisted of the guest's telephone conversation with his wife in his hotel room sometime later and an *authoritative* explanation provided by the textbook, which was uttered by the presenter in the video.

Guest: Well, I was just trying to be polite, you know. They wrapped it up and sent it to the hotel. I have to get it to the airport somehow, and then try to get it through Customs, I suppose. But, you know, I just wonder whether I'll leave it to the hotel.

Presenter: ... what a terrible misunderstanding! The Chinese host has lost his precious painting, and the European businessman has ended up with an unwanted present. It is quite natural in western culture to compliment the host on their home and possessions ...

(Lonergan 2006, pp. 71–72)

As can be seen from the extract above, the European businessman has ended up with an unwanted gift, while the Chinese host has lost his expensive painting. A “cultural” explanation was provided by the textbook. After playing this episode, the teacher let the students work in the same groups to *critically* analyze the explanation. Interestingly, some of them began to identify the “cultural” assumptions underlying the claim that “It is quite natural in western culture to compliment the host on their home and possessions” and questioned it. One group (Stephanie, Richard, and Alex) even provided the following counterargument, at which the whole class laughed in approval:

我觉得中国人也 compliment, 你还要谦虚, 回答“哪里哪里”。

[I think Chinese people also compliment, and you need to be modest, replying “*nali nali*”.]

The response *nali nali* may be translated as “it is nothing,” literally meaning “where where.” This can be seen as one of the ritual ways to respond to others’ compliments in Chinese, which embodies the “norms” of modesty and self-denigration (Tang and Zhang 2009). Clearly, the CFL learners in this case study began to realize that even authoritative discourses, such as textbook descriptions, can be problematic. They challenged the assumed opposition between Western and Chinese culture in this particular discourse. This, in fact, can be seen as a good example of the “minimization of the perceived differences” (see Peter’s pre-class

reflection mentioned earlier). The notion of cultural norms will be further explored in the following section.

DEMISTIFYING *OTHERING*: CULTURAL NORMS CONSTRUCTED AND DECONSTRUCTED

In this case, the advanced CFL learners had already acquired some “normative knowledge” about Chinese language and culture. The following week on intercultural mediation aimed to examine more closely the construction of cultural norms in real interactions in the real world. Role play was used again in the form of asking the students to work in groups of three or four to experience *alternative behaviors, emotions, and thoughts*. The extracts were selected from a dataset of authentic intercultural interactions.

The following scenario was described to the students: A Chinese official delegation of a government ministry is visiting the USA for three weeks. On Day 6, the Chinese delegation starts a one-and-a-half day visit to a federally funded NGO. They have several meetings with its director-in-chief (Professional 2, P2) and the directors of two departments (Professionals 1 and 3, P1 and P3). During the question and answer period in the meetings, the Chinese group discusses, increasingly loudly and in Chinese, some of the American speaker’s answers while the speaker is still talking. The interpreter does not step in until she cannot hear a question from one of the Chinese delegates (Delegate 10, D10). Although D10 is actually next to the interpreter, his voice is completely drowned out by the group’s animated discussion. The interpreter then says “Be quiet” [安静] in Chinese very loudly to stop the *side* discussion. Her shout successfully stops the “chaos,” yet because the American speakers do not speak Chinese, they appear rather baffled about what the interpreter has shouted and what the group was discussing in Chinese in such a lively manner. A few minutes after the interpreter’s interruption, the Chinese officials restart their heated discussion. This occurs several times during the meetings. What happens during the afternoon meeting, in which all three American professionals are present, seems to have worsened the situation. At the end of the day, the interpreter goes a step further to add her own explanation, asking the Americans to ‘forgive’ the group’s loud background conversation, as shown by the extract that was handed out all the students at the beginning of the lesson.

1	HOD: ²	使我们对(X)的大体状况有了一个了解, 非常感谢。 [enabled us to get an understanding of the general situation of X. Thanks very much.]
2	Interpreter:	Thank you very much for your wonderful introduction. You just gave them numerous useful information. They are very very interested. That's the reason why they had very enthusiastic and passionate discussion. They hope you can FORGIVE our discussion. Of course, we respect you very much. Just BECAUSE of your wonderful lecture, we had such an enthusiastic discussion. Thank you very much.
3	P3:	You are very kind. ((P3 bows his head to the Chinese leader.)) ((P1 and P2 nod their heads.))
4	Interpreter:	对, 他说你们非常好。 ((All the delegates applaud.)) 对, 刚才我已经顺便把你们讲的话全翻译了。说你们正是因为讲得好, 所以我们才讨论得那么热烈, 绝对不是不尊重。我们太尊重你了, 太喜欢你了。 [Yeah, just now I have already translated what you've said. (I) said that it was because the speech was wonderful that we discussed so heatedly. It does not mean not respecting (you) at all. We respect you very much. We like you very much.]
5	HOD:	嗯。 [hum]

As can be seen from the extract above, the interpreter made a relatively long addition in the second turn. Perhaps, she wanted to turn the situation around, to clear up the possible misunderstanding that the American side might have. This clarification was made in a diplomatic way. She attributed the group's heated debates to the speakers' stimulating talks, which pleased the American professionals. P3 even bowed to the head of the delegation (HOD) to show his gratitude for the added comments.

The teacher gave the students a hard copy of the transcript of the video excerpt, and the detailed contextual information was presented to the students on two PowerPoint slides. They were made aware that this excerpt was taken from authentic intercultural interaction. The students in the same group took turns playing different roles. No new Chinese words were introduced. The dynamics of the activity created a positive class atmosphere. The students seemed to enjoy the exercise and participated enthusiastically. They all noted the interpreter's addition, and many of them laughed about it during the role play. At this point, they were told to *withhold* their interpretations, so they can see how the event actually unfolded in real life.

Next, they were given follow-up evaluations from both the Chinese and American interactants in the original interaction. The Chinese delegates were upset by the interpreter's interruption and clarification. Although they concealed their emotions in the presence of the Americans, they were actually annoyed, and they decided at the private meeting, or evening meeting (EM), not to complain due to relational concerns.

EM Comment by the HOD

She also explained to the Americans in the end, which was pointless. She seemed condescending by doing that, yet since she is not our colleague and actually belongs to the American side, we'd better not ask her why. This may embarrass her and us and may affect our relations with the American side. Just let it go. Do not mention it any more. (Author's translation)

In sharp contrast, one of the American speakers, P1, revealed her initially uncomfortable feelings and expressed her appreciation for the "cultural clarification":

I did feel slightly uncomfortable when the group began talking, rather loudly and in an animated manner, after some of my answers. It was explained to me that this was not meant as disrespectful so I was fine with it. I think it was just a situation where *cultural norms may be different in China versus in the U.S.* I do not feel the visitors need to change their behavior, it just helps to explain to the speaker that this may happen and why so they do not take it offensively. I take it as a compliment, now that I know, that my comments sparked debate and conversation amongst them and am not offended at all. . . . I think the job the interpreter I worked with was ideal. She not only translated everything but was able to explain to me the meaning behind some of the questions and let me know that the things . . . were *a normal part of Chinese culture.* That was very helpful and made me feel better. Otherwise, I would have thought I said something offensive or was, perhaps, misunderstood [italics added].

After being presented with the contrasting interpretations of the same interaction, the students were asked to identify how cultural norms were constructed in the authentic discourse and evaluate the *applicability of the norms* to their personal experience and knowledge. This exercise was designed to

move the students to deliberate on one of the most important factors that has been generally neglected in such situations: the situational context.

While the CFL learners were able to identify the construction of the cultural norms in the discourse very quickly, probably thanks to the interactants' explicitly mentioning the phrase, there was a heated debate over the "loudness" norms claimed by the American interactants. For example, a few students upheld the point by citing their experience and knowledge. One student even mentioned that during his year abroad in China, his tutor for the module "Chinese History and Culture" explained the cultural stereotype of why Chinese people speak so loudly from a "historical" point of view:

我在A大上文化课的老师教我们，这要从古代历史说起。中国一直是个农业国家，所以在耕田的时候，如果你想让一个人听到你的话，就必须大声喊出来。老师还告诉我们，在北京说话最大声的是劳动者，他们是从农村来到大城市工作。现在我能理解他们大声地说话。

[My culture module tutor at A University (in China) taught us that this could be traced back to ancient history. China has long been an agricultural country, so while working in the farm fields, if you want a person to hear what you say, you must shout loudly. The tutor also told us that those who speak the most loudly in Beijing are migrant workers. They came from the countryside to work in the big cities. Now, I can understand why they speak loudly.]

As can be seen from the in-class comment above, the Chineseness behind the assumption that Chinese people tend to speak loudly was slightly challenged, though perhaps unwittingly, by the tutor in China, who made a finer distinction between the rural and urban portions of the Chinese population. The answer itself is a very essentialist account. The prejudices involved are beyond the scope of this study. What is important to note is that a teacher's superficial understanding of culture could result in her students' taking on substantive bias. Students may heavily rely on the "normative knowledge" they have acquired from classroom instruction, reinforcing cultural assumptions. Therefore, teachers should be careful not to make sweeping statements (see Pan and Wang's chapter in this volume for more on teachers' intercultural awareness).

In this class, somewhat unsurprisingly, quite a few students questioned the applicability of the norms by reporting their *counter-experiences*. For instance, a student described the *competing* "norms" that she learned when she was an intern working in China. In the second

semester of her year abroad, she accompanied her American boss and other colleagues to a series of meetings with Chinese government officials to discuss a project. Out of courtesy, her boss repeatedly told her British and American colleagues not to speak loudly at the meetings while the other side was talking. She threw the *Chineseness* of these claimed norms into question.

Lisa: 我在中国的时候经历正好相反。我在中国实习的时候……我的美国老板反复告诉我的美国和英国的同事，和中国官员开会的时候不要大声讨论，当对方讲话的时候，因为开会的时候，我们有的外国同事曾经大声用英语讨论，让中国人留下了不好的印象。

[My experience was the opposite when I was in China. When I did my work placement in China... my American boss repeatedly told my American and British colleagues not to discuss loudly during our meetings with Chinese government officials when the other side was talking because some of my non-Chinese colleagues discussed loudly in English during such meetings before and gave the Chinese a bad impression.]

Daniel: 我在意大利公司实习的时候我也有相似的经历……我觉得大声讨论这不一定是中国的问题，不是美国的问题，也不是意大利的问题……可能要看具体讨论的内容。

[I had a similar experience when I worked for an Italian company as an intern... I think loud discussion is not necessarily a Chinese problem, not an American problem, nor an Italian problem... maybe we need to look at the specific content of the discussion.]

Thomas: 对，还是要看具体情况吧！

[Yes, (we) still need to look at the specific situations!]

Clearly, the discussion moved into a more reflective mode. Remarks, such as the last line of the extract above, "... still need to look at the specific situations," began to emerge.

Given the time constraints of this lecture, the teacher provided a follow-up assignment to the CFL learners to enable them to informally interview their Chinese and non-Chinese friends and thus explore the possible reasons behind the loudness of the "Chinese" discussions in the extract and reflect on how to be more sensitive to their own and others' use of discourses of Chineseness in the future. In the summary

of this part of the session, the teacher once again drew the students' attention to the complexity and diversity inherent in Chineseness and the ambiguity of cultural norms. This was then related to the notion of intercultural mediation. The students were made aware of the significance of avoiding "culturalizing" an intercultural conflict in intercultural mediation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

These two lessons provided the students with an opportunity to deconstruct essentialism in authoritative discourse and develop a sophisticated understanding of cultural norms. Criticality and reflexivity (Dervin 2013), which are essential to intercultural language education, were promoted. The first example in this case study showed that guiding the students to have *a critical reading of their textbooks* could be beneficial. They were able to see that even authoritative discourse, such as textbooks, contained essentialist views.

While the students' responses to the "loudness norms" in the second example tended to be contradictory, it was the very *exposure to the conflicting views and experiences* in the classroom dialogue that made the students aware of the significant role played by the situational context. The students seemed to be able to move beyond a static understanding of claimed cultural norms and develop a sophisticated understanding of the dynamic, discursive (also see Wang Danlu's chapter in this volume), and constructed nature of culture.

The findings of the present study have significant pedagogical implications. The results show that foreign language teachers and students should be made aware that their textbooks are not a collection of golden rules for learners to follow (Wang and Rendle-Short 2013). The textbooks themselves can actually be used strategically as objects of analysis (Escudero 2013) to foster critical intercultural understanding among learners. Furthermore, learners' conflicting views and experiences, if tapped in classroom interaction (Markee 2015), can be a valuable resource for critical language learning and teaching. This case study has shed light on the pedagogical value of deconstructing culture discourses in the classroom setting.

In this chapter, I have reported on an exploratory case that brought interculturality into the CFL classroom. I present this case to illustrate ways of applying recent ideas about interculturality to teaching practice,

particularly ways of enabling students to take a discursive approach and thus revisit culture with the use of situated intercultural data. Valuable insights into fostering students' critical awareness in class were obtained through an analysis of students' spontaneous comments and reflections, particularly in relation to their evaluations of others' use of discourses of Chineseness. Arguably, while learners "principally develop intercultural competence through their own experiences and reflections" (Jin 2014, p. 23), drawing students' attention to the ambiguity and complexity inherent in "Chinese" culture can still possibly open up students' thinking in a classroom setting.

This study suggests the complexity involved in dealing with culture in CFL teaching and learning. Exploring how CFL learners enact "othering," which can be understood as a "process of differentiation and demarcation by which a line is drawn between "us" and "them" as well as a "discursive practice" (Lister 2008, p. 7), would be particularly illuminating. In consideration of the dearth of empirical studies about bringing interculturality into language education, a significant amount of research will undoubtedly continue to enrich our understanding of this issue while disentangling the factors that contribute to essentialism. All of these are possible lines of inquiry for further research.

As a language teacher and researcher, I constantly find myself balancing a variety of tensions. The main one that concerns language teachers and researchers here is that on the one hand, we are tied to the nitty-gritty of language as we teach it, whereas on the other hand, we must keep the bigger picture in mind. Significantly, the theoretical notion of interculturality (one of the main themes of this book) and the intercultural approaches to teaching culture through language may allow us to revisit the term culture and rethink it both as an analytic concept and an object of analysis. The dialectic relationship between theory and practice enables the former to extend the boundaries of the latter. Therefore, translating the theoretical notions described above into practice is opportune.

NOTES

1. According to a survey of 97 degree students of Chinese at two British universities, which the author conducted in 2014, more than 60% of the respondents have never been to a Chinese-speaking country and have never

learned the Chinese language(s) before they went to university, although many of them reported having vicarious experience. For example, some reported parents who had travelled to China, and some have read travel books about China. The situation might be different for university students of Mandarin (including non-degree CFL learners) in general. For instance, in Jin's (2016) study of 26 students of Mandarin, many of them have prior experiences of visiting China and interacting with Chinese people and languages.

2. HOD refers to the head of the Chinese delegation.

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Jiayi Wang is Subject Leader in Chinese and an Acting Course Leader in Modern Languages at the University of Central Lancashire, UK. Her current research interests include language education, corpus-assisted discourse analysis, and pragmatics, all of which are facets of her overarching interest in intercultural communication. Jiayi earned a PhD in Applied Linguistics from the University of Warwick, UK, where her research focused on professional intercultural communication. Prior to her PhD, she was an international project manager at the Chinese Ministry of Justice, and she also worked as a conference interpreter/translator for a wide range of organizations such as the Supreme Court, Deutsche Bank, and Fortune magazine. She has published research articles on comparative law, intercultural pragmatics, and foreign- and second-language education.