TOWARD A PEDAGOGICAL MODEL OF LEARNING TO READ CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

A Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for

the Degree Master of Arts in the

Graduate School of The Ohio State University

By

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The Ohio State University
1997

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to construct a pedagogical model of learning to read in Chinese as a foreign language. Reading is defined as a goal-oriented social behavior in a given culture of viewing and interpreting written texts. A pedagogical model will contribute to more effective and efficient teaching and learning of this particular behavior in the context of learning Chinese language as a foreign language.

In the current literature, reading has been treated more as a psychological behavior rather than a social one. This paper treats these as two aspects of the reading behavior and examines them in order to find out the elements of a successful reading act.

A knowledge-based pedagogical model is then constructed on the basis of the previous discussions. Five types of knowledge are found to be necessary for a successful reading act to occur. They are: the orthography knowledge, the reading strategies knowledge, the linguistic knowledge, the cultural knowledge and the specific domain knowledge. A mature and successful reading act is the result of the interactions among these five types of knowledge. Therefore, the task of the pedagogical activities is to build up in the learners’ minds a knowledge base which is composed of these five components.
Three stages of training are suggested. They are: the stage of quasi-reading, the stage of learning to read, and the stage of reading to learn. Concrete suggestions are made as to what kind of activities can be done in these three stages.
Dedicated to my loved ones
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my adviser, Dr. Galal Walker, whose research insights, guidance, and support were invaluable throughout the whole process of this research. My gratitude also goes to Dr. Mari Noda for her perceptive comments and suggestions regarding this project. I am also deeply indebted to Steve Knicely, who has been my supervisor in teaching Chinese for two years at the Ohio State University. His constant feedback, advice and assistance in my teaching practice was immense to me and inspired some of the ideas in this paper. Grateful acknowledgment is also extended to Debbie Knicely, who helped me through the procedures of graduation. Special thanks go to Walter Carpenter, for his professional editorial skills and constant assistance in the English language. I would also like to thank my parents and my brother for their unending support, sacrifice and love.
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1. Yu, Li. “A Preliminary Analysis of the Chinese Translation of English Film
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(Huadong shifan daxue xuebao), 1995:3

2. Yu, Li. and Ruirong Gu. trans., Chunlai Cao Ziqing (The Grass Grows By
Itself) by Osho, Shanghai: East Publishing Center. 1996

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: East Asian Languages & Literatures
Chinese Language Pedagogy
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CHAPTER 1

DEFINING READING FOR CHINESE LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY

1.1 What is the nature of reading?

Saint Augustine (354-430) believed that “reading and writing were among the labours imposed on the first couple as a result of their disobedience in the garden of Eden” (Stock 1996, p.15). If this belief were to lead us to some insights about reading, then we might arrive at the conclusion that reading is a cumbersome -- if indispensable-- burden in the information-oriented society. Ancient Chinese myth, however, gives us an alternate view. Cang Jie,\(^1\) an official in the court of the mythical Huang Di and the supposed inventor of the Chinese writing system, has been extolled for several millennia as a hero because of this marvelous invention. Whether reading is a punishment for unnecessary curiosity and pride, or a blessing of human creativity, it is an unavoidable pedagogical issue confronting those societies that cannot function without reading and writing.

Augustine was the first theorist in Western culture to attempt a theoretical statement on reading. His final theory, which was presented in *Confessions*, comprised a wide range...
of concepts including mental representations, memory, emotion, cognition and the ethics of interpretation. The thread connecting these different ideas was the self as a reader. The self, in his eyes, was not a solid essence, but rather a flowing fluid which was altered by the ongoing process of “mental ‘rereading’ of the narratives of previous events lodged in memory” (Stock 1996, p.1). We do not have to visit the details of Augustine’s theory of reading to say that he was the beginning of philosophical thought on reading.

Fifteen hundred years later, Edmund Burke Huey (1870-1913) pioneered a tradition of research into the psychology and physiology of reading which has subsequently attracted a tremendous amount of scholarly attention. Huey’s attempts to explore into the three areas of reading, namely, eye movements, perceptual aspects of printed text and the “higher level” cognitive operations are still followed to this day. His monumental book, *The Psychology and Pedagogy of*, published in 1908, set the stage for empirical studies of reading in this tradition and raised the main issues concerning the teaching of reading.

A review of several lexicons suggests that reading has meant different in different cultures, languages and eras. The oldest extant dictionary of Chinese, the *Shuowen jiezi* (100 A.D.- 121 A.D.), lists the words referring to “reading (a book)” as *du, song, or feng*, all seeming to convey the sense “to read aloud.” In ancient Japanese, to “read” is *yomu, or miru*, the former meaning “to read aloud” and the latter meaning “to see”. The English word “to read” came from the Middle English “reden”, which means “to advise,
interpret, read”. “Reden” was etymologically derived from “rædan” in the Old English, which, in turn, was akin to the Old High German “rātan” which meant “to advise” (Webster Dictionary 1970). According to the Oxford English Dictionary (Vol 8, p.193), the original senses of the Teutonic verb are “those of taking or giving counsel, taking care or charge of a thing, having or exercising control over something.” On the one hand, these different expressions may suggest different modes of reading in different cultures over time. On the other hand, a more plausible interpretation is that the way a people or time depicted the action reflects the way they perceived it. The Chinese and Japanese words depict how reading is done -- using the eyes, mouth and ear-- whereas the English word explains why reading should be done --to seek advice. These etymological observations may suggest that as pedagogues we should strive to see more than one aspect of reading behavior.

The first issue to be addressed is how we read. The second issue is why we read. The first involves the field of “the psychology of reading”, whereas the latter compels questions of “the sociology of reading”. The psychology of reading answers questions such as: How do native speakers read in contrast to how non-native speakers read? Are the two processes the same or different? Is reading a dedicated skill or a composite of many skills? Can reading be best described by an information processing model?

The sociology of reading, on a more macro level, investigates the role reading plays in a given culture: How much is reading valued in a culture? What motivates people to read?
What is the role of culture in facilitating the transfer of meaning from print to mind?

What observable behaviors are associated with reading?

It is not an exaggeration to say that an academic industry has grown around the concept of reading. Researchers from different disciplines --such as literature, linguistics, education, psychology, second language acquisition and foreign language pedagogy-- have devoted their efforts to the study of this human behavior, and a myriad of books and journals have been contributed to this topic. Such academic activity recognizes that reading is crucial in modern society. However, even though modern societies would not be able to function without reading, few literate people outside these small academic circles are concerned or even cognizant of these issues. Reading is such an omnipresent and transparent act and learned at such an early age that the details behind learning to read are either ignored or forgotten.

Among the many perspectives on the nature of reading offered by different scholars, very few attempts have been made by language pedagogues or educators to define reading for their own purposes. It seems that the act of reading is taken for granted and deserves no further definition other than the existing psychological and literary ones. Walker (1984) proposes a pedagogical definition of reading by describing the capacities of the practitioner: “A reader knows the purposes and conventions of a written language and knows what a society does with its written artifacts” (Walker 1984, p.69). He further distinguishes two categories of “knowing” in this definition: psychological knowing and
social knowing. By “psychological knowing”, he refers to the knowledge of the
conventions of writing systems. By “social knowing”, he means the awareness on the
reader’s part of his purpose for reading. While this distinction is useful, the connotations
between these two notions can be extended.

The psychological studies of reading have not and should not be limited to “knowing
the conventions of writing systems.” Readers cannot read successfully if they only know
the “conventions of writing systems”. Apart from the knowledge of the orthography
and a working lexicon, they must also be aware of text genres and personal styles,
possess cultural background information, as well as know which reading strategies are
appropriate for certain reading tasks. Therefore, it may be better to generalize
“psychological knowing” to “knowing the conventions of writing.”

Another dimension to reading is its social aspect. As Walker has correctly pointed
out, the reader must be aware of why she reads. In addition, we should teach students
how to use a written text. If we say writing has extended the human memory by
providing an alternative device for storage of knowledge other than the human brain, then
reading is one of the tools that our culture has provided its children, by which, the written
knowledge is retrieved, interpreted and cycled into the human memory system for
immediate or future use. In order to teach the students how to use a text, we need to first
analyze reading as a social behavior, or a cultural performance in a society.
To sum up the discussion so far, I will offer a working definition of reading as follows: reading is a goal-oriented social behavior in a given culture of viewing and interpreting texts. A text is considered to be a set of written symbols designated in a particular writing system.

1.2 Who are the readers?

Compared with languages, writing systems are relatively new inventions in the evolutionary history of the human species. Homo Sapiens has been in existence for between 30,000 and 50,000 years. The earliest script dates from only 6,500 years ago (Venezky 1980, p.5). The Chinese writing system is among the very few oldest writing systems of the world. Its origin dates back to three thousand years ago during the Shang Dynasty (16 century B.C.- 1066 B.C.).

The issue of “privilege” has always been associated with reading and writing. Within a society, be it ancient or modern, not everyone enjoys the equal right to learn and use their writing system. For example, throughout history in some societies, only the rich and powerful have access to writing; in others it is a technology possessed by an occupational group. A traditional Chinese view about literacy is that literate people are cleverer and wiser than their illiterate counterparts. This view can be illustrated by Zheng Qiao (1104-1162), a Chinese scholar’s words that “the world is of the opinion that those who know Chinese characters are wise and worthy, whereas those who do not know
characters are simple and stupid” (cited in DeFrancis 1984, p.1). Here, the phrase “to know Chinese characters” can be better understood as “to be literate”, as they are synonymous in the Chinese language. Following the same logic, it is widely believed that a literate society is more “civilized” than an illiterate one.

Given the fact that under the democratic educational systems, although all the people are bestowed with the same right to learn to read and write, not all of them become “readers”. I mean this in three senses: a) not all of them become literate despite all efforts; b) even if some become literate, they still cannot read; c) even though some people are able to read, they do not choose to read.

Therefore, readers in a particular society are a group of “privileged” people, who have access to the learning of the writing system, understand the conventions of the writing system, and make use of them on a regular basis. Reading, writing, listening and speaking have been conventionally regarded as the four basic skills of learning a foreign language. One of the assumptions behind this notion is that learners should behave as competent members in the target culture. To this end, the ability of reading is a must. Armed with the knowledge of the target writing system, a foreigner has a better chance to access the legacy and resources of the target culture. The aim of a Chinese reading program for foreign language learners is, therefore, to produce competent readers in the sense that the Chinese culture means its members to become. Such readers are the ideal end products of a pedagogical model that is to be presented in this paper.
1.3. How do people read?

The answer to this question has been sought since Edmund Huey’s time. Though ninety years have passed, almost every reading psychologist still agrees with his prediction that “to completely analyze what we do when we read would almost be the acme of a psychologist’s achievements” (Huey 1908). However, with the advancement of more exquisite experimental methods, many questions have been answered and many more have been raised during the past ninety years.

Although researchers differ in their definitions of reading, there is one popular belief that reading is a process of information transfer from a written or printed page to a reader’s mind. There are three stages in this process. First, the graphemic stage. In this stage, the eyes meet the words on paper (or screen) and visually recognize the orthography. The second stage is the phonological stage, in which the recognized orthography are attached with a meaningful sound. The existence of this stage was at one time a controversial issue, especially in the case of Chinese. More will be discussed later. The third stage is the comprehension stage, in which semantic knowledge, syntactic rules and mental schemata are synthesized to make meaning out of this mixture of graphemic and phonological stimuli. The first two stages were conceived as “initial reading”, which is heavily involved with symbol-sound translation and partially independent from
comprehension, which is thought to be more closely tied to intellectual functioning and higher-level of cognition.

There are three lines of research corresponding to these three stages. The first is the research on orthography and reading. The first international-scale cross-language conference on the role of orthography in reading and in reading failure was held in the United States in 1978 (Kavanagh and Venezky 1980). One of the major concerns of the conference was to “inspect what evidence might be adduced for discovering the role that orthography plays in reading and in reading failure, and what steps might be taken to overcome dyslexia” (p. 1). Many studies began with the assumption that certain orthography, for example, English, had a notorious spelling system that formed “a menace to health, public safety, and early acquisition of literacy” (p. 1). Therefore, time had been spent in seeking a marketable replacement of the existing writing systems. Yet, more and more scholars have come to the view that even with languages in which translation from writing to speech is highly predictable (e.g., Finnish), problems in reading are found. Kyöstiö, in his article “Is Learning to Read Easy in a Language in Which the Grapheme-Phone Correspondences are Regular” (1980), concluded that “the advantages of a regular orthographic system are perhaps still greater concerning writing skill rather than reading skill” (Kavanagh and Venezky 1980, p. 41).

A “myth” about orthography was that different writing systems might imply different routes of information processing. A distinction was drawn between the
alphabetic system and the Chinese characters, the latter being claimed to be a "logograph" in the western world as opposed to "phonograph". Mishkin and Forgays (1952) found a differential accuracy of recognition, favoring words presented to the right of the fixation point, which has been termed as the right-visual-field, RVF, (left-hemisphere) superiority effect of language processing. Sperry et al. (1969) found that written and spoken English were processed in the left hemisphere, while the right hemisphere was superior in performing various visual and spatial tasks. Following their approaches, Tzeng and Hung (1978), Hardyck, Tzeng, and Wang (1978) conducted a series of studies, in which experiments were designed to find out if there is a left visual field, LVF, (right hemisphere) superiority effect for Chinese characters. Their findings were: a) there are right- or left-hemisphere superiority in visual processing of Chinese characters, yet they are task-specific properties of the two hemispheres rather than the orthographic-specific localization properties; b) cerebral lateralization experiments reflect lateralization of memory storage rather than information processing, in other words, both the alphabetic writing systems and the Chinese characters have the same route in terms of orthographic processing, with only the memory process being subject to lateralization.

A second line in reading research is concerned about the role of sound in reading. Is phonological encoding a necessary step in the reading process? Although studies have found that subvocalization occurs when people read, they do not answer the question whether phonological encoding is just a residual of an earlier reading habit, or is it
indispensable for readers to achieve comprehension. Levy (1977) argued that speech recoding “acts as an overflow device to aid comprehension of long and difficult passages” (p. 86). This implies that phonological encoding is not a necessary step in reading, but it helps comprehension when reading is blocked.

A general hypothesis was proposed that processing of Chinese characters went from print to meaning to sound while alphabet processing was phonological which went from grapheme to sound and then to meaning (Paradis et al 1985). This hypothesis had been supported by a lot of linguistic, experimental and clinical evidence in the research of the Japanese orthography, which has both kanji and kana. However, Paradis et al pointed out that “this evidence may be due to artifact” (p. 20). They proposed an alternative hypothesis to account for the difference in processing kanji and kana: “Prelexical processing for any word in any script can be both visual and phonological as long as the word is known and the script is familiar to the fluent reader” (p. 20).

Based on their conclusion, I would like to point out that we shall differentiate between possible ways to process a script and how people really process. Each script has the possibility of being processed either phonologically or visually, or both. The hypothesis that Chinese characters were processed visually was based on the false understanding of the nature of this writing system: that it is “logographic”. Secondly, phonological processing and visual processing are two strategies that readers can adopt. At the beginning stage (for children and L2 learners), the former one would be naturally
adopted because people normally learn to speak a language first before they learn how to read and write. But as a reader is more and more familiarized with the orthography and the reading techniques, the second strategy would be adopted to achieve faster reading rate. This should be the same case with every writing system.

A side issue in this line is the difference between oral reading and silent reading. The first person who raised this issue was Józef Balogh in his 1927 article “Voces Paginarum”, which claimed that “silent reading was, if not completely unknown in the ancient world, at least so rare that whenever it was observed, it aroused astonishment, even suspicion” (Knox 1968, p. 421). Balogh even went to the extreme to say that “silent reading was not just unusual but almost unheard of” (Knox 1968, p. 421). To counterattack Balogh’s insistence, Knox refuted point by point and noted that it was hard to believe that scholarly readers at that time did not develop a technique of silent, faster reading. Hendrickson (1929) suggested that “there are many gradations between vocal and silent reading, descending from distinct oral utterance to indistinct murmurs, to whispers, to mere lip motions, and so on through unconscious muscular movements of the tongue, throat or larynx, to pure eye-reading unattended by any enunciatory effort” (p. 196). Common sense tells us that Knox and Hendrickson’s claim might be closer to the reality: it is not that the human beings 1500 years ago were not capable of reading silently, but that they were simply not trained to do so. The rarity of books made it necessary for reading to become a public performance. It is also interesting to note that
the earliest extant literary works are all of the poetic genre, which were originally intended for chanting instead of for reading. It is of pedagogical concern to know if orality of reading helps the acquisition of the skill of silent reading. Even today in China, oral reading is valued in classroom education and in cultural performance. Thus, shall this practice be emphasized in teaching the reading of Chinese as a foreign language?

The lion’s share of the research has been centered on reading comprehension, the third line of the reading psychology. It deserves more attention and effort because it is the “black box” of the reading process. Unlike the previous two matters, it is a higher-level cognitive capability that is elusive to observation measurement. In the issue of reading comprehension, there are two key concepts that need clarification: meaning and understanding.

Reading comprehension is ultimately the transfer and reconstruction of meaning from one mind to another through the means of a printed page. According to Bruner (1990), “the central concept of a human psychology is meaning and the processes and transactions involved in the construction of meaning” (p. 34) Yet, as Nell (1988) has pointed out, “[T]hough the question of what meaning is, and how it becomes known, is central to cognitive psychology, ...... it is a murky area bordering on the metaphysical and burdened with the dangers of solipsism”(p. 78). A common misconception about meaning is that it resides, or is hidden, in a text. This misleading notion can be illustrated by the metaphors “we live by”: we say “extracting” a meaning (using the metaphor of
“pulling teeth”), “digging the meaning out” (using the metaphor of excavation); and “figuring the meaning out” (using the metaphor of mathematical formula solution (Gould 1987). Instead of being pre-determined by the text, cognitive scientists have agreed that meaning is distributed and is the result of the interaction between the reader/listener and the text/discourse. Literary criticism has also come to recognize that the meaning of a text depends on how a reader interprets it, rather than something hidden in the text, or the author’s intention.

Understanding is not possible without previous knowledge. A schema-theoretic view, so far the most durable model of understanding, which attempts to account for a reader’s prior knowledge, argues that knowledge that is already inside the reader’s mind determines how she interprets a text. Schemata are conceived as the “building blocks of cognition” (Rumelhart 1980, p. 33). A schema is a kind of “theory about the nature of the events, objects, or situations we face” (Rumelhart 1984, p. 3). Thus, when a reader reads, she is presumably constantly organizing the new information with the help of the schemata in the mind and constructing the most plausible interpretation of the text.

In order to understand a certain text, four levels of schemata are necessary: the first is the broad cultural background or the global background knowledge. This is the basis of mutual understanding of people sharing the same culture. The second is the specific or local background knowledge, which is needed when texts of a specific academic discipline are read. The third is the knowledge of the genre and structure of a text, with which
scanning strategy can be adopted to achieve high reading speed. The fourth is the most basic one, the knowledge of the semantic, syntactic and pragmatic rules of the language.

1.4 Why do people read?

A simple and intuitive answer to this question is that “Well, we have to read.” or “Because our educational system requires and teaches us to read.” In second language teaching and learning, reading is widely accepted as one of the four basic skills that an L2 learner must grasp. According to Bruner (1996, p. 1), “Education is not just about conventional school matters like curriculum or standards or testing. What we resolve to do in school only makes sense when considered in the broader context of what the society intends to accomplish through its educational investment in the young.” Therefore educational policies and goals embody the aims of a certain culture. The requirement for literacy reflects the values of a cultural community.

In everyday life, for a certain group of people (or what we mean by “readers” discussed in the previous section), reading occurs on a regular basis. It’s an ordinary day: In the morning, I read something from a newspaper to get an idea about what is happening around the world. At nine o’clock, I go to the school library to read books and papers assigned by my professors. Then at noon I take out a Chinese textbook to read a lesson, preparing to teach students how to read in Chinese. After the class, I read my students’ homework to see if they have mastered things that they are supposed to have learned.
While I have my late lunch, I scan a local newspaper in order to find a suitable apartment for the summer. After I return home, I receive some letters from my friends and a bill from the telephone company. I read the letters to know how my friends are doing and I read the bill to see how much I owe the telephone company. Then I sit down among a pile of books, to read in order to write a paper for a course. Perhaps, I take out a book on Buddhism, in which I am deeply interested, to relax my tired brain. It is bed time. I read one of my favorite novels to soothe my tense nerves before I go to a peaceful sleep.

Historically, reading activities have been put into two categories. In as early as the fourth century, Augustine made a distinction between “reading for pleasure” and “reading for self-improvement”, the former, out of an “aesthetic” impulse, the latter, out of an “ascetic” one. “The aesthetic can be defined as a type of reader’s response in which the pleasure of the text is an end in itself, while the ascetic assumes that the text is a means for attaining a higher, more pleasurable end. In an extreme form, the aesthetic sees nothing beyond the text; the ascetic sees nothing of lasting value in the text” (Stoke 1996, p. 29).

Augustine’s conceptions of “aesthetic reading” and “ascetic reading” correspond amazingly well with the modern distinction between “ludic reading” and “labor reading” (Nell 1988, p. 2). The former is of a paratelic nature, meaning the activity is performed for its own sake; whereas the latter is characterized as telic, meaning the activity is labored at because of external rewards. Nell’s research on pleasure reading shows that
books possess the power of creating a world, in which readers are effortlessly absorbed and their consciousness is taken over through enthrallment.

Although Nell's research also suggests that the primary goal of reading in modern cultures is for pleasure, we cannot ignore the fact that reading in a foreign language, especially at the beginning stage, is more an onerous task than an enjoyable diversion, let alone a pleasure. The issue here that concerns a reading pedagogue is whether we can integrate the "aesthetic" experience and the "ascetic" experience into an activity that is both educating and entertaining. Augustine succeeded in doing so, by incorporating the aesthetic pleasure into a well-defined plan: his search for the ultimate truth. For him, the role of reading changes from being a "wandering" among literary delights to a goal-seeking "pilgrimage". Modern research also points out the possibility of a "reversal" between "telic" activities and "paratelic" activities (Apter 1979), in which telic acts may quite suddenly become paratelic. It is hard for us to find a religious goal in order to turn reading in a second language into a "pilgrimage" for our L2 learners, yet we do have the responsibility and ability to turn it from a telic task into a paratelic experience.

While agreeing with Nell's typology of reading activities, in the setting of learning and teaching reading in Chinese as a foreign language, I would like to offer a line of demarcation between three types of reading activities: quasi-reading, learning to read, and reading to learn. In the pedagogical model we are going to suggest later, a reading program is divided into these three stages. In the first stage, reading is more likely to be a
telic task for the learners. They have to struggle with the "eerie spelling" of the Chinese script—the combination of components of the characters. I don’t mean that reading Chinese cannot be made into a pleasure activity from the very beginning, but to the average learners who are only used to the alphabetic writing system, the Chinese orthography forms a formidable obstacle at the beginning. As the learning process moves along, efforts should be made on the program designer’s part to transform the telic task into a paratelic experience. During the second and third stages, external rewards such as grades and others' praises will give way to the internal pleasure that reading in another language brings about. Many factors may contribute to this transformation: learners’ attitudes, learners’ motivations, learners’ skill level, reading materials’ topic, and methods of teaching.

1.5. Why a pedagogical model?

After a review and critique of the reading studies conducted in the Less Commonly Taught (LCT) languages, Everson called on researchers to "collaborate on a model of reading that seems particular to an LCT language and then proceed with the age-old process of verifying or rejecting hypotheses so as to define the model further" (Everson 1993, p. 210).

Models are scientific stories or narratives that researchers construct in order to better understand and explain things that we cannot detect visually or aurally. A good model is
a careful analogy that displays the relations of the part to a whole. Successful models are useful for discovering hypotheses and can predict changes of the whole system if one of the components changes.

To build a model of reading that is “particular to an LCT language” will no doubt bring better guidance and organization into future research and teaching practices. However, a comprehensive model that is beneficial both to research and pedagogy might be too ambitious a plan. Models are designed for certain goals. For instance, to investigate various motivation factors and their interactions in reading, a motivational model of reading can be built; to map the reading activities to the brain functioning at the level of neuroscience, a neuropsychological model of reading might be built. Therefore, in order to clarify the various components and the dynamics among them in learning and teaching reading, a pedagogical model should be constructed.

This paper seeks to construct a knowledge-based pedagogical model of learning to read Chinese as a foreign language. In this model, various knowledge components, as well as their interactions, will be demonstrated. It is hoped that by building a model, the vague relationship of issues in teaching and learning Chinese reading as a foreign language will be simplified into a coherent story.
1.6. The organization of the thesis

In the next chapter, the sociological and psychological aspects of reading Chinese will be addressed. Next, a pedagogical model of reading Chinese as a foreign language will be constructed on the basis of the discussions in the previous two chapters, combining the sociological and psychological components of reading. In the final chapter, the applications and implications of this model will be addressed and some current issues in teaching the reading of Chinese as a foreign language will be discussed.
CHAPTER 2

READING IN CHINESE: TWO SCENARIOS

The previous chapter reached the conclusion that there are two aspects of reading: the psychological aspect and the sociological aspect. From one perspective, the psychological aspect comprises the micro level of reading and the sociological aspect comprises the macro level of reading. This chapter will present the psychological scenario and the sociological scenario as to the issue of reading in Chinese. I will draw on the research findings in the field of psycholinguistics and experimental psychology that pertains to Chinese reading and their implications will be summarized. There is no existing body of research on the sociological aspect, so an attempt will be made to draw such a picture.

2.1 The psychological scenario of reading Chinese

Tzeng (1993) gives a very good review of recent research on Chinese orthography and discusses the relationship between orthographic symbols and reading processes on the
basis of the most recent research findings. In this quite comprehensive review, he addresses the following questions: a) Are Chinese logographs difficult to learn? b) Does reading Chinese require an enhanced visual memory? c) Does skilled reading of Chinese not require the speech recoding process? d) Is phonological awareness not essential for learning to read the Chinese script? e) Does reading Chinese involve a greater right hemispheric processing?

Psycholinguistic scholars have been obsessed with these five questions for the past several decades. If we dig deep into the root of these five questions, we find that they actually stem from a misconception about the Chinese orthography, that is, as opposed to alphabetic writing, Chinese characters are “pictures” which represent “ideas” or “words” symbolically or pictorially. For example, Logan (1986) distinguishes three writing systems in the world: the alphabetic system, the logographic (pictographic) system and the syllabic system. According to him, Chinese orthography belongs to the second category which is defined as “each spoken word is represented by its own unique visual sign, which denotes or depicts the word symbolically or pictorially” (p. 20). This entrenched notion that Chinese characters are pictures has been occupying the western scholarly mind for centuries, leading DeFrancis (1984) to take issue and denounce this “ideograph myth”.

Although more and more scholars are coming to agree with DeFrancis that Chinese orthography is no more logographic than English writing is phonographic, the influence of
that old notion has already spread into the field of psycholinguistic study. Some common misconceptions: since Chinese writing is logographic and does not record sound, it is a burden to the memory of a learner to remember the sound, meaning and structure of a character at the same time--hence, Chinese logograph is considered to be difficult to learn; since Chinese characters are “pictures”, and sometimes quite complicated pictures, processing them might demand more visual memory; since Chinese characters are logographic or ideographic, meaning that the sense of a character is linked directly to the visual symbol instead of through the intermediate means of sound as alphabetic writing systems do, there might not necessarily be a speech recoding process in reading, especially in skilled reading; by the same token, in learning the Chinese script, it might not be essential for learners to have phonological awareness (the ability to recognize the internal structure of spoken words) as learners of alphabetic writings do; last but not least, since characters are pictures which require visual processing rather than phonological processing, while hemispheric lateralization studies have found that “verbal stimuli are processed in the left hemisphere and visuospatial stimuli in the right hemisphere” (Hardyck, Tzeng and Wang 1978, p. 57), therefore, reading Chinese might involve a greater right hemisphere processing. These logical inferences have become assumptions or premises of psycholinguistic studies and have spawned numerous research papers over the past several decades.
After almost twenty years of research, Tzeng (1993) came up to the stage again and
curtained the show with a series of no’s to the above-mentioned five most pertinent
questions: “there is no reason at all for the Chinese logographs to be cast as a difficult
script to be learned” (p.56); “there is no need to propose a special requirement for
enhancing the visuospatial ability in order to learn to read the Chinese logographic
system” (p.58); “despite the bias towards direct grapheme-to-semantic processing,
logographs may also activate phonological recoding processes” (p.59); and “visual
hemifield experiments with Chinese subjects clearly showed a right visual field (left
hemisphere) superiority for processing Chinese logographs” (p.63).

Tzeng’s conclusions were argued convincingly at both theoretical and empirical levels.
It is beyond the scope of this paper to cite his evidences, but some implications can be
made to clarify some issues in teaching reading of Chinese. First of all, Chinese
orthography takes longer to learn than an alphabetic orthography, but the memorization
of the association of a graph to a meaning is in no way the same as remembering the
arbitrary matching of phone numbers to people. Secondly, since more than 85% of all
the commonly-used Chinese characters are phonograms, and skilled Chinese adult readers
decode newly encountered Chinese characters by taking advantage of the generic
properties of phonograms, it might be worthwhile to spend some instructional time
within the classroom to teach some orthography decoding strategies to learners. Thirdly,
although phonological recoding process is not a necessary stage but rather an optional
strategy in skilled reading, the connection between orthography and phonology is essential for beginning readers. Therefore, to emphasize the speech of the language might expedite the learning of the writing system.

In his concluding remarks, Tzeng said:

"It is clear that, despite the seemingly very different script/speech relationships embedded in different written languages, there is much commonality in the process of extracting meanings from print. The important question to be asked about reading, therefore, is not ‘what’ are the differences, but rather, we should ask why it should be that there remains so much commonality in the psycholinguistic processing across the perceptually very different scripts" (p. 64-65).

Most of the studies in the psychological aspect of reading Chinese have focused on the unique nature of the Chinese writing system-- a relatively narrow focus compared to the nature of reading which deserves a broader picture as a social behavior.

2.2 The sociological scenario of reading Chinese

In his A History of Reading, Manguel (1996) agrees with Dr. Melin C. Wittrock's (?) definition of reading that "it is a generative process that reflects the reader's disciplined attempt to construct one or more meaning within the rules of language" (p.39). Manguel discusses where meaning comes from:

"We ‘discover’ a word because the object or idea it represents is already in our mind, ‘ready to be linked up with the word.’ It is as if we are offered a gift from the outside world (by our elders, by those who first speak to us) but the ability to grasp the gift is our own. In that sense, the words spoken (and later on the words read) belong neither to us nor to our parents, nor to our author; they occupy a
space of shared meaning, a communal threshold which lies at the beginning of our relationship to the arts of conversation and reading” (p.35).

This understanding of meaning and comprehension agrees with the psychological idea that meanings are public and distributed (Bruner 1990) and that we learn new things through the help of the old schemata that already existed in our minds (Rumelhart 1984, 1988). Manguel’s statement makes us wonder about the role of reading in a certain culture or society, and about the values people put on reading in a certain culture and how people acquire or learn the skill of reading against a certain cultural or social background. These considerations will be addressed in the case of reading Chinese in the Chinese culture. References are cited from a report on reading in China made by the U.S. Reading Study Team to The People’s Republic of China, statistical reports, research findings of (il)literacy problem in China, and my personal experience as a native speaker and reader.

2.2.1 Social attitudes toward reading in China

The Chinese verbs “nian” and “du” (both meaning “to read”) have broader senses than the English “to read”. Here are some examples gleaned from everyday conversations to illustrate their broad applications:

e.g. a) Nide haizi nian(du) shu le ma
     |   |   |   |   |
     Gloss: your child read book past-particle question-particle
     English: Has your child started school?

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b) Ni zai zhege daxue nian(du) shenme?
   | | | | | | |
Gloss: you at this university read what
English: What is your major at this university?

c) Ni nian(du) le ji nian shu le?
   | | | | | | |
Gloss: you read P how many year book P
English: How many years have you been in school?

d) Ta mei nian(du) guo shu, keshi ta shi zi.
   | | | | | | |
Gloss: he not read P book but he recognize character
English: He didn’t receive any education, but he knows characters (is literate).

e) Wode nüer jin nian qiutian nian(du) si nianji.
   | | | | | | |
Gloss: my daughter this year autumn read four grade
English: My daughter will become a fourth-grader this autumn.

f) Ta xianzai zhengzai nian(du) boshi.
   | | | | | |
Gloss: he now -ing read Ph.D.
English: He is now studying toward a Ph.D. degree.

From the above examples, we can see that in Mandarin Chinese (and also in some dialects), nian/du is equated with “to enter school”, “to learn” or “to receive education”.

This equation reflects the general understanding of reading in the Chinese culture: to learn to read is the vital part of receiving education and reading is the major means of learning in the school system.
Education and reading have always been valued in the Chinese society, except in some political movements when intelligentsia were persecuted.\(^5\) In the old Confucian tradition, people “read books”, or receive education for two ends: a) to reach a higher social or political status (qiuqì gongming); b) to raise the level of consciousness and to reach a better understanding of the universe as well as the human being (xiushen yangxing). The former one was an external reward, which lured people with the promise of a higher social status and hence a better economic standing. This extrinsic motivation for education was further enforced by the civil service examination system starting from as early as the Sui Dynasty (581-618 A.D.). From then on, to read classics for twenty years and then sit for a series of rigorous civil service examinations became the most common way for the general public to seek political positions and better their lives. It would be a great honor to a family if their son succeeded in the examinations and became an official for the imperial court. Compared with this goal to seek success in the material world, the other goal-- to seek a higher state of mind, was of a more intrinsic nature. Intellectuals read in order to understand better the relationship between the macro universe--the world, and the micro universe--the human being. Literary erudition which was acquired mainly through the means of reading was believed to lead to moral virtuousness. Its reward was a peace of mind and a more natural way of living.
Intellectuals were revered and even people who had only a few reading and writing skills were respected. From some examples of folk belief, we might be able to peek into Chinese people's attitudes toward scripts and books. Guthrie (1984) related as follows:

"There is one folk belief that a person who used inscribed papers for toilet purposes would be struck dead by lightning. Books are especially treasured and it was reported by one Chinese that some people think that if a person accidentally steps on a book, he must pick it up and place it on his head momentarily for appeasement" (p.95).

In the household where I was brought up, children were taught that if they used inscribed paper as toilet paper, they were to become illiterate instantly. Also, if they wanted to be good at reading, they might put a book under their pillows when they slept. Even if these are superstitions, they reflect Chinese people's awe toward books and reading.

Yet, this does not mean that people have not harbored doubts about reading and education. In the past two decades in mainland China, there were two attacks of the so-called "Theory of No Use to Read Books"\(^6\), when many students dropped out of schools and pursued business opportunities to make money. For many years, intellectuals have been underpaid as one of the aftermaths of the Cultural Revolution. With the introduction of a commodity economy into the society, intellectuals’ situation became worse: a street peddler's monthly earnings was more than double the salary of a university professor. So, many people began to doubt the value of reading and education. However, as people recovered from the initial shock of the commodity economy and the
government made efforts to better intellectual’s conditions, knowledge was once again respected. According to a leading evening newspaper in Shanghai, in the middle of the 1990s, more people were trying to get into graduate schools to seek a higher degree than ever before.\(^7\)

2.2.2 The (il)literacy problem in China

Placing reading in a social context leads us naturally to talk of literacy rather than simply of reading. With two thirds of the population occupying the rural areas, illiteracy has always been a nationwide issue and high on the national agenda in P.R.China. It was found that 20.61% of the population over six years of age was illiterate or semi-literate in a national population census conducted in 1990 (China Statistical Yearbook 1996, p.71). According to a more recent statistical survey, the illiteracy rates of the population over fifteen years of age are summarized as follows (China Population Statistics Yearbook 1994, p.158-175):

It is apparent from these figures that illiteracy for the population over 15-years is approximately 12% in cities and is generally about 26% in smaller counties. In the more remote areas such as Tibet, the illiteracy rates increase to 50% to 80%.

The Chinese term for literacy is *you wenhua*, literally meaning “having culture”, which is much closer to “being educated”. The word for illiteracy is *wenmang*, with “wen” meaning “scripts” and “mang” meaning “blind”. Generally speaking, illiteracy is defined
Table 2.1: Illiteracy Rate in China--1994

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General Illiteracy Rate</th>
<th>Men’s Illiteracy Rate</th>
<th>Women’s Illiteracy Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nationwide</td>
<td>22.21%</td>
<td>12.98%</td>
<td>31.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Han Nationality</td>
<td>21.53%</td>
<td>12.93%</td>
<td>31.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mongolian</td>
<td>17.82%</td>
<td>12.63%</td>
<td>23.19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tibetan</td>
<td>69.39%</td>
<td>55.71%</td>
<td>82.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cities</td>
<td>12.17%</td>
<td>6.27%</td>
<td>18.50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Townships</td>
<td>11.45%</td>
<td>5.62%</td>
<td>17.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counties</td>
<td>26.23%</td>
<td>15.74%</td>
<td>37.11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

as not having received primary schooling (Seeberg 1991, p.8). But differentiation of literacy standards is tolerated: “For peasants, the criteria for individual literacy is the recognition of 1,500 Chinese characters; but for employees in urban enterprises and for urban residents 2,000 characters. In addition, they must demonstrate ability to read simple newspaper articles, keep basic accounts, and write simple pieces for practical purposes” (Bhola 1990, p.9).

2.2.3 How reading affect people in China

The previous chapter discussed the distinction between labor reading and lubric reading, with the former defined as seeking external reward--typically for information, and
the latter seeking internal reward—pleasure. Correspondingly, reading can affect people in two ways: it can either lead to change of behaviors of the readers or their state of mind (consciousness). This can be illustrated by examples in China.

Reading is one of the most efficient ways to keep well-informed in an ever-changing world, and the earlier the acquisition of information always means profit or advantage. It was reported that after an illiteracy-elimination movement in a village, a poor peasant read an article in the local newspaper on a new planting method. He learned the method and applied it to his field. He got a better harvest and was delighted that he had learned reading. Also, the reading of political directives always leads to a change of behaviors on the part of the subordinating working units.

In a survey on what people read in China, Guthrie (1984) found that novels on the topic of traditional martial arts were hot items in book markets. These novels are usually legendary stories about a group of martial art warriors, who lived sometime in remote history. A lot of people, from adolescents to university professors, enjoy so much reading these novels that they become addicted to them. They take satisfaction in immersing themselves into the fictional world, so that the real life can be put aside for a while.

People usually talk about or write about what they have read. They need some channels to let out information they have gained in their reading or to share the pleasure, or sometimes the distaste, they have experienced in their private reading. The effect of
reading on people and what they do with what they have read might not differ much across cultures. But still, they comprise the indispensable components of reading as a social act.

2.2.4 Methods of teaching reading in China

In China, methods of teaching reading have been consistent throughout history in terms of the pedagogical stress on reading aloud, recitation, and memorization. If you went to observe a reading class in a primary school, or even in a high school, you would probably notice the predominant activity of reading aloud either unanimously by the whole class, or by a single student, or in whispers by individual students. From time to time, the teacher would call upon students to stand up to recite certain paragraphs which were required to be learned by heart. That was exactly the observation made by most of the members on the U.S. Reading Study Team to China in 1984: “What is always stressed is precise, fluent oral reading” (Anderson 1984, p.73); “The educational approach...... places an explicit emphasis on correct pronunciation of characters, expressive oral reading, literal comprehension of each sentence, and verbatim reproduction of text units as the only means for answering questions.....” (Guthrie 1984, p.102).

Why does oral reading enjoy such a pedagogical emphasis, while the common mode of reading for literate adults is silent reading? First, Asian education systems are known for
their emphasis on rote memory. A good proportion of learning materials, including well-written essays, mathematical rules, physics statements and chemical elements charts, have to be committed to memory. One finds it much easier to memorize written texts if both visual and aural memory are utilized. By orally reading a text, one is creating an aural “image” to accompany the visual input of the scripts. Second, it provides the teacher with a way of testing students’ pronunciation. The Chinese reading courses in the primary and secondary schools are not strictly “reading” courses, in that they must fulfill the educational goal of teaching the four skills, namely speaking, listening, reading and writing, at the same time. The course is called yuwen (literally meaning “language and script”), instead of yuedu (“reading”). Since most of the students speak a dialect before they go to school, the yuwen course becomes the best place to teach them the standard common language--Mandarin. Third, it can also check students’ grasp of characters. Fourth, it is used as a means for checking comprehension. It is assumed by many teachers that if a student can pronounce a character right, she can comprehend its meaning correctly. Finally, oral reading is an important skill for some activities unique to the Chinese culture. One is the “politics study sessions”, which are designated to be held once a week (usually on Friday afternoons) in every working unit all over the country. This slot of time is devoted to, as the name suggests, learning “politics”—government directives, new policies, etc. The pattern goes like this: the session leader (usually a party secretary) reads directives or documents aloud first, then the group has a
discussion. Children at school who are too young to learn directives are instructed to read aloud, in group, newspaper articles which report a role model’s deeds as part of their moral education. Another cultural activity is “poetry recital” (shi langsong), a popular performing art genre, in which a person or a group of people recite a poem either with or without background music. Recital Contests are held from time to time to discover young artists and to promote the use of Mandarin. In a word, oral reading is culturally valued and it is no wonder why it should become a major activity in classrooms.

Not only did the emphasis on oral reading and rote memory not shift over the past one thousand years, the procedures of teaching reading did not change much, either. The yuwen curriculum is divided into two stages: the orthography instruction (shizi jiaoxue) and the reading instruction (dushu jiaoxue). During the first stage, stress is put on orthography recognition and production, while some basic reading skills are taught (oral reading being one of the skills). During the second stage, the goal is to teach students how to appreciate literary works and how to write (The Great Chinese Encyclopedia, p153).

Because of the nature of the Chinese writing system, children spend a relatively longer period of time on the learning of orthography. In traditional society, children needed to know two thousand characters before they embarked on the activity of reading per se. The amount--two thousand is estimated because there are three books, One Hundred Family Names, One-Thousand-Character Text, and Three-Character Classic that were the most commonly used ABC readings for pre-school children in the old days.

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The total of different characters used in these three books are 2720 (The Great Chinese Encyclopedia, p. 153). The *One Hundred Family Names* contains almost one thousand commonly used family names grouped by four in a string and reads like a long four-character poem, only that it has no meaning. The *One-Thousand-Character Text* and *Three-Character Classic*, however, are meaningful texts using almost one thousand characters, arranged in alternately rhyming lines of three or four characters to each. They could be used both as character textbooks and basic knowledge books. For instance, the first sentence of the *Three-Character Classic* goes like this: "*Ren zhi chu, xing ben shan; xing xiang jin, xi xiang yuan* (Men at their birth are naturally good. Their natures are much the same, their habits become widely different)” (San Tzu Ching, p2).

For children nowadays, they have to learn altogether a little more than three thousand characters during the six years of primary school (Sheridan 1992). Following is a table showing the numbers of characters contained in twelve volumes of the *yuyuen* textbooks which are adopted as the national standard reading textbooks for primary school use. Six years of schooling are divided into twelve semesters, for each of which one volume is used.

From Table 2.2, we can see that by the end of two years of learning, students grasp 47.42% of all the characters they have to learn during the whole period of primary schooling. In the first semester of grade one, the students are responsible for learning and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Volumes</th>
<th>Number of New Characters/ Percentage of Total</th>
<th>Total Number of Characters Learned/ Percentage of Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>260 / 8.15%</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>370 / 11.59%</td>
<td>630 / 19.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>450 / 14.10%</td>
<td>1080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>433 / 13.57%</td>
<td>1513 / 47.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>389 / 12.19%</td>
<td>1902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>384 / 12.30%</td>
<td>2286 / 71.66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>194 / 6.08%</td>
<td>2480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>197 / 6.17%</td>
<td>2677 / 83.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>127 / 3.98%</td>
<td>2804</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>131 / 4.11%</td>
<td>2935 / 92.01%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>127 / 3.98%</td>
<td>3062</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>128 / 4.01%</td>
<td>3190 / 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2: Number of Characters Learned During the Chinese Primary School (data source from Sheridan 1992, with some revisions by this author)

writing the Pinyin system. Students are expected to learn 260 characters in the first semester, pronounce them, be able to read and write them and understand their meanings.

The students also learn 58 radicals and the principles for stroke order in writing Chinese characters. After they are secure with the basic principles of the structures of the characters and rules for writing them, in the second year, a total of 883 characters are introduced, which is followed by an introduction of 773 characters during the third year.

By the end of the fourth year when 2677 characters are learned, students can read virtually any articles in the newspaper, with a little help of a dictionary. 10
Another noticeable fact is that during the six years of learning, the study of characters is always a component of reading instruction. This might seem awesome at first thought, but learning a new character forms no difficulty after grade two since all the basic principles and rules are grasped. In addition, because the Chinese language has a large number of compounds, a new character often means an increase of several items in the vocabulary. For example, if a student already knows (猪) zhu “pig”, (牛) niu “ox”, (羊) yang “sheep”, and then she learns the character (肉) rou “meat, flesh”, her vocabulary will be expanded at least by three items: (猪肉), “pork; (牛肉), “beef”; and (羊肉), “lamb”.

Two methods are used to teach Chinese characters. Sheridan (1992) gives a detailed description:

“The first method is called the Contextual Teaching Method. In this method new characters are taught within the context of a meaningful word and sentence. The other method is chiefly used in the second grade and is called the Concentrated Drill Method. In this method groups of characters with some commonality of meaning, structures or pronunciation are taught. A large number of characters are taught this way so that by the end of second grade students have learnt more than half of the number of new characters they will learn in elementary school” (p. 28).

Many studies have focused only on character teaching in China and mistakenly equals orthography instruction to reading instruction. Some researchers did notice the distinction between orthography instruction and reading instruction and made some attempts to investigate the latter one. But they hastened to conclude that “there is less
emphasis on comprehension in Chinese than in American schools” (Anderson 1984, p.
75). As for instruction of reading strategies, it was suggested that no skills were taught. 
According to my own experience, there was no mention of reading strategies such as 
scanning and skimming until I began the study of college English. But I do not agree that 
there is no comprehension instruction in reading Chinese in China. The issue here is not 
whether there is instruction in reading comprehension or not, but how comprehension is 
conceptualized in a Chinese reading class. As stated before, the emphasis of the reading 
instruction in the Chinese curriculum is on appreciation of literary works and practical 
writing. As long as students can orally read the text smoothly in class, it is assumed by 
the teacher that they comprehend it at least on the surface level. Then effort is put on the 
discovery of the underlying intentions of the author, appreciation of the mood created by 
certain words and the application of rhetorical techniques.

2.2.5 Pedagogical implications for reading Chinese as a foreign language

From the above discussion about the teaching methods of reading Chinese as a first 
language, we can glean some insights into how people should look at teaching reading 
Chinese as a foreign language.

First of all, orthography instruction is different from “reading” instruction and the 
two should not be equated, but their relationship is close: the former being one of the 
prerequisites for the latter.
Secondly, orthography learning takes time and special effort. Extra instructional hours might be needed to explain the structures and formations of characters so that both the rate and the accuracy of recognition can be achieved. New characters may be encountered even by an advanced Chinese reader, which means that character learning is a lifetime undertaking. But at the advanced level, character learning is combined with vocabulary learning, which is not different from an advanced English reader encountering a new word, checking its meaning out either by guessing from the context or consulting a dictionary.

Thirdly, oral reading might contribute to learning reading in the initial stage. It can be used as a test to check learner's grasp of characters and also their pronunciation of the language. Since the pedagogical goal is to enable the learners to communicate or function in the target culture, pronunciation should deserve special attention not only in a speaking class but also in a reading class. Moreover, correcting pronunciation when a student is reading a text aloud might be less embarrassing and more efficient than correcting it when a dialogue is going on between the teacher and the student. In the latter situation, the teacher has to block the communication and the student’s attention span might be too narrow to take care of both the pronunciation and the task of passing on information. However, oral reading is just one of many activities that can be used in a reading class and should not be misused or overused: 1) the ability of orally reading a text aloud does not ensure comprehension. Therefore, comprehension should not be taken for granted if the
student can read the text out. 2) too much emphasis and training on oral reading might foster a bad habit of relying on reading a text out, instead of silent reading, in order to comprehend the contents of a text.

Fourthly, language is not the same as the writing system. Scripts were invented to record language. Proficiency in the spoken language does not ensure proficiency in reading. The illiteracy problem in every country proves this statement. Although language instruction and reading instruction are combined in China’s school system, it will not be efficient in an environment where Chinese is learned as a foreign language. Linguistic knowledge, including knowledge of semantics, syntax, discourse structure and rhetorical conventions, is another prerequisite for the reading activity. Therefore, in a program of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, the instruction of this type of knowledge should precede the reading instruction.

2.3 Summary

So far, two scenarios of reading Chinese as a first language have been presented: one from the perspectives of psycholinguistic studies; the other from a sociological view. While many studies have been focused on the first dimension of the issue of reading, the second dimension has been neglected and research papers are scarce in this respect. From the limited discussion in this chapter, we can see that reading is a highly complicated
social behavior, which occurs against a cultural background and is influenced not only by
psycholinguistic factors, but also by many social factors.
CHAPTER 3

A PEDAGOGICAL MODEL OF LEARNING TO READ IN CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

This chapter will build a pedagogical model of reading Chinese as a foreign language, considering all the components we have seen in the two scenarios described in the previous chapter. First, a review of existing models of reading will be made. Following that is the suggestion of a pedagogical model of reading Chinese as a foreign language. Its components and learning cycle will be discussed in detail.

3.1 Models of reading

Model building in reading research has a relatively short history, compared with the length of research on reading. It started in the middle of the 1960's, when the so-called "psycholinguistic perspective" was proposed in the field to push studies toward the direction of considering underlying assumptions about basic processes in reading. Then
papers to build models for the reading process sprang up. The models of the 1960’s and early 1970’s “tended to be linear information processing models”, whereas the models in the 1980’s “tended to be interactive with opportunities for feedback loops from components in the later stages to influence components in the earlier stages” (Samuels and Kamil 1988, p.25). The following table is a brief summary of all the influential models we have had so far. It is based on the research done by Samuels and Kamil (1988) and Grabe (1988): (See Table 3.1)

This list is not exhaustive but is enough for people to see how many models can be constructed about reading. As said before, models are narratives constructed by scholars to describe or explain phenomenon and processes that cannot be detected simply by ear or by eye. Reading is one of the most complicated cognitive and social acts. It has too many facets and there are many perspectives from which people can view it. There is just not a single model of reading which can contain all the important facets.

There are some commonalities of the above models. Firstly, they all focus on one of the many facets of the reading process, yet all of them are from the same vantage point: viewing reading as an information process.

Secondly, these models are all based on research in the field of English as a Second Language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Researchers and Year of Publication</th>
<th>Brief Description of Their Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hockberg (1970)</td>
<td>what a model describing the processes of skilled reading must account for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mackworth (1972)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Levin and Kaplan (1970)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Carroll (1964)</td>
<td>a definition of reading along with a simple one-way flow diagram from visual stimulus to oral language recoding to meaning responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ruddell (1969)</td>
<td>a system of communication model of reading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smith (1971)</td>
<td>a description of the linguistic and cognitive processes that any decent model of reading will need to take into account</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gough (1972)</td>
<td>all letters in the visual field must be accounted for individually by the reader prior to the assignment of meaning to any string of letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LaBerge and Samuels (1974)</td>
<td>emphasizing automaticity of component processes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McClelland and Rumelhart (1981)</td>
<td>interactive-activation model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stanovich (1980)</td>
<td>automatic-processing model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taylor and Taylor (1983)</td>
<td>bilateral cooperative model</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perfetti (1985, 1986a, b)</td>
<td>verbal efficiency model</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1: Summary of Models of Reading

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Thirdly, a consensus has been reached in the field since Rumelhart's model was established that reading is an "interactive" process rather than a linear one. The process of reading is a combination of a top-down process and a bottom-up process: readers bring with themselves a previously built-up knowledge base as they read; when they read, their previous knowledge interacts with the information derived from the text, meaning is constructed and comprehension is reached only when this interaction is successful. This conception is very important for reading teachers to bear in mind for the following reasons: a) we cannot make students comprehend if they are not ready for it; b) merely explaining the text itself is not sufficient for comprehension, we are also responsible for building a knowledge base in the learners' minds.

Finally, the limitation of these models is that they all view reading as a cognitive or psycholinguistic process, isolated from its rich social context. The act of reading is reduced to the interaction between the text and a simplified mechanical mind.

3.2 A pedagogical model of learning to read in Chinese as a foreign language

3.2.1 Three stages of the model

Figure 3.1 shows the visual representation of the model. The model is divided into three learning stages: "quasi-reading", "learning to read", and "reading to learn".
A conventional demarcation of reading instruction is that there are two stages: “learning to read” and “reading to learn”. This typology is often used in reading instruction in first language education, when the first stage is devoted to the instruction of the writing system and some reading skills, whereas the second stage is mainly content course instruction. During the first stage, reading is an end, a skill that a child must acquire in order that she will survive in her educational journey. During the second stage, reading becomes a means, a tool to achieve a higher goal: learning domain knowledge.

In Chinese as a foreign language environment, I would like to propose a prerequisite stage: “quasi-reading”, a phase when reading in its strict sense has not started yet. The proposition of this stage is due to the nature of the Chinese writing system.

In the stage of “quasi-reading”, the goal is to familiarize learners with Chinese orthography. Because most American students have only been exposed to alphabetic writing systems before they learn Chinese and they have heard so much about the complexity of the Chinese writing system that they do not know exactly how it functions, it takes time for them to understand the basic features of the Chinese orthography and the optimum learning methods and strategies to study Chinese characters. The true reading, as defined by us as “the act of viewing and interpreting texts” does not occur at this stage. At this time, students have learned a while the spoken language, and the “reading materials” are better to be the scripts of the spoken language they have already learned. This is beneficial because they do not have to attend to both
the language and the writing system simultaneously, when they are still very “weak” both linguistically and orthographically.

It is from the second stage that true reading begins. The goal of this stage is to train learners to become skilled readers. Knowledge about reading strategies, such as scanning, skimming, and genre recognition are imparted. Tasks designed to automate these skills are conducted to elevate the rate of reading and enhance the appropriateness of interpretation. In addition, topics about strategies and techniques of reading are raised so that learners will be able to consciously polish their reading skills. Throughout this stage, learners have to read a large number of materials so that they know how to read in this language.

Materials for this stage progress from what are intended for foreign readers toward what are intended for natives, such as newspaper and magazine articles.

The last stage, “reading to learn”, is a practical training period. The focus of this stage is on what to do with the reading texts. During this stage, learners train themselves to be experts in certain domains of the target culture by reading in the target language, with very little help from the instructor. Additionally, they have to practice what to do with the texts, following the examples of what native readers do after they read. It is not to say, though, that the learners no longer need to learn how to read during this stage. While still recognizing obstacles formed by L2 language issues, learners should shift their attention more toward the sociological aspect of reading. By this time, they have already learned the basic skills of reading and achieved certain proficiency in the language, so, they can
read with the same aim as a native reader—either to seek information or pleasure—as well as do whatever native readers do after reading. During this process, their language proficiency will be further enhanced because of the large amount of input from their reading. Materials used in this stage should be exclusively authentic.

3.2.2 Five components of the model

In Figure 3.1, the enclosed box stands for a reading program. Within this box, there are five shaded areas which represent five types of knowledge components of the model. These five components comprise a knowledge base that a skilled reader needs when she reads in her native language. Each letter represents a unit of learning time and effort. Therefore, the numbers of a certain letter indicate roughly the amount of learning time and effort that should be contributed to each type of knowledge that letter represents during the three learning stages.

The "o" shaded area is the orthography knowledge. It includes knowledge of the Chinese characters, their structure, their radicals, their formation and the relationship between their sound and shape. This is analogous to learning to spell in English—only the "spelling" rules of the two writing systems are totally different. This area is shaped as a triangular, because of its progressively decreasing demand for learning time. During the first stage of the model, it occupies almost all of the learning time. In the second stage, it engages nearly a third of the learning time at first and nearly none toward the end. It
Reading to Learn

Learning to Read

Quasi-Reading

S: Reading Strategies Knowledge
C: C2 Knowledge
O: Orthography Knowledge
L: L2 Knowledge
D: Specific Domain Knowledge

Figure 3.1: A Knowledge-based Pedagogical Model of Learning to Read Chinese as Foreign Language

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lingers on until the beginning of the third stage. After that, the knowledge base for orthography is almost complete and enough for reading to continue without obstacles caused by characters.

The second component is the reading strategies knowledge, a conceptual tool-kit for strategies and tactics. For example, for different tasks, different modes of reading can be utilized. To get a general idea of a news report, skimming can be applied. To look for certain information, scanning can be employed. Hosenfeld (1984) provides a list of reading strategies used by successful readers. To name a few: keeping the meaning of the passage in mind, reading in broad phrases, skipping inessential words, guessing from context the meaning of unknown words, and so on and so forth. Additionally, it is very important for the learners to recognize different writing conventions, including genres, styles and rhetorical techniques of the Chinese language, and different strategies are needed for successful and fast comprehension of texts written in different genres or styles. The importance of this component is that: a) while some students are experienced successful learners and adept at finding appropriate strategies for themselves, many more students in our Chinese classroom are very naive foreign language learners. b) to explicitly tell learners about strategies and train them to employ them in certain tasks will aid the acquisition of the reading skill.

There is one point that teachers of strategies should bear in mind: there are no good strategies, nor bad strategies. Clarke (1988) conducted a study on Spanish-speaking
readers reading English. One of the questions he sought to answer was whether proficient
L1 readers transfer their reading skills to the second language. His findings were
interesting:

“There is some transfer of skills, for the good readers perform better
than the poor readers in both languages, but limited language proficiency
appears to exert a powerful effect on the behaviors utilized by the readers.
The results of these studies suggest that, while some form of the ‘universal
hypothesis’ may be justified, the role of language proficiency may be
greater than has previously been assumed; apparently, limited control over
the language ‘short circuits’ the good reader’s system causing him/her to
revert to poor reader’s strategies when confronted with a difficult or
confusing task in the second language” (p. 119-120).

Clarke’s message was that although the ideal process of reading might be universal
across all languages, this is not true with a person who has a different proficiency level in
two languages. In her highly proficient language, she can read as a “good reader”. But in
her poorly proficient language, her reading behaviors tend to be like a “poor reader”. This
is why Clarke did not agree to use the terms “good readers” and “bad readers”, but instead
suggested using “good reading behaviors” and “bad reading behaviors”. This is in
accordance with an observation teachers can often make in a second language reading class:
adult L2 readers behave just like L1 children learning to read, struggling word by word,
pointing characters one by one, trying to pronounce every word …..Strategies are good if
they are used by the right person at the right time for the right task. The so-called “good
strategies” can be bad if they are employed either by the wrong person, or at the wrong
time, or for the wrong task. For example, if a learner is still struggling with the
orthography, then the so-called good strategy of “scanning the text title to get the main idea” will not help her much, since she cannot recognize the characters in the first place. Or, if a learner’s language proficiency is still inadequate, then the good strategy of “skipping inessential words” will mean nothing to her, since she cannot distinguish essential words from inessential words to begin with. By the same token, if the learner is only required to grasp the general idea of a text, then such a good strategy as word-attack will be unnecessary. Therefore, I prefer to use the term “appropriate strategies” than “good strategies”.

As illustrated, this component takes the shape of an upside-down triangular marked with the letter “s”. As the time for orthography learning shrinks, the time for conscious reading strategies learning increases. Building this portion of the knowledge base occurs mainly during the second and the third stage of the model. It is worthy of noting that the types of reading strategies introduced in these two stages are different. Warnick (1996) identified forty-seven reading strategies adopted both by native and non-native readers of Japanese and listed them under four categories: bottom-up, top-down, metacognitive, and socio-affective. Bottom-up reading strategies include questioning of vocabulary, phrase solving, which are more oriented to the text. Top-down strategies include prediction, inference and self-questioning, which are more oriented to the reader. Metacognitive strategies include such actions as commenting on one’s own strategy use or monitoring one’s own comprehension. Socio-affective strategies are actions like expressing level of
interest, laughing or desire to discuss text contents with others. I would like to suggest that during the second stage, bottom-up and top-down strategies be introduced while during the third stage, metacognitive and socio-affective strategies be introduced.

The "L" marked area stands for the third component, knowledge of the target language (L2 knowledge). This portion includes the range of knowledge that occupies the attention of linguists: semantics, syntax and discourse structure. Vocabulary expansion, word and phrase recognition, grammar explanation are all part of this knowledge. Traditional approaches of reading instruction tended to overemphasize this type of knowledge. One of the implications of Rumelhart’s schemata theory is that L2 knowledge is necessary for comprehension, but is not sufficient. Hence in our model, L2 occupies approximately one third of the learning time. As learners read more materials, they accumulate linguistic knowledge for future use.

There are cases when we encounter texts which are linguistically difficult for our reading level, but because we have enough prior or background knowledge of the contents of the text, we can still comprehend the gist of it. Compensation for lack of L2 knowledge comes from the other two components of our model: cultural knowledge (C2 knowledge) and specific domain knowledge.

As Gould (1987) has pointed out:

"A written text is a cultural document, written by a social being, that reflects the society to which the writer belongs. Writing and reading, therefore, are two of the most important ways in which culture and society perpetuate themselves. Writers and readers from the same society
who speak the same language tend to share common cultural assumptions which form the basis of their mutual understanding" (p. 5).

In the case of foreign language teaching and learning, the learners are not only faced with a new language, but also more importantly, a new culture. To enable them to access the "cultural assumptions" of native speakers, therefore, is an essential function of a curriculum. A culturally appropriate interpretation requires not only L2 knowledge, but also knowledge of the target culture. One lesson of the Textbook for a Changing China, for example, deals with the story of a farmer who tries to find a marriage partner through newspaper advertisement. Since he owes many real estate properties and earns good money, his ideal "Miss Right" is a city lady who is sociable, pretty and has at least a high-school diploma. A lot of excellent young ladies respond to his ad, among whom, there is one lady who succeeds in setting up a date with him in a unique way. When they meet, she introduces herself as being capable of many things such as typing, dancing, speaking English and Japanese. She adds specifically that she can drink alcohol. Some of my students were puzzled as to why she should mention alcohol in particular. Some interpreted that this showed her to be a capable and independent woman; some suggested that this indicated that she liked alcohol; others were just at a loss. After I explained to them that the ability of drinking alcohol is valued in the Chinese business world and is therefore regarded as one of the criterion to judge a person's sociability, the text made more sense to them. They came to the "culturally appropriate" understanding. For that
reason, in order to help the learners reach a proper understanding of a text, C2 knowledge has to be imparted to serve as a support for the heavy load of reading.

Gaining C2 knowledge is a fundamental task for teachers and learners. It is an effort deserving at least the same amount of time and energy spent on language learning. Turner (1991) has provided us with a very nice term for this kind of knowledge: “cultural literacy”, and has also given us a very good reason why we should spend much time to obtain it:

“To be culturally literate is not just to know that the Grim Reaper stands for death, in such a way that one could pick out the right association in a multiple choice test, or fill in the blank correctly on a fill-in-the-blank test. ... to be culturally literate is to possess the conceptual patterns behind the concept of the Grim Reaper, and those patterns are elaborate and powerful. One must know the basic metaphor that PEOPLE ARE PLANTS with respect to the life cycle, know the scenario of cultivation, know the commonplace notion of the general cause of individual deaths, know the very complicated way in which events can be understood metaphorically in terms of actions, know how to personify, and know all the constraints on this conceptual connectivity” (p. 225).

It is for this reason that in the diagram of the model, the component of C2 knowledge stands side by side with the component of L2 knowledge and enjoys the same amount of time and effort as the latter. Both of these components are emphasized throughout the three stages of the model.

The fifth component, the specific domain knowledge, can be seen as a subcomponent of the C2 knowledge, but does not have to be. It does not enter the picture until the end
of the second stage of the model, because from this point, learners begin to gain expertise in a specific domain in the target culture. They may become real experts, but their understanding of some specific knowledge might make them a better comprehender than a given native reader about a specific topic. In the reading material that we use for third-year level Chinese reading class at the Ohio State University, there is one short newspaper report on the outcomes of a baseball game. Although I knew every character and all the words in the article, I didn’t understand what the article was talking about, because I was “baseball illiterate”. It was my students who assumed the role of the teacher for the time being and explained to me what an “inning” is, what “balls” and “strikes” mean. Therefore, domain specific knowledge is germane in comprehending certain texts. During the third stage in our model, almost one third of the time and effort is given to expanding the domain specific knowledge in the target language. It should be noted that

3.2.3 The relationship of the five components in reading comprehension

This discussion of the roles of the five components in our pedagogical model dealt with each component individually; but this does not mean that they function independently in the real act of reading. On the contrary, each component interacts with the others and they compensate for one another if one is inadequate in an individual. If a
Figure 3.2: The Learning Cycle of Reading Chinese as a Foreign Language
reader encounters new characters, she can adopt the strategy of skipping certain words and use her semantic and syntactic knowledge to bridge the gap of the meaning loss. If her L2 knowledge is not adequate, she might just use her cultural or domain knowledge to guess the meaning. Figure 3.2 shows how these knowledge components work together to interact with the text and get an interpretation of the text.

As the figure shows, the five components combine to form a general knowledge base. A knowledge base is not a static system, but a dynamic one. When reading occurs, the knowledge base interacts with the text as a whole. If it is adequate, an interpretation (or misinterpretation) of the text grows out of the interaction of the knowledge base and the text. This interpretation goes back to the reader’s mind and becomes an addition to the original knowledge base. If the original knowledge base turns out to be inadequate to comprehend the text, reading is interrupted and the mind goes to a help system to get the right information to enrich the base until it is adequate.

3.3. The learning Cycle of reading in Chinese as a foreign language

On the basis of the above discussion on the pedagogical model, a learning cycle for reading Chinese as a foreign language may be proposed. It is a loop made up of five steps.

First, a reading self comes to read in a social context. The learner readers (in this paper, the term “learner readers” refers to unskilled L2 readers) are not abstract beings
who have no feelings nor thoughts. They read with a goal in mind. Some intend to find some useful information in a foreign text. Some want to enjoy the pleasure that reading original novels can bring them. Some read a text written in a foreign language merely with the purpose of learning the language better.

Secondly, no matter what goal readers have in mind, in order for reading to proceed smoothly, they have to build up the necessary knowledge base: the five components of our model. The construction of such a knowledge base cannot be completed overnight. But it does not have to be complete before reading can begin. The knowledge base is an ever-expanding system, as the language experience and cultural experience increases.

Thirdly, holding the knowledge, the reading self interacts with the text. In most circumstances, a learner reader will find the text’s readability beyond the level her current knowledge base allows. If such a situation happens, she needs to discover in which component she is lacking the knowledge. She can either ignore the lacking knowledge with compensation from other components, or go to a help system to revise and enrich her knowledge base.

Fourthly, the reader comes back to the text again. An interpretation of the text is achieved, which can either be an understanding, or a misunderstanding of the text. Anyway, the interpretation is the result of the interaction of the text and the reader’s knowledge base.
Finally, the interpretation enriches the original knowledge base. On the macro level, after each reading activity, the reading self is changed more or less. Each challenging act of reading is to reach the limits of the self and exceed them. It is not an exaggeration to say that to read is to discover the self and to reconstruct the self. It is especially so in the case of reading in a foreign language.

3.4 Summary

In this chapter, a pedagogical model of reading Chinese as a foreign language was constructed. The model consists of five components and three stages. The five components are: the orthography knowledge, the reading strategies knowledge, the linguistic knowledge, the cultural knowledge and the specific domain knowledge. The success of a reading act depends on the successful interaction of these five types of knowledge. Therefore, the task of the teaching of reading is to build a knowledge base, which comprises these five components, in the learner’s mind. Three stages of learning reading, namely, “quasi-reading”, “learning to read”, and “reading to learn” are proposed. In addition, a learning cycle of reading is suggested.
CHAPTER 4

APPLICATIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE PEDAGOGICAL MODEL

4.1. The goal of teaching reading in Chinese

Philosophically speaking, the goal of all teaching is to not to teach. Teaching plays a supporting role on the stage of a learning performance. It is there only for a very limited period of time and does not have many lines of the script to say. Its rationale for existence is to encourage and assist learning. As learning becomes more and more independent, teaching gradually fades away from the scene. Great teaching makes great learning possible. Since learning is a lifetime experience, one of the assumptions of the educational system is that with the help of systematic teaching for a short period of time, the lifetime experience of learning can be as successful and fruitful as possible.

By the same token, the ultimate goal of teaching reading in Chinese is to not teach. To this end, a basic knowledge base containing all the five components for reading Chinese as a foreign language should be built with the aid of teaching. More importantly, the skills of how to update and enrich this knowledge base must also be imparted. So that
by the end of a reading program, a learner is ready to function in the Chinese culture as a reader, who is equipped with the skill of reading in order to explore a much bigger storage of knowledge written in that language.

Walker (1989) proposes two types of instruction: the Learning Model Instruction (LMI) and the Acquisition Model Instruction (AMI). LMI is concerned with "teaching items—vocabulary, grammatical patterns, cultural mores, and appropriate linguistic responses to specified situations", whereas AMI is concerned with "imparting strategies and tactics for using spoken and written Chinese when and where it is needed."

Conforming to these two types of instruction, the goal of teaching reading Chinese can be accomplished through two sub-goals: The first subgoal is to teach the items in the five components of the knowledge base, including Chinese characters, vocabulary, syntax, cultural stories, and the rules of thumb for using various reading strategies. The second sub-goal is to train the learners in applying these items in real problem-solving tasks. In doing so, the items and the processes of how to apply these items can be consolidated into a dynamic, self-improving knowledge base ready for future use.

4.2. The role of a reading instructor

Thirteen hundred years ago, a great educator in China wrote an essay on "teacher". His definition of a teacher is a person who “passes on the ‘Way’, imparts knowledge and answers questions from students”. In such a picture, a teacher was a moral being who
practices the Way and possesses knowledge. He was both a role model and a resource to go to for moral and academic teachings. Several centuries have passed, and whether it is good or bad, it is more and more difficult for a modern being to become such a teacher. For one thing, knowledge has been expanded to such a point that no one single biological brain can "possess" it within a lifetime. Thus, it is not realistic for a reading instructor (hereafter, "reading instructor", "instructor" and "teacher" will be used interchangeably) to know all the components of the knowledge base. In the following pages, the discussion will be centered on what the instructor cannot do and what she can do.

4.2.1. What the reading instructor cannot do

Research in the field of second language acquisition has shown that formal instruction can affect the rate of acquisition, but cannot affect the sequence and order of language acquisition (Ellis, 1994). Likewise, the development of a learner’s reading ability has its own sequence and order, which means that she can only comprehend reading materials suitable to or a little higher than her reading level. Therefore, a reading instructor cannot force her to comprehend things that she is not yet prepared to understand at this stage.

Moreover, reading has always been seen as a skilled act. Huey (1908) draws the analogy of reading to skilled motor performances, such as playing tennis or playing the piano. This analogy has profound meaning, as Kolers (1968) points out:

"His doing so raises a fundamental point, namely, that, as with all skilled acts, performance varies with the 'talent' of the performer. Almost
anyone can learn to move his fingers over the keys of a piano in good correspondence to a set of printed notes. But the quality of the sounds that emerge is not due entirely to the amount of practice that the player has had. People differ greatly in their ‘feel’ for music, just as they differ in their ability to act, to think about chemical structures, and to cope with words. ..... Reading skill, which is a form of information-processing, also varies with talent. All talents, of course, require practice for their fullest expression; but as with all talents, no amount of practice will enable the less-gifted performer to compare successfully with the well-practiced, more-gifted one” (p. xxxvi).

This idea of a “talent” of reading might disappoint the teachers, because they can do nothing to change a person’s inherent tendencies. Yet, knowing what teachers cannot do might make them do better in what they can do: maybe they can help the learner reader discover her talent in reading; maybe they can help her to bring her talent into “the fullest expression.”

4.2.2 What the reading instructor can do

A reading instructor can affect the learner readers in two ways: emotionally and technically. By “emotionally”, I mean that the instructor can become a positive motivation facilitator. By “technically”, I mean that the instructor can give the learners a lot of technical help in pre-reading and post-reading activities.

In the real world, motivation plays an important role when people read. People do not read only for the sake of reading. They either look for some information from the reading materials, or seek pleasure in the act of reading, or both. Sometimes they are
forced to read; sometimes they read willingly. After each act of reading, the benefits they get may motivate them to do further reading.

Likewise, motivation has been viewed as a key factor in learning reading as well. There are different explanations of motivation, four hypotheses have been put forward by Skehan (1989). The Intrinsic Hypothesis holds that motivation derives from an inherent interest in the learning tasks the learner is asked to perform. The Resultative Hypotheses proposes that learners who do well will persevere, those who do not do well will be discouraged and try less hard. The Internal Cause Hypothesis posits that the learner brings to the learning situation a certain quantity of motivation as a given. The Carrot and Stick Hypothesis suggests that external influences and incentives will affect the strength of the learner's motivation. Practical experience in both teaching and learning suggests that there is truth in each hypothesis. Motivations are as varied as are learners. Teachers can always bring positive (or negative) influence to learner readers' motivation (Ellis, 1994).

Almost all the learners entering a beginning Chinese reading class hold some curiosity, awe or even fear of the Chinese writing system. Most Americans hold the prejudice that the Chinese language is one of the most difficult languages in the world and that Chinese characters are the most difficult orthography in the world. How to maintain their initial curiosity as a driving force, how to turn their awe and fear into positive motivation, depends largely on the art of teaching. Since learning characters entails a different type of
memory task than remembering English spelling, many teachers of Chinese create "stories", and encourage the learners to create their own "stories" about characters they are learning. These stories might be (in most cases, they are) "etymologically" incorrect, but there should be no worry about passing on misinformation to the learners. Teachers report that their students eventually forget those stories, but creating stories does help them overcome the fear of Chinese characters and, at the time of learning, does provide them with more mnemonic cues.

Except for the orthography stage, reading Chinese as a foreign language may share many universals with reading in other foreign languages. Instructional activities around reading are usually categorized into three types: pre-reading activities, reading activities and post-reading activities. Since the goal of teaching reading is to train learners to become independent readers, this paper will emphasize the pre-reading and post-reading activities.

The following, in association with the proposed pedagogical model and learning cycle, are suggestions as to what kind of teacher activities can be organized before and after reading.

**Pre-reading Activities:** The goal is to prepare learner readers for successful reading before they read. Reading is a discovery process and people tend to read in the way they are taught to read. Therefore pre-reading activities are very important in facilitating comprehension and in forming good reading habits.
On the macro-level, a reading instructor must do first two things.

a) *Clarify the goal of reading tasks*: we read for something. For learners at the stage of “quasi-reading”, the goal of reading in Chinese is mainly to learn the orthography. The learners' task is to recognize characters and decode their meanings. At the same time, the L2 knowledge and cultural information can be supplied in their native language. Tactics for learning orthography can be taught to optimize their rate and accuracy of recognizing characters.

As learners progress along toward the stage of “learning to read”, the major task is to learn more cultural information, orthography and language items. The focus of attention for the learners is to learn “how” to read, which requires the acquisition of a large number of language items. In the mean time, bottom-up reading strategies such as word attacking skills, syntactic analysis skills should be trained and reinforced.

In the stage of “reading to learn”, the learners should be reminded that they are reading to receive certain information, not merely to learn the language. They should learn “what” to do with the texts they have read as native readers do. They can further seek pleasure in reading Chinese if their ability and time allows. They should be able to apply both top-down and bottom-up reading strategies in their reading activities.

In both the stage of learning to read and the stage of reading to learn, accumulating C2 knowledge is always one of the major goals.
b) Assign specific reading materials: this is one of the two most difficult and most important decisions a reading instructor has to make. (The other one is to decide what tasks to design in order to check reading comprehension.)

At the stage of "quasi-reading", as we have stated before, the major goal for the learner readers is to become familiar with the Chinese orthography. At first, materials designed exclusively for learning characters instead of reading per se are desirable. Later on, the learners can be given texts with unknown contents but already known characters. This is to strengthen their grasp of the characters and prepare them for "true reading" which does not allow them to spend too much time on character recognition.

From the beginning of the second stage ("learning to read"), more and more authenticity should be added to the reading materials so that by the end of this stage learners begin to read "original" articles or books. The control of the difficulty of the materials is in the hands of the reading instructor. Two things may be done by the end of this stage: the transition of one form of characters to the other and the transition of the kouyiyu (the spoken register) to the shumianyu (the written register).

At the last stage ("reading to learn"), learners can choose reading materials of their own interest under the guidance of the instructor. The criterion the instructor may use are the learners' ability of recognizing characters and language proficiency, namely the orthography knowledge and L2 knowledge.
For each specific reading task, the following three things can be done on the teacher’s part.

a) *Clear possible obstacles in orthography, language and background knowledge*: knowing the capacities of the learner readers, an instructor should be able to predict what kind of problems they would have when they read a certain text. A common obstacle that beginning readers tend to have trouble with is the Chinese orthography. For learners at the stage of “learning to read”, the major obstacles might be language items. At the last stage, while language still pose some obstacles from time to time, the major difficulty might lie in background knowledge.

b) *Provide related cultural and background information*: learner readers read Chinese in order to become either a participant or an observer of the Chinese culture. Or, they read in order to become knowledgeable in certain areas. As a learner’s proficiency of the language improves, her reading comprehension tends to be blocked relatively less and less by orthographic and linguistic items, but more and more by the lack of cultural and background information.

c) *Suggest possible reading strategies*: for different reading tasks and different readers, different reading strategies should be recommended. It is the instructor’s responsibility to foster “good reading behaviors” out of learner readers. One way is to make the learners be aware of using certain strategies for certain tasks. For example, in order to grasp the general idea of a text, a top-down approach, including such strategies as “keeping the
meanings of the passages in mind"; "examining illustrations if there are any"; and "using their prior knowledge of the world", may be adopted. If the task is to identify the details of a text, a bottom-up approach, including word-attack strategies and grammatical analysis of sentences may be used.

Post-reading Activities: In the "quasi-reading" stage, the purpose of post-reading activities is to check learner’s grasp of the orthography knowledge, whereas in the latter two stages, the purpose is to check reading comprehension and to diagnose problems if there are any.

Reading comprehension is a high order cognitive process that transforms printed words, sentences, paragraphs and chapters into inner worlds. It happens so automatically and naturally that one can hardly monitor its happening. What teachers can do is to check comprehension. Traditionally, there are three ways of checking comprehension (Aweiss 1993). They are multiple choice questions, short answer questions and cloze tests. All have their advantages and disadvantages. Multiple choice testing has been widely used as an L1 and L2 reading comprehension measurement. Its advantages lie in its objectivity in grading and easy quantification of reading performance. But researchers have pointed out that "the correct answer can be reached in more than one way and can often be identified without actually understanding the text and without any judgmental activity in selecting the correct response" (Aweiss 1993, p. 10). Short answer procedure is good in that it allows some freedom of expression on the students’ part. It
also tests readers' ability of inference making, recognition of a sequence and finding the main idea of a text. However, its requirement for readers to write in L2 "interferes with the measurement of the intended construct" (Aweiss 1993, p. 11). Cloze testing has been given more and more attention recently in comprehension research. According to some researchers, it "holds potential for measuring aspects of students' written grammatical competence, consisting of knowledge of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and phonology/graphology". However, opponents to this procedure argue that it does not require ability to interpret global text meanings.

Given the disadvantages of the traditional way of checking comprehension, researchers in the L1 and L2 reading research communities have currently reached a consensus that free recall of a text in one's native language is the best way to obtain information of reading performance. This procedure asks the reader to first read a short passage in the target language and then write in her native language everything she can remember about the text. Contrary to the traditional approaches which provide more or less cues to the answer, this procedure uses a free recall method, which provides more valid information as to the process of comprehension.

The value of this immediate free recall protocol lies in the fact that it allows the instructor to look into the reader-text interaction and find out more of a learner reader's problems that either hinder comprehension or lead to misunderstanding. Moreover, this is more similar to what people do after they read in the real world. We seldom do
multiple choice questions, or wrote short answers to questions, or finish a cloze test after we read a newspaper or magazine article. In the discussion about the sociological aspect of the act of reading, it was found that people talk about texts they have read or change their behavior after a reading act. These activities are based on their semantic memory about the article and their ability to draw on that memory.

Along this line, in combination with the concern of reading as a social act, I would suggest the following tasks as post-reading activities for learners at the stage of “learning to read” and “reading to learn”. One major difference between these activities and the free recall protocol is that they are conducted in the target language. The assumption here is that a successful learner is the one who develops the four skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) at a relatively close pace. This means that whatever she learns through reading or listening, she should be able to restate in speaking or writing, though a lag between what one can comprehend and what one can express is recognized. Post-reading activities are described below:

a) Summarizing: this activity trains the reader’s ability to find the main idea of a text. Some students can memorize the exact words in a text, but cannot restate it in their own words. Summarizing requires them to process the text on a deeper cognitive level. By learning to summarize, the learners are also developing the complementary skill of narration, which is necessary for representing what they have read.
b) Making comments: In order to discuss a text, one has to have her own perspective. Making comments brings the reader's subjectivity into the act of reading. Not only must she digest the text, but also evaluate what she has read.

c) Discussion: Both (a) and (b) can be done either orally or in writing, but discussion can only be conducted orally. This requires the students not only to express their own ideas, but also listen to what others have learned from the text and discuss among themselves. This way, they not only learn from the reading materials, but also from each other.

In the stage of "reading to read", the focus of these activities should be the students' grasp of linguistic items, such as usage of new vocabulary and application of grammatical rules. In the stage of "reading to learn", the quality of ideas should be stressed.

4.2.3 Teacher training

Intuition says that it is very easy to become a language teacher, especially if one is a native speaker of the language. But against a lot of people's "common sense", it is very difficult to become a good language teacher, even if one is a native speaker, because it requires a person to explain things that she has taken for granted in a way that makes sense to persons from a different cultural background. This notion is yet to be widely accepted.
An instructor is first of all a pedagogue, the meaning of which differs drastically from its origin. “Pedagogue” originally meant “the slave who escorts the children to school” (Higgins 1988, p. 14). Higgins describes vividly the appearance of a pedagogue in the old days:

“Think of a man in sandals and a cheap cotton robe, walking five paces behind the young master. He carries the young master’s books for him, but no cane. The young master snaps his fingers and the pedagogue approaches. He answers the young master’s questions, recites a poem, translates words, plays a game, or even, if that is what the young master demands, gives a test. The young master snaps his fingers again, and the pedagogue goes back to his place. He hopes he has given satisfaction, since otherwise he may starve” (p. 14).

This description might be an exaggeration, yet it points out the ancient relationship between a pedagogue and a student— the former being the slave of the latter—and suggests why the term has been avoided in the past. The slave role of a pedagogue can now be assumed by a well-programmed computer, hence, the pedagogue can assume higher level responsibilities such as a learning manager, diagnostician and facilitator.

Ideally speaking, a reading instructor should simultaneously assume the role of a reading diagnostician, a reading facilitator and a reading activity manager. Doing so requires much knowledge about Chinese linguistics, the psychology of reading, and second language acquisition. She should be able to diagnose problems of the learner reader. This can be done either by testing or by interactive activities with the learner. This direct interaction between teacher and learner is one area that a computer cannot
compete with a human being. On the basis of the diagnostic results, she should give "prescriptions" as to how to solve problems. In doing so, she is making pedagogical decisions to help students manage their learning. In addition, she acts as a motivator to push the learners along the pathway of learning. A teacher training program should equip the future reading instructors with these necessary knowledge and skills.

4.3. The role of the computer technology: CALL and reading

Technologies are tools that have been created to help expand human productivity. They are extensions of human power, invented to make people's life more efficient and comfortable, but, contrary to what people usually think, technologies more often than not make our lives more complicated instead of easier. Although new inventions were intended to change the way people live, they often changed the way people think as well. The first electronic computer was designed by Dr. John Atanasoff in the hope of assisting graduate students in nuclear physics with their mathematical computations. Today, computers have infiltrated into virtually all aspects of our lives and their existence is taken for granted.

4.3.1 The advantages and disadvantages of CALL

Computer applications in reading have been studied for more than a decade. Computer-based reading research is of at least three distinctly different types: The first
type examines ways to use computers in teaching reading; the second type uses computers to assess and evaluate reading performance; the third type employs computers to examine psychological and physiological aspects of reading processes (Blanchard, Mason, Daniel 1987, p. 66). Of concern here is the first type. As Reinking (1986) has pointed out, “computer makes available a new technology that may require us to rethink commonly held notions about reading and learning from text” (p. 3).

Generally speaking, computer assisted language learning is advantageous in the following four aspects. First of all, computer is a most suitable tool for individualized learning activities. It can be used according to different individuals’ needs in content, rate and mode of learning. Secondly, it is good for drilling and practice, which saves instructional time for more creative interactions. Thirdly, it provides easy access to a large amount of information stored either on the internet or in a data base. Fourthly, it is excellent for enhancing attention and motivation. Multi-media presentations are more entertaining and attention-catching than are traditional material presentations.18

As opposed to these four advantages, CALL has four disadvantages (Kamil 1986). First is the cost. Computers and instructional software are still too expensive to be easily accessible. Second, is the difficulty of reading at a CRT (cathode ray tube). Time may solve these two problems but may not be able to provide cures for the following two fatal “faults” of CALL. One is that no matter how well a computer system works, there are occasions when it is not available—it goes “down” or cannot be transported. This idea is
expressed in the common plaint "computers are good as long as they are where you need them and they work". The other problem is the computer's limited interactivity with the learner. Computers are pre-programmed machines that work according to machine languages. Although sometimes they seem to be "intelligent", what they do, fundamentally, is computation, not thinking. They cannot take the place of a human teacher who can give feedback and guidance in a timely and accurate manner. Although the word "interactive" appears in many language software now, computer interaction is fundamentally different than human interaction. The so-called interaction in these software is opposite to linear process. Usually, a computer program executes in a linear manner. But if some controls (for example buttons) are added into the program and the users are allowed to choose which controls to use, then the program can change its flow direction according to the users' choices. Thus, the program appears to be interactive. Even though a software program can give some feedback, it is pre-programmed in the software and hence can hardly exhaust all the possibilities of individual learners' needs. The human interaction, however, is a process of negotiation of meanings. When a learner has an understanding or misunderstanding about something, a human teacher will have to see what is going on inside the learner's mind. She will have to judge whether the learner understands or not. If not, she will have to decide what causes the misunderstanding and how to correct it.
It goes without saying that these advantages and disadvantages of CALL also apply to reading instruction. In teaching reading, however, computer-based materials have one more advantage than do their printed counterparts: they are manipulable. Textual information can be cued by flashing, graphic displays can be animated, and more wonderfully, immediate alterations of the text can be provided (Reinking 1986, p. 5). What’s more, sound files can be added to the reading materials to make the reader-text interface more user-friendly. This manipulation is of immeasurable value if we use it to impart reading strategies.

4.3.2 CALL’s current role in learning reading of Chinese as a foreign language

In a review of CALL software for Chinese, Yao (1996) listed eighteen programs under six categories, out of which, nine are for teaching Chinese characters, two for teaching reading, one for teaching vocabulary with writing, and one is an interactive program for teaching listening and reading in Chinese. It is noticeable that a good proportion of CALL software was designed to teach or practice Chinese characters. Yet, very few programs deal with practice of reading per se.

With the increasing popularity of the internet, many software designers and commercial companies have made available their products, or portions of their products, online for public use. Xie (1997) has created a web page containing the internet’s most extensive set of links to online Chinese-learning software together with some review
articles of some of the software. He categorizes Chinese-learning software into six groups which are intended respectively for learning pronunciation, conversations, characters, grammar, reading and listening. While there are several tutorials for learning pronunciation, conversation, characters, and grammar, there is none for reading. Under the heading of "reading materials", there is only a collection of reading materials.

4.3.3 A proposal for computer's role in learning reading of Chinese as a foreign language

In the light of the pedagogical model presented in the previous chapter, I would like to explore the various possibilities of employing the features of computer technology in the context of learning reading in Chinese as a foreign language.

As stated above, the major task of a reading program is to build up a five-component knowledge base in learners' minds. It is hoped that with the help of the computer technology, this task can be completed with more efficiency and efficacy.

For developing the orthography knowledge, computer's graphics and animation features can be used. In printed textbooks, stroke orders are shown either by placing numbers beside the strokes or by breaking a character down. With animation, stroke orders can be demonstrated more vividly as if a teacher is writing a character before the learner. Likewise, learners' sense of components in a character can be reinforced by manipulating the colors of the different parts of a character. A database can be built to group characters with the same radicals together so that learners can recognize the
functions of radicals and applying them in learning new characters. Moreover, the task of learning the transition between the simplified forms and the traditional forms of characters may be eased because both forms can be juxtaposed and compared in a more convenient way with the help of the coding facilities of some software.

The rapid expansion of the internet resources is making internet a handy tool to provide learners with a wide range of C2 knowledge and specific domain knowledge. Learners can use the search engines in the internet to obtain the most up-to-date information under a topic that is otherwise either difficult or time-consuming to obtain.

Among all other features, the manipulability of computers may contribute immensely to learners' acquisition of reading strategies. Flashing key words in sentences can teach learners the skill of scanning and the skill of finding conjunctive words and phrases. Certain words or phrases can be highlighted to give hints for discourse analysis. Insertion of photos and pictures may teach learners how to use illustrations to understand the text better. If learners find the text too difficult, they might be able to click to read a simplified version. This may teach the learners the skill of paraphrasing. In addition, reminders can be inserted in certain places in a text to prompt the user to think for a while before reading on. This can teach the learners the strategies of activating their prior knowledge or using inference and prediction to aid comprehension.

As for the L2 knowledge, the sound feature of computer technology can help learners to improve their pronunciation and intonation. Speech analysis technology can enable the
learners to compare their own pronunciation with that of a native speaker's and imitate the intonation with the aid of a graph. In terms of grammar learning, grammatical items and patterns can be highlighted to enhance memorization.

As can be seen, there remains room for improvement in using computers in Chinese reading instruction. With the development of computer technology and the decrease in cost of hardware and software, computers will further take the place of a traditional reading instructor. Therefore, what a teacher should be thinking now is how to utilize the potential of technologies in order to make her role even more creative.

4.4. Some current issues in teaching reading Chinese as a foreign language

In the field of teaching reading Chinese as a foreign language, there are still many issues open to debate. Teachers and practitioners still hold different opinions about these issues. No conclusions will be made here but suggestions will be proposed.

4.4.1 Time lag between language instruction and orthography instruction

In an intensive Chinese curriculum proposed by Walker (1989), it is suggested that all textual materials for level-one should be pedagogically created representations of the spoken language except for some commonly-used signs. This view represents some practitioners' opinions that there should be a time lag between language instruction and orthography instruction. In this particular curriculum design, the learners have been
exposed to the spoken language before they learn "reading" so that they can concentrate on the shape and organization of this unique writing system. Currently in the Chinese program at the Ohio State University, orthography is introduced after the beginning students have developed a "stable" Chinese phonology—usually a time lag of twenty to forty classroom hours.

At some institutions in the United States, characters are introduced from the very beginning of the program and no forms of romanization are used in classroom. Through an informal survey done in a Chinese teachers and learners' listserv owned by Kenyon College, I learned that in most programs, a time lag ranging from ten hours to thirty hours is allowed, but most teachers think learning Chinese characters is too important to be delayed. This is an incomplete survey, but it reflects teachers' intuitions about the teaching of the Chinese orthography. On the one hand, they know it is very difficult for learners to grasp the form, meaning and sound of a Chinese character from the very beginning; yet on the other hand, there is such a limited amount of classroom time that they do not want to delay the learning of the characters. In order to reach a consensus, both longitudinal and short-term research is needed.

Packard (1990) conducted a one-year-long classroom-based study on the effects of a time lag in the introduction of Chinese characters into the curriculum. One experimental group, which had a lag, and a control group, which did not have a gap, were formed in two different intensive elementary classes. The no-lag group began to learn characters at the
beginning of the first week, while the lag group did not learn characters until the beginning of the fourth week (after 24 contact hours). Written tests including listening comprehension, pinyin transcriptions of unfamiliar Mandarin syllables, English-to-Chinese translations using pinyin system, and character writing were given to both groups. Test results showed that students in the lag group "were better able to discriminate phonetically and transcribe unfamiliar Mandarin syllables and were also more fluent in spoken Mandarin" than those in the no-lag group, and that the no lag group "was not consistently found to be significantly better than the lag group in any aspect of Mandarin Chinese that was analyzed as part of this study" (p. 173-74). Packard concluded that a time lag between language instruction and orthography instruction will benefit learners’ acquisition of the spoken language and help them develop superior phonological skills.

Packard’s research shows that a time-lag is helpful for learners to acquire the spoken language better in terms of phonetics, but it does not answer the question whether it will benefit learners’ reading skills in the long run. The tests he gives in the experiment are listening comprehension, pinyin transcriptions of unfamiliar Mandarin syllables, English-to-Chinese translations. While the first two test the listening ability, the third is not a satisfactory test for orthography per se. We still don’t know which group associates sounds with characters more accurately and faster, which group performs better in interpreting texts and performing writing tasks.
If research can show a time-lag will at least not harm orthography learning, then its benefit will dissuade practitioners from rushing into orthography teaching and learning too soon. More studies are needed to convince all teachers that a time lag will not harm the learning of orthography but benefit the learners in the long run. Whether to allow a time-lag is an important, pedagogical decision that every Chinese curriculum designer needs to make.

4.4.2 Which goes first: traditional characters or simplified characters?

Almost all institutions in the United States teach students traditional Chinese characters. Some supplement this with the teaching of simplified characters, some don’t. Walker (1989) gives two reasons why many programs follow this practice: one is that the graphically more redundant fantizi (traditional characters) are easier to recognize and remember than jiantizi (simplified characters); the other is that learners feel psychologically more comfortable to “descend” from fantizi to jiantizi than the other way around. Cheng (1978)’s discussion of some socio-political factors sheds some light on the question of what has made many teachers in the United States prefer fantizi to jiantizi. According to his analysis, the debate over which character form is easier to learn is not based upon linguistic or psychological investigation, but rather the teachers’ own feelings toward a particular form. He pointed out three reasons for some teachers’ dislike of the simplified forms: Firstly, most native teachers of Chinese left China before the
Communist Party took over the power; Secondly, The Cold War and McCarthyism hindered their understanding about the development of Chinese orthography. Thirdly, most Chinese newspapers published in the United States still use the traditional form.

Taking these three social factors into account, one can see that the decision to teach traditional characters first is not merely out of psychological considerations. By intuition, we know that graphically complicated fantizi may provide more cues for learners to remember; but the relatively easy structures of jiantizi make the characters easier to write. To learn fantizi first and then jiantizi might let learners "feel" that they are switching to an easier task, but isn't "first easy ones, then tough ones" a general rule for learning? After learners are familiar with the jiantizi, they are aware of the basic components of characters and more ready to learn to write the complicated form. From my own experience (I was a simplified form user first and learned fantizi when I was in college) and my observation of my students, who began to learn the simplified forms after two years of learning the traditional forms, both parties felt awkward at the beginning of the transition and resisted to the learning of the other forms. But eventually, both parties began to appreciate the other form: the simplified form users found the elegant structures of the fantizi attractive; the traditional form users found the convenience of the jiantizi irresistible.

My point is that the stress of the debate should not be about which forms to teach first, but how to make the transition from one form to the other much easier to handle.
4.4.3 The CORA project

The CORA Project was initiated by a group of Chinese language instructors from six institutions in March 1996 during the Committee on Institutional Cooperation (CIC) Symposium on Technology and Foreign Language Learning. "CORA" stands for "Chinese Online Reading Assistant", which is a collection of authentic or nearly-authentic Chinese reading materials with annotated words. It uses the internet as the reader-text interface and the hyper-linking feature of the internet files is employed to make the English meaning and usage of an unknown word only a click away. Annotated Chinese articles are posted on the internet. In these texts, some words and phrases are highlighted. These are the words that have been annotated with pronunciations and meanings. If a reader does not understand these highlighted words or phrases, she can just click on them and instantly their pronunciations, grammatical categories, and English meanings will appear in another window. Currently, many instructors are preparing the reading materials and the annotations for the project. A database of words and phrases is being built along with the project. It is hoped that in the future the software will be capable of preparing annotations for new materials automatically according to this database (Cheng 1996).

CORA might be, so far, the largest institutional cooperative project concerning reading in Chinese and computer technology. There are some benefits that this project can bring
to the Chinese reading instruction. First, it provides a corpus of reading materials which are good for out-of-class extensive readings. These materials are of a wide variety and up-to-date since most of them are taken from recent journals or magazines. In addition, the explanations of the entries in the online dictionary are also up-to-date, with many new items that are not included in older dictionaries. Second, it is easily accessible. What it requires is a computer and an internet access, which are all affordable by most institutions. Third, it costs less than traditional textbooks and CD-ROMs, because only one copy is needed and can be used by unlimited number of users. Fourth, the online-dictionary feature saves learners time and energy to consult an off-line dictionary.

Chinese characters are difficult to find in a dictionary. Without special training and much practice, most of the third-year students find it very difficult and frustrating to look up a new word in the dictionary. A handy on-line dictionary will enhance the readability of a text and thus lessen, to a certain degree, the frustration a learner will feel when she reads an authentic piece of work. Fifth, it is more convenient to maintain and update this project than CD-ROMs or hard copy textbooks.

Although CORA has many merits, it is not without problems. CORA's developers believe that it can help teaching reading in a more effective and efficient way. One of the assumptions is that "the more one reads the more one likes to read" (Cheng 1996). As we have discussed before, one reads to receive either information or pleasure. In the latter case, it might be true to say that the more one reads the more one likes to read. But since
most of the intermediate students of Chinese are still struggling with the language, it might be too bold to say that the more they read the more they will like to read. Second, the efficiency and effectiveness of reading instruction is certainly enhanced by extensive out-of-class reading. Yet, this enhancement is not achieved merely because of the quantity of the extracurricular readings, rather, the repetition of the items being learned and new contexts where these items appear make the difference. These items become more retrievable and easier to be activated because more cues are associated with them.

A second assumption of CORA is "the more vocabulary you have, the less difficult reading will be". This was not openly stated by the developers. But by observing the annotations, we find that words and phrases that are thought to form obstacles for comprehension are highlighted. According to our teaching experience, sometimes, even though every word has been explained, the students still have difficulty in understanding a passage. Vocabulary is necessary for comprehension but is not sufficient. Although a text is built up by words and phrases, the meaning of a text, however, is more than the summation of the individual meanings of these words and phrases. Our previous discussion about meaning demonstrates that meaning is constructed more culturally and contextually than lexically.

Additionally, this mode of reading (clicking on new words to find their meanings) might foster "helplessness" when engaged in normal reading tasks. The learners will rely too much on the online dictionary and jump to the meaning of an unknown word
whenever they meet one. They will not bother to infer its meaning based on contextual and discursive cues. Moreover, too much reliance on English will hinder foreign language learners from associating old words with newly learned words, and from adopting a way of “thinking in Chinese”. This is a dilemma that a material compiler faces: on the one hand, she is preparing materials to improve a learner’s reading ability; on the other hand, she is compiling a dictionary that should be as comprehensive as possible.

Finally, no specific reading strategies are suggested and trained in this project. As said before, computer’s manipulable feature is a good means to impact reading strategies. For example, essential words can be highlighted in another color and their meanings should not be given away, so that the learner readers have to guess from context the meanings of unknown words. “Stop” signs can be inserted into certain places within the text, prompting the readers to pause and ask themselves what the text means so far and predict what will happen next. What learners get from CORA, however, is merely a wide range of reading materials and a handy easy-to-“lookup” dictionary. No guidance is given to the readers as to how to read a specific article and what to do with it.

The above review is not meant to discredit CORA, but to point out the caution that users should exercise when they use it. CORA no doubt has many advantages, a good collection of materials and a convenient dictionary. Meanwhile, its merits should not be overestimated. It has not solved any problems in reading comprehension of Chinese per se, but it has made a great contribution to material preparation and dictionary
compilation. How well it will help reading instruction depends upon how well Chinese reading instructors make use of it.

4.5 Summary

This chapter first talked about the goal of teaching reading in Chinese. Then, it discussed the role of a reading instructor in a Chinese reading curriculum. Suggestions were made as to what an instructor can do before and after the learners read. The issue of the training of reading instructors was mentioned. After that, the relationship between reading instruction and the computer technology was discussed. Finally, three current issues in teaching Chinese reading in American institutions were addressed.
NOTES

Chapter 1

1 According to Zhongguo lishi renwu cidian and Zhongguo lida mingren cidian, the name of Cang Jie first appeared in an article in Xunzi titled “Jiezi”. His name also appeared in Hanfeizi and Lushi chunqiu. He was said to be an official under the reign of Huang Di who was the legendary common ancestor of all the Han tribes in central China. Cang Jie was known be the inventor of the Chinese characters.

2 These are the only three words meaning “to read” which could be found in the earliest dictionary Shuowen jiezi (p. 51) compiled by Xu Shen from 100 A.D. to 121 A.D. In modern Chinese, yue, kan, nian also came to have the meaning of “to read”. It is interesting to note that in Shuowen jiezi, yue means “to count numbers at the center of a gate” (p. 249); kan means “to look far away” (p. 72); and nian means “to think often” (p. 217). All the three new forms can mean “to read silently”, with nian also being able to mean “to read aloud”.

3 The Book of Odes in China, Manyosha in Japan and the two Greek epics in the western culture.

Chapter 2

4 The term “ludic reading” was coined after Stephenson’s (1964) article “The Ludic Theory of Newsreading”. The word “ludic” came from the Latin ludo, which means “I play”. It reminds us that this kind of reading is at root a play activity.

5 The first occurred in the 3rd century B.C., when China’s first emperor, Qin Shi Huang, ordered all the books of different schools to be burned and scholars to be buried alive. The most recent persecution of intellectuals happened during the Cultural Revolution (1967-1977), when the slogan “The more knowledge you have, the more anti-revolutionary you are” was prevalent all over China.

6 In Chinese, it was called “dashu weiyong lian”. Its first hit happened around 1984 and the second time around 1987.

7 There was an article titled “A New Heat in Shanghai” in Xming Evening Paper on February 6th, 1996. It was reported that nearly 20,000 people took the entrance examination for graduate schools on that day. The quota of enrollment for that academic year was only 3,700.

8 I still remember how angry our teachers would be if we could not perform the task well and how eager we wished that there were no such recitation exercise assignments at the end of the texts.

9 I was born and raised in Shanghai, where the dialect of Shanghaiese is spoken. I did not know how to speak Mandarin until I went to school at the age of seven. I learned pinyin and the pronunciation of Mandarin in the yuwen course. All the teachers I had for this course spoke perfect Mandarin and only Mandarin was used during the classes, while teachers of other courses spoke Mandarin in a more or less accent, and some others spoke whichever dialect they liked. Before I went to the university, I could read texts aloud and answer questions in class using perfect Mandarin, but I could not communicate in everyday life with Mandarin. Recently, with the promotion of Mandarin, many children cannot speak their dialects any more. In Shanghai, it is very common to see parents speak to their children in Shanghaiese, but their children reply in Mandarin. They can understand the dialect, but they do not know how to speak it and do not even bother to try.

10 No statistical data are available as to how many words students have learned up to that point. Knowing 2600 characters, however, makes it possible to learn many thousands of words that can be derived from combinations of the characters. The controversy over the concept of “word” and word boundaries still
exists. Some scholars even argue that the use of "word" concept would cover up the productivity of single characters. Chinese dictionaries are all organized on the basis of characters. The first Chinese-English dictionary organized by "word" has just come out in 1997, compiled by John DeFrancis.

Chapter 3

11 We say "almost", because even a skilled native reader still encounters new characters when she read. But usually this causes no problem, since her knowledge about semantics, syntax, context, and culture will compensate for it and the gap of meaning will be covered.

12 Comparison of "good strategies" and "bad strategies" is very popular now in the field. For a detailed discussion, see McDonough (1995).

Chapter 4

13 The content of this hypothesis is that reading is a process characterized by universals, that reading is basically the same in all languages.
14 The essay is Liu Zongyuan's "Shi Shuo" (On Teacher).
15 To my knowledge, no great educator in the ancient China was a woman.
16 According to high school teachers presentations in the Chinese Language Teachers' Workshop held at Columbus, Ohio in May 1996.
17 But this practice might deepen the general view that Chinese characters are "ideographs" or "logographs".
18 This advantage of computer might cease to be so after 10 years when multi-media presentations are as common as illustrated books nowadays. People's curiosity tends to diminish after they are familiar with the new media.
19 According to personal communication with Madeline Chu at Kalamazoo College.
20 Informants include Ted Yao at the University of Hawaii, Bai Jianhua at Kenyon College, Hu Wenze at Harvard University, Charles E. Hammond at Southern Illinois University, Claudia Ross at the Holy Cross University, Mike Miller at the Seoul National University, Wolfgang Frick at the Edith Cown University and Stuart Sarget. Special thanks to all of them.
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