ASPECTS OF HIDDEN CHINESE CULTURE
REVEALED IN AN AMERICAN UNIVERSITY CLASSROOM

A Thesis

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports an empirical study aiming to identify hidden Chinese culture concerning behavioral culture and suppressed culture. The research was conducted with a group of Chinese and American students attending a graduate-level course in an American university, with a focus on their interpersonal interactions. Data were collected by means of participant observation, video and audio recording class sessions, interviewing students, as well as collecting some students’ culture journals. Analysis was conducted on the students’ language use including their verbal and nonverbal behaviors. The findings include: 1) the hierarchical concept has a great influence on Chinese social communication; 2) the principle of “favors must be paid back” is fundamental for maintaining a good relationship among Chinese; 3) some Chinese follow dual interactive patterns with foreigners and Chinese; 4) some Chinese seem to have a higher tolerance for a small personal space and interpersonal distance; 5) making personal pleasure tour on one’s business trip is a normal expectation among many Chinese. Some implications are drawn from the study for Chinese culture training.
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CHAPTER 1
STUDYING CHINESE CULTURE TO HELP INFORM CHINESE CULTURE TRAINING

With China’s amazing economic development and increased international importance, more and more people around the world are interested in learning to communicate in the Chinese language. Some want to do business or find a job in China, and some want to develop friendships with Chinese people. Most people with these ambitions have a clear vision that they need to learn the Chinese language to communicate with Chinese, and they put great efforts into learning Chinese characters, pronunciation and grammatical structure. However, when it comes to learning Chinese culture, the vision becomes somewhat blurred. Many Chinese language learners are unclear as to what Chinese culture is, what needs to be learned, how to learn it, and what their goals should be. When they turn to many Chinese language experts for help, the answers are still not so clear unfortunately. Chinese culture training programs are rare in the first place. Although some Chinese language programs claim that they integrate Chinese culture into language teaching, what they actually do is highly ineffective when it comes to preparing learners for serious interactions in Chinese culture. They simply provide some information about
China from history, geography, food culture, literature, or traditional holidays, but the information does not produce culturally proficient Chinese language users. Many Chinese language curriculum designers and instructors are not clear themselves how to proceed in the training of culture. The questions that have troubled many Chinese language learners about culture learning also have perplexed many Chinese language teaching professionals.

The importance of training culture has been well recognized in many fields, and there have been some scholarly efforts in studying Chinese culture. For example, Hsu (2001) examined filial piety in Chinese Culture. Huang and Zürcher (1995) explored the notion of time and space in Chinese culture. Tang (1991) studied the influence of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity on Chinese culture. These studies have provided valuable knowledge about Chinese culture. However, as Chinese culture is treated as something highly abstract in these studies, it is quite difficult to draw any direct implications for Chinese culture training. When a concrete guidance for training is lacking, Chinese culture cannot be taught and learned effectively.

Many Chinese language programs can produce learners with a good sized vocabulary, extensive grammatical structures, and good-sounding pronunciation, but without the knowledge and ability to perform in Chinese culture when these learners begin to communicate with Chinese natives, they quickly find what they have learned is inadequate for them to achieve their intended objectives. Whenever this happens, it causes feelings of confusion, anxiety, frustration, and even anger and fear.
A story from a popular webpage (www.backchina.com) offers a good example of this. A high-ranking delegation from China’s banking industry visited London. The British hosts held a welcome banquet for their honored guests at the Ritz, one of London’s best hotels. The hosts made careful preparations for the big occasion. They hired a translator who had learned Chinese for years, and prepared gifts for their guests. During the banquet, a waiter served wine to the guests. He was surprised to notice that whenever he poured wine for the Chinese, the person tapped the table surface with two fingers while showing no facial expression. The waiter could not figure out the meaning of that gesture. After seeing it repetitively, he became anxious that the Chinese may be unhappy about his service. The poor guy was worried that he might lose his job if the hotel found that out. Later he grabbed a chance to ask the translator about the meaning of the Chinese gesture, hoping that he could explain what was wrong with his serving. However, the waiter was disappointed because the translator did not understand the gesture either. The waiter’s question actually brought a concern to the translator that the Chinese guests may be unhappy about the banquet. Finally, the translator gathered enough courage to ask the Chinese guests about the meaning of their gesture, and he was relieved to know that it was a Chinese way to express thanks at the dinner table. The banquet went on. When it was approaching the end, the British hosts presented their gifts to the Chinese guests. However, when the banquet was finally over and the Chinese guests left the restaurant, the British hosts were shocked to find some of their gifts were left behind on the dinning table. The hosts asked the translator if the guests had forgotten to take the gifts with them and whether they should resend the gifts to the guests’ hotel
room. Unfortunately, the translator was once again at loss for an answer. He did not know that many Chinese take the value of the gift presented to them seriously as they interpret it as a token of the gift giver’s sincerity and respect for them. The translator had been learning the Chinese language for years, and on the surface, he could use the language to communicate with the Chinese natives. However, because of his lack of knowledge and understanding of Chinese culture, he failed to provide the British hosts with important cultural advice to avoid those unpleasant misunderstandings.

For the British translator, and many other Chinese language learners, experiences like this are frustrating. For Chinese language program administrators and teachers, the story is a warning of the danger of teaching foreign languages without addressing culture. Failure to tend to culture in language education would definitely result in learners’ deficiency in the knowledge and skills in the target culture, causing a never ending series of troubles in their communications with the native speakers. The only solution to the problem is to have effective culture training in a language program. Had the British translator been trained about the Chinese table manners, and known that tapping on a dinner table was a gesture for expressing thanks, he would not have to bother the Chinese guests for an explanation. Likewise, had he known about the Chinese norm of giving and receiving gift, he would have advised the British hosts to buy better gifts that were more appealing to the Chinese guests. The cultural knowledge could have made the banquet more successful, and achieved a better result. In this sense, we can say that the British translator was actually an unsuccessful Chinese language learner because he lacked proficiency of Chinese
culture. He would have certainly encountered more troubles in the future in his communication with Chinese natives.

Seeing the great importance of Chinese culture training, but being disappointed by the reality that it is so weak and often fails to hit the target, I resolved to investigate Chinese culture and explore how it impacts the Chinese language use in social interaction. I hope the findings will illuminate some significant aspects of Chinese culture that can directly inform culture training for Chinese language and culture learners.

My research interest also had to do with my perception of limited culture research directly serving the pedagogical needs of culture training. I found that many culture researchers were more interested in studying culture for proposing cultural theories, constructing cultural models, or comparing cultures at an abstract level. The literature is certainly thought-provoking, but it gives little direct guidance to culture training. For curriculum designers and instructors of culture training, what culture to teach and how to teach it are two important questions to ask.

My study was conducted with a clear intention to serve the pedagogical needs of Chinese culture training. The major aim is two-fold: The first is to help enrich the content of Chinese culture training, in other words, to answer the first question - what aspects of Chinese culture should be taught to Chinese language and culture learners to help them gain Chinese culture competence. The second was to help illuminate the effective way of culture training; that is, to answer the second question - how can Chinese culture be taught effectively. Given the limited number of the empirical Chinese culture studies, I decided to base my investigation of Chinese
culture on actual interaction among Chinese native and non-native speakers.

With that intent, I began to look for a research site. The school where I was undertaking my graduate study is a large university in mid-Western America. The university has a department of East Asian Languages and Literatures which offers many programs to students who are interested in learning Asian languages. One particular course attracted my attention because of its unique feature of culture training for Chinese and American students. The course was a graduate level course, taught by two instructors, one American and one Chinese. The students were Chinese natives and Americans who learn Chinese as a foreign language. The objective of the course was to help American students learn Chinese culture, and help Chinese students learn American culture. It was a perfect site for my study of Chinese culture. From the Chinese students’ behaviors, I could study Chinese culture, and from the American students’ behaviors, I could see Chinese culture more clearly by comparing the behavior of the two groups.

As a graduate student myself, I enrolled the course as a Chinese student and attended all 20 class sessions, together with other 7 Chinese students and 13 American students. During the ten-week course, I collected a large amount of data consisting of recordings of class sessions and interviews, as well as some students’ cultural journals. The empirical data were invaluable as they helped reveal the hidden Chinese cultural behaviors and cultural expectations, showing the complex interplay between culture and language use, and offering some great insights for Chinese culture training.
In the following chapters, I will provide a detailed description of my study, including the theoretical framework and analytical tools (Chapter 2), research methods (Chapter 3), findings (Chapter 4), and implications for culture training and culture research (Chapter 5).
The present study has its theoretical framework constructed from multiple theories on culture and culture’s influence on language use. As culture is the main focus of the study, it is important to first define what is meant by culture in this study.

What is culture?

As one of the most frequently and widely used terms, culture has been defined in many different ways. Traditionally, culture is considered to be learned and shared. When babies are born, they do not carry culture with them. Rather, they acquire culture from their environment as they grow up through socializing with the people around them, including their family, neighbors, friends, teachers, classmates, colleagues, and other members of the communities that they are involved with.

Kramsch (1998) expresses a social view of culture which stresses the common worldviews, attitudes, beliefs and values that a social group share through socialization.

People who identify themselves as members of a social group (family, neighborhood, professional or ethnic affiliation, nation) acquire common ways of viewing the world through their interactions with other members of the same group. These views are reinforced through
Based on the social, historical and imagined view of culture, Kramsch (1998) defines culture as “membership in a discourse community that shares a common social space and history, and common imaginings. Even when they have left that community, its members may retain, wherever they are, a common system of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating, and acting” (p.10).

The above definition makes three claims about culture.

a. Members of a social group have certain commonalities as the result of their long-term socialization with each other;

b. Commonality in the worldviews, attitudes, beliefs and values shape people’s behavior and actions, leading to a common system of standard behaviors.

c. The culture of a person’s social group has a continuing influence on the person’s thinking and behaviors even after the person crosses the boundary of his/her original social group.

Controversy about the notion of “national or ethnic culture”

The above definition of culture has been widely accepted and used in the field of anthropology, communication, education, linguistics, and many others. In many cases, people take the default culture as ethnic or national culture (Holliday, 1999:237). Over the past decade, however, there has emerged a body of literature that is critical of the notion and use of ethnic or national culture.

When talking about who share a culture, Kramsch (1998) refers to both the small groups such as family, neighborhood, and the larger ones such as professional affiliation, ethnic affiliation or
nation. Obviously, these social groups are different in size and scale, and the meaning of culture differs widely. Some critical scholars (e.g. Keesing, 1994; Sarangi, 1994) strongly oppose attaching culture to ethnic or national groups by arguing that culture is inherently heterogeneous and changing, and the notion of ethnic or national culture over-simplifies and over-generalizes cultural reality with stereotypes.

Furthermore, controversy arises pertaining to the use of ethnic or national culture for interpreting people’s social behaviors. Critical scholars argue that too often people jump to the conclusion that any differences in people’s communication are caused by their different ethnic or national background. The scholars argue that people differ in age, gender, and personality, and the context in which they interact varies widely. All these factors can play a big role in shaping people’s behaviors, and all may result in different interactive styles. For instance, Scollon and Scollon (2001) suggest that generational or gender differences can exert a bigger impact on people’s behaviors than ethnic or national cultural differences.

The controversy over national or ethnic culture is hard to resolve, and may be impossible to resolve at all due to researchers’ different interests in culture study. Generally speaking, scholars who have their interest in culture education tend to accept the notion of ethnic or national culture because a certain level of generalization and simplification is needed to make culture training possible. On the other hand, those who are more interested in the theoretical aspect of culture tend to reject the notion of ethnic or national culture, and many choose to focus on the complicated process of culture construction (e.g. Bloome, 2005; Holliday, 1999).
This study aims to empirically investigate Chinese culture and its impact on Chinese social behaviors, particularly on language use in face-to-face interactions, with an intention to inform the pedagogical decisions on culture training. Due to this practical pedagogical interest, the notion of Chinese culture is used throughout the present study. Admittedly, culture training always involves certain generalization and simplification, and it is true that there is always a danger of over-generalization and over-simplification. However, it is believed that the danger can be controlled through careful planning by the curriculum designers and trainers who have equipped themselves with a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the target culture, who are fully aware of the danger of over-generalizing and over-simplifying culture, and who are clear about what culture to teach and how to teach it. For that reason, the present study adopts the term of “Chinese culture” to refer to what the Chinese participants perceived to be shared by many members of their cultural community. Similarly, the term “American culture” is used to refer to what the American participants agree to be shared by many Americans. It is important to note that culture is not equally shared by all members in a cultural group. Rather, members of a cultural community may have available to them different norms of behaviors, and also there are variations in the accounts or rationalizations of cultural behaviors.

**Inspirations drawn from the controversy**

A few important insights are drawn from the controversy for the present study. The first one is that culture is inherently heterogeneous and changing. The present study may not agree to the radical claim that ethnic or national culture is non-existent, but definitely agrees that what people
often conveniently label as ethnic or national culture may be only shared by certain social groups within the national or ethnic boundaries. It is therefore important for a researcher to always define the boundary of a cultural trait or a cultural behavior in question. In other words, one needs to always question who actually share an identified cultural trait, whether it is the majority members of an ethnic or national group, or just members from certain social groups. Defining the boundary of culture helps researchers avoid over-generalizing cultural findings and overusing them, thus misrepresenting the cultural reality and imposing stereotypes. In this respect, Walker’s (2000) theory of “culture as performance” is useful as it situates cultural knowledge in cases, series of stories about doing things in a culture, or sagas, series of stories about people or locations in a culture. It helps define the boundary of culture and avoid the common trap of over-generalization.

For culture educators, the significance of defining culture can never be overestimated. Those who work on culture training need to pay special attention to the boundary of any cultural trait that is being taught and learned. Curriculum planners and instructors need to always ask question as to who actually share the cultural traits that are included in the curriculum. The defining process helps educators have a better understanding of the cultural reality of an ethnic or national group, and do a better job to introduce it to learners. The ultimate goal, of course, is that learners develop a realistic and comprehensive understanding of the target culture. They know to take precaution against over-simplifying the target culture, or overusing certain narrowly shared culture beyond its boundary.
The second insight from the cultural controversy is that social interactions are complex, and factors such as age, gender, and personality all have an influence on social interactions. Although these factors are also intricately linked with culture, caution needs to be taken against using ethnic or national culture to explain all differences in interactive behaviors. Procedures should be taken to examine other relevant factors before making statements about an ethnic or national culture. Any cultural finding must be supported by the evidence that it is shared by the cultural members, both demonstrated in their behaviors and their perceptions.

The third insight from the cultural controversy is that context plays such a critically important role in social interactions that it must be taken into account in studying culture. Hall (1976) claims that it is impossible to separate the individual from the environment in which he or she functions (p.86). In studying the native inhabitants of the Trobriand Islands, the anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942) found that it was not enough to understand and write down the meaning of the natives’ words, and there was a need to understand “why they said what they said and how they said it to whom in a specific context of situation” (cited in Kramsch, 1998:26). Context becomes an integral part of interactions, and it must be analyzed in studies of social interactions.

**Cultural models**

Many scholars have attempted to produce cultural models, that is, the highly abstract frameworks for representing culture. Several cultural models have informed the present study.
Hammerly (1985) proposes the model of achievement culture, informational culture and behavioral culture. As the name suggests, achievement culture refers to what is often considered as achievement of a social group, or what makes its members feel proud and eager to share with others. Informational culture concerns the information about a social group such as its history, geography, holidays, food etc. The distinction between achievement culture and informational culture is not that clear-cut as people do not necessarily agree as to what is achievement and what is not. In a sense, these two types of culture are similar in that they are often explicitly known by members of a social group. When a person is asked about achievement or informational culture of his or her social group, he or she can usually provide a clear and firm answer. This is because most cultural knowledge of these two types has been extensively studied, written or discussed. People get the knowledge from various written and spoken sources, and often the knowledge is easily accessible in their mind. Possibly for that reason, many language educators readily integrate achievement and informational culture in their language curriculum, and claim that their program has a culture component.

The third type of culture, behavioral culture, is not as visible as the other two. It is what people do in their culture everyday. Paradoxically, most people cannot explicitly describe or explain what seems to be so familiar to them. Hall (1976) explains the reason:

Everything man is and does is modified by learning and is therefore malleable. But once learned, these behavior patterns, these habitual responses, these ways of interacting gradually sink below the surface of the mind and, like the admiral of a submerged submarine fleet, control from the depths. The hidden controls are usually experienced as though they were innate simply because they are not only ubiquitous but habitual as well. (p.42)
Behavioral culture governs social interactions as people follow certain interactive patterns to communicate and socialize with others. Underlying the cultural behaviors are the invisible worldviews, values, beliefs, and expectations. They shape cultural behaviors but they are not easily accessible because people are not often conscious of their own behaviors, let alone why they behave so. According to Hall (1976), this is not because people are not intelligent or capable, but because “deep cultural undercurrents structure life in subtle but highly consistent ways” (p14.). Man’s nervous system is structured in such a way that the patterns that govern behavior and perception come into consciousness only when there is a deviation from plan (Hall, 1976, citing Powers, 1973). When members from a same social group socialize with each other, they follow the shared interactive behavioral patterns and the shared expectations. When everything is normal and usual, behavioral culture becomes automatic and invisible. In other words, it becomes hidden. That is why many natives cannot describe or explain their behaviors in handling some most common social situations. This obviously makes behavioral culture difficult to research, and consequently difficult to train. There has been very little literature on pedagogy for training in behavioral culture, and many educators do not know how to conduct training on behavioral culture.

Some other cultural models are more or less similar to Hammerly’s. For example, in the model of “Big C vs. little c”, “Big C” refer to what a cultural group consider as great and important, while “little c” refers to the culture concerning people’s daily life. The models of “overt vs. covert culture” and “explicit vs. implicit culture” are similar to the distinction made between
behavioral culture and the other two types in Hammerly’s model. ACTFL standard defines culture as composed of perspective, product and practice. In that model, perspective is invisible thoughts that people have, influencing people’s practices as well as their products.

Walker’s (2000) model of revealed culture, ignored culture, and suppressed culture provides a new dimension in viewing culture. Revealed culture refers to what makes the natives feel proud to share with others and ignored culture is what the natives are so familiar that it sinks beneath their consciousness. These two categories of culture can find their counterparts in other cultural models. What is new in this model is suppressed culture, referring to what the natives are not so eager to let outsiders know because they think it is not so good. Suppressed culture may become part of hidden culture, though for a different reason from that of behavioral culture. Behavioral culture lies below people’s consciousness and people are not aware of it, but suppressed culture is something that natives are aware of the existence but intend to hide from outsiders. Suppressed culture also shapes people’s social behaviors and may pose a challenge for non-native speakers’ social interactions. Thus it is also worth investigation in culture research.

Behavioral culture plays an important role in people’s social interactions, and directly impacts people’s communication and socialization. They are particularly important for those second language learners who aim to communicate with the native speakers in the target culture. However, the hidden nature of behavioral culture and suppressed culture makes them difficult to explore, and that may be the reason why few researchers deal with hidden Chinese culture. Given the importance of hidden culture for communication, the present study aims to investigate
hidden Chinese culture, and its impact on Chinese social behaviors, particularly concerning language use.

**Research on culture**

Among the large body of literature on culture, the number of empirical studies is quite small. Scollon and Scollon (2001) point out that most cultural scholars explore culture abstractly, independent of any form of social interaction (p.13). Some frequently used methods are laboratory experiments (e.g. Nisbett, 2004), questionnaire survey (e.g. Chong, Cragin and Scherling, 1983), and content analyses of textbooks or stories (e.g. Domino and Hannah, 1987). In those studies, cultural traits of a social group, usually of an ethnic or national group, are determined by numerical values generated from quantitative analysis. Scollon and Scollon (2001) think that abstract culture literature is useful for deriving preliminary hypothesis for social interactions, however, “there is a difficulty with that literature in that it does not directly come to grips with what happens when people are actually communicating across the boundaries of social groups” (p.13). As such, Scollon and Scollon (2001) focus their study of culture on actual communication between people from different cultural backgrounds. Similarly, Luk and Lin (2007) build their culture study on classroom interactions between native English speaking teachers and Chinese students in Hong Kong.

Given culture’s big influence on social interactions, face-to-face communication should be an important research site for studying culture. Such research helps make salient the interactive styles shared by people, and helps illuminate the underlying thinking patterns shaped by
invisible worldviews, values and beliefs. Such research is useful for people to understand another culture and know better to communicate with members from that culture. It also helps culture educators design good curriculum for culture training and find better ways to conduct training.

Social interactions situate culture research in real communication between members from the same or different cultural background, creating an optimal opportunity for identifying cultural behaviors and underlying expectations. Furthermore, the empirical data collected from real interactions lend concrete support to the culture findings, and readers can gain more confidence in those findings by checking the analysis process. Given the scarcity of culture studies based on people’s real interactions, the present study targets at classroom interactions among Chinese native and non-native speakers for investigating hidden Chinese cultural behaviors and expectations.

**Cultural influence on language use**

To study social interactions, it is necessary to clarify what components are involved in the interaction process. Obviously, language is the most important part of it. Here language does not just refer to the linguistic aspects of language such as words, structure and pronunciation, but more broadly, how language is used - how it is given and taken, with what paralinguistic features, with what body movements and facial expressions, and in what context. Underlying these observable aspects of language use are the invisible worldviews, beliefs, values, and expectations, some of which are commonly shared by members of a social group, termed as culture. The
present study is designed to investigate the relationship between the visible language use and the invisible thinking that is influenced by culture. By examining social interactions among the Chinese native and non-native students, it is hoped that some aspects of hidden Chinese culture can be identified, and can be later integrated in the curriculum of Chinese culture training.

Language and culture are inseparable. Kramsch (1998) sums up the relationship between the two in these brief statements:

- Language expresses cultural reality
- Language embodies cultural reality
- Language symbolizes cultural reality. (p.3)

In the following sections, some key theories on the relationship between language and culture are reviewed. They help construct a theoretical framework for the present study.

**Cultural influence on verbal behaviors**

Verbal behaviors in interactions are mainly concerned with what words are selected and how the words are delivered. Both are intricately linked to culture. First, the words that people select to use are heavily influenced by culture. Words have denotations - meanings that can be looked up in the dictionary, and connotations - associations that words evoked in the minds of their hearers or readers (Kramsch, 1998:16). Words also have iconic meanings that imitate the images of the signified. All three types of meanings are encoded into words by people based on their life experiences. As people in different speech communities have different life experiences, they encode their language in different ways (Kramsch, 1998:17). For example, the word *yinsi* (隐私) in Chinese and “privacy” in English seem to have the same denotative meaning. However, the words’ connotations are quite different in the two languages. In Chinese, what is considered as
privacy is often defined much more narrowly than in English. There may be some variations among Chinese, but overall, the Chinese word *yinsi* evokes the meaning of the intimate relation between lovers. In English, the word “privacy” signifies much more than that, ranging from the intimate relation between lovers, to people’s personal information such as age, income, and even home phone numbers. These, however, are not often the connotations evoked in the Chinese language. The difference in the meaning of the two seemingly similar words is caused by the different culture in the Chinese and American society. In China, privacy is not as highly valued as in America because social relationship is organized in a more collective way. Individualism is not so much valued in China as in America. The semantic meaning of the two words reflects the difference between the two cultures.

In 1940, Whorf proposes the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. He claims that the structure of the language one habitually uses influences the manner in which he or she thinks and behaves. The strong version of the hypothesis has been rejected as it implies that humans are the prisoner of their own language. However, the weaker version of the hypothesis, that there are cultural differences in the semantic associations evoked by seemingly common concepts, has been generally accepted (Kramsch, 1998:13). Drawn from that, it is useful to examine the meanings of the words used by Chinese interactants in their social interactions to help reveal the influence from Chinese culture.

Furthermore, it is also important to analyze how Chinese deliver their selected words to achieve their intended communicative purposes. Like selection of linguistic codes, patterns of
delivery are also heavily influenced by culture. Some interactional sociolinguists have suggested ways to study patterns of language delivery. In studying English conversation between members of Britain’s white majority community and members of South Asian minority communities, John Gumperz and his associates (Gumperz et al. 1979) find that the two groups have systematic difference in what he called ‘contextualization cues’. Specifically, it means when people communicate with each other, not only their selection of words but also how they use the words are shaped by their culture. Contextualization cues include “prosody (intonation, pitch and stress contrasts), paralinguistic cues (hesitation, pausing, contrasts of speed and volume, simultaneous speech), or switching to a different language, dialect, style or register for the part of the utterance [people] want to pick out as having a particular significance” (Cameron, 2001:109). When two people from different cultural backgrounds talk to each other, and if they do not understand each other’s contextualization cues, they will miss part of the meanings that their interlocutor is trying to convey, or misunderstand the meanings, communication problems thus occur. This study examines the patterns of language delivery in order to reveal Chinese cultural influence on social behaviors and cultural expectations.

**Cultural influence on nonverbal behaviors**

People move their body when they interact with each other. Like verbal behaviors, nonverbal behaviors are also part of language interactions. A lot of messages are sent through body movements, and people’s use of language is often contingent upon their perceptions and interpretations of others’ body language.
In 1952, Birdwhistell first studied body movements in his book *Introduction to Kinesics*. Since then, many people have conducted research on human’s body movements. One influential research is on human synchrony (moving together). Hall (1976) expounds on that (p.71-84).

Synchrony means people in interactions move together (in whole or in part), and if they fail to do so, they are disruptive to others around them.

When two people talk to each other, their movements are synchronized. Sometimes this occurs in barely perceptible ways, when finger, eyelid (blinking), and head movements occur simultaneously and in sync with specific parts of the verbal code (the words, with pitches and stresses) as it unwinds. …… The only thing that destroys synchrony is if one of the people was called out of the conversation by a third party. Synchrony stopped, and a new chain was set up with the new interlocutor. (p.82)

Research shows that syncing is panhuman and innate, meaning it is a nature of all human beings regardless of language. It is rooted in biology, but it is also modified by culture. Different cultures have different rhythms, and members from the same speech community are habituated to the rhythms of their own language and culture. Each culture has its own characteristic manner of locomotion, sitting, standing, reclining or gesturing. However, like other hidden aspects of culture, people are mostly unaware of their synchronous movement and they tend to use their own nonverbal communicative patterns as though they were universal. As the result, when people from different cultures interact with each other, unconsciously they may expect their interlocutor(s) to synchronize to the rhythm that they are familiar with. When rhythms are different, communication becomes bumpy.

Discoveries of culture-specific body movements have far-reaching implications for culture training. It helps reveal culturally shaped nonverbal communicative patterns, and explain some
problems that often occur during the interactive process. Hall (1976) points out that if one wants to fit in an interaction, or not appear too conspicuous, it is helpful to begin to move to the local rhythm and conform to the local beat. People who target at nice and smooth social interactions need to learn about nonverbal communicative patterns in another culture, and also gain awareness of their own.

**Cultural influence on context**

All social interactions take place in context, and thus all verbal and nonverbal behaviors must be studied in context. Context plays such an important role that any social interaction study would be incomplete if context is not taken into consideration. Some scholarly efforts have been made to explore context of social interactions. Two theories are particularly relevant to the current study.

**Microcontext vs. macrocontext**

A social constructive view sees context of human interactions as composed of microcontext and macrocontext (e.g. Bloome, 2005). Microcontext refers to the immediate environment where an interaction occurs. It includes time, place, participants, audience and so on – factors that are directly related to the occurring of an interaction. Macrocontext, on the other hand, refers to the larger and broader social environment that impacts human interactions through various factors in microcontext. Both macrocontext and microcontext are intricately linked to culture, influencing people’s social behaviors in interactions. Take a classroom interaction as an example. A group discussion in a graduate class in an American university is shaped by many factors in its
microcontext, such as how the classroom is arranged, when do the class meet, who is the instructor, who are the students, what are the curriculum and teaching plan, who initiates the discussion topic, and whether students are prepared or not. All these factors have an immediate impact on how the discussion proceeds. Meanwhile, the group discussion is also influenced by its macrocontext, i.e. the larger and broader social context such as the school’s funding for the program, the policy for recruiting students, the state’s education policy, the country’s national political and economic system, and so on. Compared with the microcontext, the impact of macrocontext is not so easy to perceive and sometimes get ignored by researchers. In fact, macrocontext always plays a role in human interactions as interactants are all social beings and they bring their experience and history into their socialization process. To understand Chinese cultural behaviors and cultural expectations, both microcontext and macrocontext are to be examined when studying participants’ social interactions.

**Internal context vs. external context**

Another perspective views context as composed of internal context and external context (Hall, 1976).

Contexting probably involves at least two entirely different but interrelated processes-one inside the organism and the other outside. The first takes place in the brain and is a function of either past experience (programmed, internalized contexting) or the structure of the nervous system (innate contexting), or both. External contexting comprises the situation and/or setting in which an event occurs (situational and/or environmental contexting). (p.100)

In a sense, Hall’s external context is more or less similar to the notion of microcontext, all about situation and environment where an interaction takes place. What is special about Hall’s theory is his conceptualization of internal context as it unravels a new dimension of context
analysis. Different from other dimensions which stress the environment’s shaping force on 
human beings, internal context focuses on how human beings as active agent act upon the 
environment based on their schema built upon their past experiences. In other words, whenever 
people engage in social interactions, they interpret their external context based on their past 
experiences and they behave according to their interpretation. As such, two people who have 
very different experiences in the past would probably interpret the same external context in 
different ways, and thus behave in differently manners. Internal context is actually a mental 
process that people undergo in dealing with various social situations. The insight from the theory 
for the present study is that both external and internal context are to be examined in studying the 
participants’ social interactions for understanding Chinese cultural behaviors and cultural 
expectations.

Research questions

The present study is designed to examine classroom interactions among some Chinese native 
and non-native speakers for the purpose of revealing what aspects of hidden Chinese culture 
impact the students’ social interactions. It is hoped that the findings can lead to some suggestions 
on how culture can be effectively taught.

Following are the research questions for the present study:

1) What are some common verbal and nonverbal behaviors identified in the Chinese 
   participants’ classroom interactions?
2) What relationship can be drawn between those behaviors and the participants’ cultural background? What are some cultural expectations underlying those behaviors?

3) What are some common verbal and nonverbal behaviors identified in the American students’ classroom interactions, and how are they different from the Chinese ones?

4) How can Chinese culture be successfully taught to Chinese language and culture learners?

**Theoretical framework and analytical tools**

The present study aims to investigate hidden Chinese culture including Chinese cultural behaviors and the underlying worldviews, values, beliefs and expectations. Culture becomes hidden either because it is so prevalent and pervasive that it sinks below the conscious level of the cultural members, or because it is considered to be something not so good and the cultural members are not willing to share with outsiders.

To study hidden Chinese cultural behaviors and cultural expectations, this study examines the language use by the Chinese native and non-native participants, including their verbal and non-verbal behaviors in classroom interactions. Specifically, three aspects of language use are to be explored: 1) the participants’ selection of words and meanings, and delivery of the linguistic code 2) the participants’ body movements and facial expressions 3) the external context and internal context of the participants’ classroom interactions.
CHAPTER 3
USING ETHNOGRAPHY TO APPROACH HIDDEN CHINESE CULTURE IN AN AMERICAN GRADUATE CLASS

For the purpose of exploring social interactions to gain understanding of hidden Chinese cultural behaviors and cultural expectations, this study adopts ethnographic approach.

Ethnographic approach

Ethnographic approach is considered to be appropriate for researching social interactions. Luk and Lin (2007) claim that “the ethnographic approach is by far the most appropriate research instrument to discover the implicit sociocultural norms and resources shaping social interaction patterns and interpretive meanings of naturally occurring human actions and interactions” (p.5-6). Rooted in anthropology, ethnography is characterized by attention to contexts and societies with a focus on the cultural interpretation of people’s behaviors in naturally occurring, ongoing settings (Watson-Gegeo, 1988:576).

Different from quantitative researchers seeking to obtain numerical data and analyze by statistical means, cultural ethnographers get into real cultural sites, participate in cultural activities, gather contextual information, interview participants, all for the purpose of achieving
the insiders’ view of culture. Ethnographic researchers often keep their research questions open and keep looking for emerging themes and topics. Some typical ethnographic methods for collecting data are recording cultural activities, participating observation, interviewing participants, and gathering cultural artifacts. Data are often analyzed qualitatively and heuristically, for example, through pattern identification, coding and categorizing, comparing and contrasting, triangulating data from various sources. Given its effectiveness for social research, the present study follows ethnographic approach to explore cultural influences on social interactions among the Chinese native and non-native participants.

**Research site**

This study was conducted in a graduate level course in a large mid-Western American university. The course was offered by the university’s department of East Asian Languages and Literatures. The students were from American or Chinese cultural background. The majority of the American students were attending a Chinese master program, whose aim was to train students to be proficient users of Chinese language and culture, able to interact with Chinese natives in a culturally appropriate way. As many students in the program had a plan to work in China in their future, the program put priority to train student cultural skills to help them handle various social interactions with Chinese natives in China.

The Chinese master program was a two year program. All newly recruited students had learned Chinese for years and had achieved an intermediate to advanced level of Chinese proficiency. Most American students in the program had experience living in China before they
began their study in the program. During their first year attending the program, the students took courses at the research university, and afterwards they would go to China to take one year internship and also work on their master thesis.

The research course was offered in the fall quarter, when the participating American students just began their two-year master program. The name of the course was Networking in China and America, with a course objective to help American students learn to develop interpersonal relationships with Chinese natives. As the curriculum was specially designed to engage American students in real interactions with Chinese, the course also recruited Chinese students in a hope to build one-on-one pairs of Chinese and American so that both could learn from each other. For that reason, the curriculum also targeted at helping Chinese students develop interpersonal skills with Americans.

The course was ten weeks long. Class met twice a week, each time about two hours and forty five minutes. Each class session was equally divided into two halves, the English half and the Chinese half. The English half was taught by an American instructor, and the Chinese half by a Chinese instructor. The English half was intended to help Chinese students learn American ways of handling various social interactions, while the Chinese half was to help American students learn the same skills in Chinese.

The classroom was a windowless room in a rectangular shape. On the front wall hung a large board, and a retractable white screen for overhead projecting. Also in the front were a desk and a chair for the instructor. In the corner was a cabinet with all electronic devices including a
computer that monitored the overhead projector. Across the front wall were two rows of portable chairs. When 21 students were attending the class, the room was quite full, and several students had to sit next to the other two walls.

The course

The course was designed based on Walker’s (2000) idea of performed culture. The basic principle is that people can only learn language and culture by participating in the target culture within which they can engage in personal interactions or conduct social transactions. The organization of the course clearly reflected the principle.

First, the course was designed to provide maximal exposures of the target culture to the L2 learners by putting two groups of native speakers together in the same class. For American students, Chinese was their target language and the Chinese students brought the target culture to them. For Chinese students, English was their target language and the American students showed them the target culture. The two groups of students brought the target culture to each other. As mentioned before, each class session was equally divided into an English half and a Chinese half. In the English half, everyone spoke English. The Chinese students were engaged in actual interactions with the Americans and learned American culture from them. Likewise, in the Chinese half, American students interacted with Chinese natives and learned Chinese culture from them. The two groups of students were teachers and students to each other, and Chinese and American cultures were elicited from the native speakers and learned by the L2 learners. Putting two groups of students in the same class facilitated learning target culture from L1 cultural
Second, the course was organized around impromptu culture performance. The instructors designed various interactive contexts with parameters of time, place, role, audience and reason for interactions. No scripts were provided for the students to act out. The students performed as they wished according to their understandings of the given contexts. As such, the student performance can be considered as their impromptu or natural reactions to the given contexts based on their background and their previous experience. Through performing, the instructors engaged the students in social interactions, and helped them experience the target culture. Although classroom performance was not completely the same as real life interactions, it provided culture learners with invaluable opportunities to experience first-hand how native speakers interact and learn their ways to behave in the target culture. Like what Walker (2000) stresses, “To know is to do”, the students in this class learned target culture in action, and acquired target culture in action.

Furthermore, culture performance is also valuable for native speakers to learn about their hidden culture. Most native speakers are not clearly aware of their own cultural behaviors because they are too familiar with them. They follow social norms and use social communicative patterns, naturally and automatically. This makes it hard for native speakers to explicitly know about their cultural behaviors and see the differences between their behavioral culture and those of other social groups. Through culture performance, native speakers are made to perform their cultural behaviors and also observe others’ cultural behaviors, including those of non-native
speakers. Any strangeness and abnormalities that they perceive from other’s performance could bring to consciousness their own behaviors in their culture. In theory, culture performance would help non-native speakers learn the target cultural behaviors and also help native speakers identify their own hidden culture.

Third, the course provided each group of students with ample opportunities to get immediate feedback on their performance from the native speakers of the target culture. After each cultural performance, a brief period was given for the whole class to comment on the performing students’ verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Reflective comments were especially valuable in that they helped native speakers see their hidden behaviors, and also helped non-native speakers know the appropriateness of their performance and learn how to improve their cultural behaviors.

A typical class session of the course went like this: the American instructor first started class with several administrative notes on things like assignments, group projects, problems related to technology, etc. Then he started the English half lesson. He first introduced the culture theme of the day, and provided the first social context that he designed for the students to perform. He often explained the context with a powerpoint slide projected onto the white screen. The context was set by time, place, role, audience and reason for interaction. For example, a context for congratulating a person was set in a company’s kitchen, in an afternoon, with nobody around, when a person meets a colleague who was recently engaged. The instructor usually read loud the context to the class, and encouraged the students to ask questions to make sure they fully understood it. Then the class was broken into small groups, each group with a Chinese student
and one or two American students. Several minutes were allowed for each group to have a
discussion about the context. Then the instructor called on some students to perform in the front.
After the performance, the students returned to their seat. The instructor asked the whole class to
comment on the performance. The audience commented on what was good and what was not so
good, and provided suggestions for improvement. Questions regarding the target cultural
behaviors and cultural expectations were raised and discussed. The instructor picked out some
useful expressions and phrases that the students used in their performance or provided in the
follow-up comments, and wrote them on the blackboard. He stressed the usefulness of the
expressions and encouraged students to use them. After one sequence of performance-comment
was over, the instructor called on some other students to perform in the front and a new sequence
began. When the time of the English half was up, the Chinese instructor would take over the
floor and proceed the Chinese half in a similar manner.

The instructors

The course was taught by two instructors, one American and one Chinese. The American
instructor was a young male, white, in his early 30s. He was a new graduate from the research
university with a Ph.D in Chinese Pedagogy. He visited China for many times, and also lived
there for extended periods of time. Jeff (a pseudonym) was quite familiar with Chinese culture.

The Chinese instructor was a middle-aged female professor from a normal university in
Southwest China. Wang (a pseudonym) had taught Western literatures for twenty years and then
worked in the field of anthropology. She had many titles, including a deputy to the Chinese
National People’s Congress and a counselor to a provincial governor. She had visited many countries but this was the first time she lived in a foreign country for an extended period of time, and also the first time taught in a foreign country. She came to the research university from China right before the course started. She said she was not familiar with American culture. She spoke a little English.

As just mentioned, each class session was divided into an English half and a Chinese half. Normally, the class started with the English half. When Jeff was teaching, Wang would sit in a corner with her laptop computer. She kept quiet during the English half time and kept taking notes in her computer. When the English half was over, Wang would take the floor, and gave Chinese instruction. The medium of instruction changed from English to Chinese. When Wang was teaching, Jeff kept quiet and took notes in the corner. He kept track of the students’ participation, and occasionally reminded Wang to call on certain students to perform and speak.

The students

21 students regularly attended class. Among them, 13 were Americans and 8 were Chinese. The American students’ demographic information is listed in the following table.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>American student</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Major of undergraduate study</th>
<th>Years of learning Chinese</th>
<th>Length of stay in China</th>
<th>Time(s) of visiting China</th>
<th>Places of stay in China</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Political Science/Chinese</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Beijing/Shandong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Asian Literature</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>10+</td>
<td>Beijing/Shaanxi/Shandong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Biology</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>(5 years as kid) 3 months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Taiwan/Shandong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>International Relation/Economics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>14 months</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Beijing/Shandong/Hong Kong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Chinese/Security Intelligence</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4 and half months</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Shandong/Sichuan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>International Studies</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Jiangsu/Shandong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Economics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12 months</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Taiwan/Shaanxi/Shandong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Chinese Linguistics</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2+1/2 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Hainan/Beijing/Shandong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Chinese International Study</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1 year 6 months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Jiangsu/Zhejiang/Shandong/Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Chinese/Economics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Shandong/Yunnan/Taiwan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Accounting</td>
<td>3+1/2 years</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shandong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12*</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Arabic/Chinese</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>9 weeks</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shandong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13*</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>History/Comparative Literature</td>
<td>2+1/2 years</td>
<td>2 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Shandong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Undergraduate student

Table 1. Demographic information of the participating American students
Of all American students, 11 were newly recruited graduate students in the Chinese master program and 2 were undergraduate students. All master students had completed their undergraduate study in various majors, some directly related to Chinese, some not. But in general, they all had learned Chinese for some years, and had visited China for one or more times. Due to a collaborative study-abroad program organized by the master program, all American students had visited China’s Shandong province. Most students also had experience living in other parts of China. All master students had achieved an intermediate level of Chinese proficiency and were able to use the Chinese language to communicate with Chinese native speakers. Two undergraduate students enrolled the course because they had a plan to get into the master program after they completed their undergraduate study. Due to their shorter time studying Chinese and living in China, their language proficiency was lower than their graduate classmates. Despite that, they were active in performing and making comments in class.

The number of Chinese students was smaller than that of the Americans. 8 Chinese students regularly attended the class. 5 were graduate students at the research university, and 3 were Chinese scholars visiting the research university for academic purposes. Different from the American students who mostly attended the same graduate program, the Chinese students were from different programs. Also they were from different age groups, and some had professional experiences while some did not. All had learned English for over ten years. Their length of stay in the U.S. varied.
An important note here is that all Chinese participants were from mainland China, so the cultural behaviors and expectations explored in this study were defined as those shared by some cultural members from the mainland China.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese student</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Place(s) of long-term stay in China</th>
<th>Graduate Major</th>
<th>Profession experience</th>
<th>Length of stay in the U.S.</th>
<th>Length of learning English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Hubei</td>
<td>Chinese literature</td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Hubei</td>
<td>Chemistry</td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs</td>
<td>5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Liaoning Beijing</td>
<td>Chinese literature</td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs</td>
<td>3 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Fujian Beijing</td>
<td>Chinese linguistics</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Sichuan Shanghai Guangdong</td>
<td>Chinese pedagogy</td>
<td>Teaching Business</td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6*</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Shanxi Guangdong</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7*</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Jiangxi Liaoning Beijing</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td></td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs</td>
<td>1 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8*</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Shandong Gansu Fujian</td>
<td>Classical Chinese literature</td>
<td>Teaching</td>
<td>&gt; 10 yrs</td>
<td>2 months</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Visiting scholar

Table 2. Demographic information of the participating American students
The researcher’s role

It is important for an ethnographic researcher to clarify his or her role in research. Different from a quantitative researcher who mainly works with numbers, normally considered to be more “objective” in data collection and data analysis, a qualitative researcher plays a more “subjective” role in research as he or she participates in the research activities, interacts with the participants, and interprets the collected data. Obviously, the researcher has his or her influence in every procedure, and therefore it is important to clarify that.

In this study, I participated in classroom social interactions, as a Chinese student who enrolled the course together with other 20 students. I attended all class sessions, participated in cutlure performance, made comments in class discussions, and did all required assignments. Compared with a more common form of participating observation in classroom research in which the researcher plays a role as an assistant to the course instructor, I was more deeply involved in the activities that were the target of this culture study. Before the study, I carefully weighed the pros and cons of being a student enrolling the course and its possible impact on my culture study. The advantage of taking the course was to get opportunities to gain the first-hand experience of classroom social interactions and to better understand the perceptions and feelings of the participating students. It also helped me find a common ground with my fellow classmates and instructors and build a rapport with them, which was tremendously helpful for me to gain their insights and perspectives and understand their behaviors and thinking.
Meanwhile, I was fully aware that such a close involvement with the participants and the classroom activities could pose a danger that a researcher loses sight of a bigger picture or loses a critical perspective that a researcher should have. Technically, the participation work could interfere with the process of data collection. To offset the possible disadvantages, I made arrangement to audio-tape all class sessions and also get the video recording of some class sessions. The recordings enabled me to re-view and observe the classes as a researcher, not as a participating student. Furthermore, I reflected on my own cultural background and its possible impact on data analysis. To counter the possible danger of misinterpretation and misanalysis due to my subjectivity, I incorporated procedures of “member check” and “peer debriefing” (James-Brown, 1999). Member check is a procedure that a researcher shares his or her data analysis and findings with participants and double check with them the accuracy of researcher interpretation. Peer debriefing means the researcher seeks opinions from his or her colleagues or classmates and get their opinions on his or her analysis. Both procedures can effectively reduce the chance of misinterpretation and misanalysis in qualitative research.

To further clarify my role in this study, it is necessary to provide my background as a researcher. I am a Chinese native speaker from mainland China. My second language is English and I learned it for over ten years in China’s formal education system. I had my undergraduate study in English language and literature in a university in Shanghai, and afterwards I worked as a university lecturer teaching English to adults. In early 1990’s, I went to South China and worked in several foreign companies as secretary, office manager, and marketing executive assistant.
Then I resumed teaching English in several schools and training centers. Later, I moved to Canada and lived in Toronto for nearly five years. I worked in a private school as a test trainer and administrative assistant. I also attended a master program in applied linguistics at a Canadian university. Afterwards, I was admitted to a Ph.D program in foreign and second language education in an American university. By the time of the research, I had lived in China for more than thirty years, and lived in North America for over seven years. I considered myself having a native understanding of Chinese culture particularly concerning business and education, and some level of understanding of North American culture.

This study is concerned with two cultures, Chinese culture and American culture, and the use of two languages, Chinese and English. Chinese is my first language and Chinese culture is my home culture. English is my second language, and American culture is my target culture. My investigation of cultural influences on social behaviors was obviously influenced by my own understandings of Chinese and American culture. That is why it is so important for me to conduct member-check with my participants, and peer-debriefing with another Chinese graduate student who also shared an interest in studying Chinese culture.

Data collection

Data in this study were composed of four types: recordings of class sessions, field notes of class observation, recordings and notes of interviews with the participants, some participants’ cultural journals.
Recordings

All class sessions were audio recorded and partially video recorded. With the consent of all members in the class, an MP3 was placed on my desk recording the complete class sessions including the recess. The machine was one of the advanced models, powerful in capturing sound from even distant corners of the room. The sound quality was satisfactory. The digital recordings were later transferred into my computer and labeled with the date of the class. In total, 22 class sessions were recorded in full.

The video recording was made through the arrangement of the American instructor. The purpose was to facilitate the evaluation of student performance. A video camera was placed at a corner facing the front of the classroom, and a student was designated to monitor its operation. The video recordings were uploaded on a school website and each student was given a password to access them. As a part of course evaluation, the students were asked to select the clips of their own performance and upload them to a special software program for anonymous evaluation by some native speakers of their target language. For the purpose of research, I downloaded all video clips and treated them as the key data of my study.

Field notes of class observation

While attending class sessions, I made notes of any observations that I felt relevant and interesting to my study. Each page of my notebook was divided into two columns, one for input of observation notes, and the other for input of my comments. Into the observation column, I put what I observed was happening in class, for example, who spoke what, with what body
movements, what comment was made and who agreed and disagreed. In the comment column, I input my interpretation of the observation. I wrote down my comments, questions, and further steps that I thought I needed to take to explore certain interesting points. Keeping my observation notes and comments separate helped me distinguish the more objective information from the more subjective one. The two column format was also useful for me to add more comments following my observation in class. It greatly facilitated the process of data analysis.

**Interviews**

Interview was conducted with 11 American students and 5 Chinese students. It was intended for eliciting information about the students’ background and cultural experiences, their perceptions of class performance and comments. The students were interviewed individually for at least one time, and all interviews were audio recorded.

The interview questions for eliciting background information were semi-structured, mainly concerning the following three aspects: 1) the student’s personal information including their age, hometown, first language and interests 2) the student’s educational background including their secondary school learning, favorite subject, foreign language learning, and college education including school, major and minor, and degree earned 3) the student’s history of learning the second language, including years of learning, motivation of learning, learning experiences concerning teachers, classmates, method of teaching, textbooks, evaluation, and any exposures to the second culture 4) the student’s history of visiting the target culture country including times of visit, length of stay in the host country, places visited, purpose of visit and stay, any striking
memories about the target culture and its members, and any reflections on his or her cross-cultural experience.

The interview questions for eliciting student perceptions of cultural influences on their language use were drawn from the initial analyses of each student’s class performances and comments, and his or her cultural journals. During the interview, I replayed clips of video or audio recording that contained the interviewee’s performance and watched the parts together with the interviewee. I stopped the recording from time to time and asked the interviewee to recall his or her inner thoughts at the moment of performing, especially his or her interpretation of the context, understanding of the interlocutor’s intentions, and the meaning of his or her verbal and nonverbal behaviors. The video or audio replay helped the interviewee revisit his or her classroom experiences, and elicited his or her thinking that shaped the behaviors moment by moment.

The interview questions for eliciting student perception concerned the following aspects: 1) the student’s general comments on his or her own performance concerning the interpretation of the context, how and why the verbal and nonverbal behaviors were used, how well did the behaviors work and help achieve the intended communicative purposes; 2) the student’s reflection on specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors, and the perceived influences from his or her cultural background or the understanding of the target culture. The interviewee’s answers were helpful for drawing differences between Chinese and American culture and illuminating the cultural impact on his or her use of language; 3) students’ comments on some patterns of social
behaviors that were identified from their classmates’ performances.

The interview was conducted with each individual student for at least one time. With the American students, both English and Chinese language were used, while with Chinese students, only Chinese language was used. For the purpose of eliciting maximal information from the participants, I let the interviewees select the language that they felt most comfortable with for their interview. The majority of the American students said that they felt equally comfortable with Chinese and English, and they could go with either one. Some American students said that they preferred to use the language that was easier for the conversation to go on. If they felt that their interlocutor’s English was better than their Chinese, they would choose to speak English rather than Chinese. But if they feel that the interlocutor’s English was not as good as their Chinese, they would insist speaking Chinese. Thus different American students made different choice on the language for having their interview. Different from that, all Chinese students chose to use Chinese in their interview.

During the interview, I was clearly aware of my role in co-constructing conversation with my interviewees, so I was careful not to impose my interpretation on them. I structured most questions as open-ended, for the purpose of eliciting most information from my interviewees.

**Cultural journals**

Most of the American students attended a two month study-abroad program in China’s Shandong province organized by the Chinese master program at the research university. As part of culture learning, the students were asked to keep a journal about their experiences and
reflections during their stay in the country. Several American students who had attended the program sent me their culture journals, which offered me a good opportunity to see what cultural phenomena caught their attention and how they interpreted them. The data were also important for me to gain a deeper understanding of American students’ perceptions and perspectives of Chinese culture, which was normally invisible to Chinese native speakers. Finally, the journals also helped me structure the interview questions with the students.

Other data

During the ten-week course, I had many opportunities to talk with the two instructors. We exchanged a lot of thoughts about the course and how it proceeded. I also had many informal chats with my classmates about the course and their perceptions of cultural differences. I kept notes of the relevant information.

Besides, I attended a class party held in a student’s home and a dinner in a Chinese restaurant with all class members. I also attended a lecture on Chinese culture given by a Chinese professor from another American university. All these were useful data for the study.

Data analyses

Transcribing class recording and interviews

Class recordings and interviews were first reviewed and listened to, and then selectively transcribed. Transcription was done according to the language in use. Interactions in English were transcribed in English and interactions in Chinese were transcribed in Chinese. As paralinguistic and nonverbal aspects of interactions were focuses of this study, I also transcribed
the relevant paralinguistic and nonverbal features of student classroom interactions.

**Pattern identification and triangulation**

Data from one source were first analyzed independently, and then in combination with data from other sources. Whenever a pattern emerged, a code was assigned and used across analyses of all other data. Then all coded patterns were matched, and grouped together. Then the patterns were categorized according to their nature, and reduced to themes generated from each category. Triangulation is an import analyzing procedure in which any findings generated from one source of data are to be checked with the data from other sources. The procedure helps maintain validity of qualitative research.

**Contrastive analysis**

The present study has its focus on hidden Chinese culture and its impact on social interactions among Chinese native and non-native students. As mentioned before, hidden culture is hard to explore because cultural behaviors are so familiar to cultural members that they usually sink below their conscious level. When members in the same culture group interact with each other, they use the same cultural expectations, and can hardly have the awareness of the influence from their cultural background. The awareness is possible to gain only when a different culture is at present, and the contrast makes hidden culture become visible and clear. Contrastive analysis is an important procedure for revealing cultural differences. In other words, identifying hidden Chinese culture is directly facilitated by examining American culture. Social interactions in this study generated a large amount of data that placed two languages and two cultures in the same
context, which facilitates comparative and contrastive analysis.

Comparing and contrasting in this study involved three concrete procedures. One was comparison and contrast of the behaviors of the same participant, concerning his or her use of the Chinese language and Chinese culture, and the English language and American culture. The procedure helped illuminate the commonalities and differences between the two cultures and languages, demonstrating the influences from Chinese culture on the participant’s use of the Chinese and English language.

The second procedure involved comparing and contrasting students from the same cultural background, in other words, between a Chinese and another Chinese student, and between an American and another American student, concerning their use of the first and second language. The purpose was to identify patterns commonly shared or agreed upon by people from the same cultural background, and flush out the influences from personality and individuality. Culture is shared, not personal or individual.

The third procedure involved comparing and contrasting the group of Chinese students and the group of American students, concerning their use of the first and second language. The purpose was to identify differences between the two cultures and the two languages. When the patterns generated from one group are placed against the patterns from the other group, the cultural differences are revealed.

In all, comparing and contrasting in this study started from individual students, then among groups of students from the same cultural background, and finally between the groups from
different cultural background. Also it was done between the two languages, both used as the first language and as the second language.

**Member checking**

To maintain validity of the study, member check was done with some participants. When the initial findings were out, some participants were invited individually to hear the data and findings concerning him or her, and had a chance to give opinions whether he or she agreed to my interpretations and findings. The participants’ opinions were important for revealing any misinterpretations or misrepresentations made by the researcher. Member check was done at the later stage of the study.

**Peer-debriefing**

To further enhance validity of the study, a doctoral student in Chinese Pedagogy at the research university was invited to give opinion on my data collection and analyses. The student was a native Chinese who also shared an interest in learning about Chinese culture. She came to the U.S. for a graduate study six years ago, and she was quite familiar with the group of American students in the present study because she supervised some of them in their study-abroad program in China.

Due to a research project of her own, the student visited our class frequently as an observer. She was able to access the video clips of student performance and she herself kept field notes of class observation. During the research period, we had frequent conversations about what we observed in class and how we reflected on them. We also shared our thinking about culture, its
influences on language use, and differences between American and Chinese culture. At a later stage of research, I invited her to share my initial findings and have her opinions about my interpretations of the data. Getting a second opinion from someone who had rich experiences in both cultures and had good research training definitely helped me go deeper into my data and avoid simple and rush conclusions about Chinese culture and cultural differences.
Several aspects of hidden Chinese culture were identified in student performances in the given social contexts and their comments on the performances. Conclusions about hidden Chinese culture were made when commonalities were identified across the students’ performances and their culture comments. Although the revealed hidden Chinese culture in this study were only drops of water in the big sea of Chinese culture, it makes salient some prevalent and pervasive cultural behaviors and expectations shared among many Chinese people. For learners of the Chinese language and Chinese culture, knowing these cultural behaviors and expectations is beneficial for their successful socialization with Chinese natives in Chinese culture.

Before presenting the findings, one reminder must be reiterated. All Chinese participants in this study were from mainland China, so all findings about hidden Chinese culture should be read within a specific boundary. In other words, the hidden cultural behaviors and expectations
identified in this study are only possibly applicable to the culture in the mainland China.

Furthermore, the identified hidden culture should not be taken as fixed and unified, as culture is undergoing constant changes and there are many variations within a culture.

1. The hierarchical concept

The hierarchical concept is found to have a big influence on the Chinese students’ interactive behaviors.

The great influence of the hierarchical concept was constantly identified in the students’ performance, revealing some shared Chinese cultural behaviors and cultural expectations as detailed below.

a. In Chinese culture, a new employee is expected to assume a lower status to old employees, and show humbleness and respectfulness to them.

The cultural expectation was revealed when the students were asked to perform self-introduction as a new employee on the first day of an imaginary work in an American context. The instructor asked the students to select any job they wanted. Following is a performance of one Chinese student who imagined himself starting a new job as an editor in an American publishing company.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Performance in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>(Bowing) Hi, everyone,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I am XX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Yeah uh. I am really excited to work with you all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>And I am going to explore some of the new novels, new novelists, and I wanna be, um,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>I am really excited to be working with you great editors,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>So, (giving a small bow) thank you, thank you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Several features can be drawn from this brief self-introduction, indicating certain Chinese cultural expectation at work.

First, the Chinese student bowed before he started introducing himself. Bowing as a bodily movement signifies humbleness and respectfulness in Chinese culture. It is not commonly seen in American culture, but quite so in East Asian cultures among people with unequal status. In general, persons with lower status bow to those with higher status to show respect to them. Accordingly, the Chinese student bowed to the old employees to show his respect to them. The gesture indicated that the new employee assumed himself a lower status to the old employees and a humble attitude towards them. In Chinese culture, this gesture is often be taken as a good manner because it complies with a desirable expectation of a modest, humble and respectful new employee. In China, seniority is valued, and old employees are often considered more privileged than new employees due to their experience and contributions. That explains why many Chinese share an expectation that new employees should explicitly show their humbleness towards old employees, particularly in initial encounters. Satisfying that expectation could help a new employee make a good impression on their coworkers, and build a good relationship with them.

Interestingly, following the performance, some American students expressed their dislike of bow on the basis that it signifies an unequal relationship. They asserted that the new employee did not have to assume a lower position to the old employees, because he was more or less the same as them. Besides, they thought that showing humbleness would not help build a confident image for a new employee, which is critically important in American culture. Obviously bowing
is a cultural-specific social behavior.

Second, the Chinese student did not talk much about himself. He just simply introduced his name (Line 3), without mentioning his background. He expressed his excitement to work with others (Line 4), and mentioned a little a bit what he would be doing in the company (Line 5). He had an intention to say what he wanted to do, but did not finish it (Line 5). Then he reiterated his excitement to work with others and referred to them as “great editors” (Line 6). Clearly, the positive remarks showed the new employee was trying to flatter the old employees, intending to leave them a good first impression.

At the closing, the student gave a small bow to everyone else and said “thank you, thank you” (Line 7). Once again, the bow conveyed his humbleness, showing his respect to the old employees. Duplicating use of polite expressions is an interesting linguistic phenomenon in Chinese, frequently occurring in the Chinese students’ interactions. The duplication intensifies the speaker’s politeness. Two typical examples are xiexie, xiexie 谢谢,谢谢 (thank you, thank you) and duibuqi, duibuqi 对不起,对不起 (sorry, sorry). Usually duplicative uses of polite expression go with constant nodding or bowing. The verbal behavior synchronizes with the non-verbal behavior, intensifying the politeness that the speaker is conveying. In the above performance, the Chinese student’s duplicative utterance of “thank you” can be viewed as a transfer of his Chinese language use pattern to his English speaking. Chinese culture has been encoded in the use of the Chinese language, and in turn, it was transferred to the use of English by the Chinese student who used English as the second language.
The transfer could be further evidenced by the performance in the Chinese language.

Following is a self-introduction given by a Chinese student in an imaginary Chinese company.

The original performance was in Chinese, and the English translation was provided in the next column.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Performance in Chinese</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(鞠躬)大家好。</td>
<td>(Bowing) Hello, everyone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>我是 XX。</td>
<td>I am XX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>我非常高兴跟大家一起在这个地方工作。</td>
<td>I am very happy to work with you here.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>很期待跟大家有一个很好的互动。</td>
<td>I am looking forward to a good interaction with you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>谢谢大家。</td>
<td>Thank you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>(鞠躬) 请大家多多关照。</td>
<td>(Giving a bow) Please kindly take care of me.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similar to the first English self-introduction, the Chinese student bowed and expressed his excitement to work with his new colleagues. He did not talk much about himself. In the end he gave a bow and expressed his hope that others would kindly take care of him in the future.

Despite the visible humbleness exhibited by the two Chinese students, one Chinese student still thought that their humbleness was not enough. Here is her comment:

(They both said that they were looking forward to working with others. I felt they were putting themselves in an equal position with the old employees. Usually, you should say, I have a lot to learn from all of you. If you say “I look forward to working with others”, others would think: what? How can you expect to work with old employees as a new person here? You should start with learning first. So this statement should not be mentioned. You can say, I just graduated from a university, and I am still not familiar with this trade. I will learn from you all. This
The Chinese student’s comment further highlighted the expectation that new employees are considered lower than old employees because of their lack of experience and seniority. New employees should stress that point and express their wish to learn from the old employees. In a word, being humble and modest is the right image that new employees should project for themselves in Chinese culture. It helps make good impression and pave the way for building good relationship.

The Chinese cultural expectation of status difference between old and new employees is more salient when put in contrast with the American students’ self introduction in American context. Following is an American student’s self-introduction. She imagined herself getting a new job as a website designer in an American company.

**Line Performance in English**

1. (Going to the front of the classroom)
   Hi, I’m XX.
2. Um I am glad to be working on our website creation.
3. I hope that I can make it a lot easier to use,
4. and bring some new customers to our company.
5. I look forward to that.
6. Nice to meet you.

Different from the two Chinese students’ self-introduction, the American student mentioned about the contribution that she hoped to make to the company. Contrary to the Chinese student’s visible humbleness towards the old employees, the American assumed a rather equal status with the old employees and she did not hesitate to show her confidence and competence. Establishing one’s importance in a new job seemed to be the priority of the student rather than showing
respect to the old employees.

The contrastive analysis of the performance of self-introductions revealed that two different sets of expectation were at work. We can say that both the Chinese students and the American student were trying to achieve the same goal of projecting a positive image as a new member of the working community. However, it was clear that the two students were following two different approaches to achieve that goal. The Chinese were trying to emphasize the status difference between them and the old employees by lowering their own. They achieved this by bowing, keeping their own information to minimal, complimenting on the old employees, reiterating their excitement to work with them, and duplicating the use of politeness expression. Contrary to that, the American student had a clear intention to project an image of a confident and competent new employee. She did not show much humbleness towards her coworkers, but instead, talked about the contribution that she was going to make to the company.

A lot of comments were elicited from the class on the appropriateness of the self-introduction in Chinese and American culture. The discussion further highlighted the different cultural expectations underlying the different behaviors. The American students pointed out that the Chinese student’s bowing was out of place in American setting, and too much humbleness and respect towards old employees projected unconfident and incompetent persona. When the Chinese students behaved humbly towards their American audience, American students commented that it was not so effective because it went against the general expectation for a new employee in American culture. In the same vein, the Chinese students pointed out that in Chinese
setting, it was inappropriate for a new employee to assume an equal status with the old employees during the first encounter and talk about one’s contribution to the company. Obviously, what are normally considered to be confident and competent in American culture could be otherwise interpreted to be arrogant and impolite. The mismatch of behaviors and cultural context could cause negative consequence, making it hard for non-natives to achieve their intended result.

To sum up, in many Chinese contexts, new employees are expected to display humbleness in making self-introduction to old employees. Some typical behaviors are bowing, duplicating polite expressions, refraining from talking extensively about oneself and giving complimentary comments to the old employees. The knowledge of the hidden culture is helpful for non-Chinese to understand the Chinese cultural expectation and adjust social behaviors, achieving the desirable goal of making good first impression in a new job in the Chinese context.

b. In Chinese culture, it is not unusual that an old employee takes an uncooperative attitude towards new employees during the first encounter, which requires new employees to utilize strategies to deal with the situation.

A big influence from the Chinese hierarchical culture was also reflected in the students’ performance in a context where a new employee asked for help from an old employee. An aspect of the suppressed Chinese culture was revealed: due to the cultural expectation of status difference between old and new employees, it is not uncommon that some old employees exhibit coldness and distance towards new employees during initial encounters. It was categorized as
suppressed culture because some Chinese students were not willing to share that with their American classmates, although their own performance well indicated that they had that expectation in mind and they knew how to deal with the situation.

**Identifying old employees’ uncooperative behaviors**

Following is a performance given by a Chinese student (CS) who acted as an old employee, and an American student (AS) as a new employee in a Chinese company. The new employee was sent by his manager to the old employee in another department to get the projection for next year’s sale. The two met for the first time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Performance in Chinese</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CS: (坐在办公室里，正在电脑前工作。)  AS: (走进办公室)</td>
<td>CS: (Sitting in her office, working on the computer)  AS: (Walking into the office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AS: 不好意思-</td>
<td>AS: Excuse me -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CS: (抬起头来) 哦。(面无表情)</td>
<td>CS: (Raising head) Um. (Showing no facial expression)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AS: 市场部吗？</td>
<td>CS: Is this the Marketing Department?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CS: 对，市场部。(面无表情)</td>
<td>CS: Yes, it is. (Showing no facial expression)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AS: 你好，我叫 XXX。（手摸胸口，表示自己）现在， 我是从-</td>
<td>AS: Hello, my name is XXX. (One hand touched the chest, indicating himself) Now, I am from -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CS: 你叫？</td>
<td>CS: Your name is-?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>AS: XXX。</td>
<td>AS: XXX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>CS: 哦。你是-</td>
<td>CS: Oh. You are from -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>AS: 我是从物流部来的，我的老板问我去拿那个那个明年的销售计划书，我不知道-</td>
<td>AS: I am from the Logistics Department. My boss asked me to get, uh, projection for next year’s sales. I don’t know -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>CS: 哦，计划书，没见过你啊？</td>
<td>CS: Oh, projection report. Did I see you before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>AS: 我是新来的。是第二天上班。</td>
<td>AS: No. I am a new employee. This is my second day at work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>CS: 哦，这样的啊。 你要那个明年的计划书？</td>
<td>CS: Oh. I see. You want the projection for next year’s sales?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>AS: 在这儿吗？</td>
<td>AS: Do you have it?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During this brief encounter, the old employee’s initial attitude towards the new employee could be described as cold and distant. When the new employee went into the old employee’s office and tried to initiate a talk with her, the old employee responded very briefly and showed no facial expression (Line 3, 5). When the new employee tried to introduce himself (Line 6), the old employee cut him off abruptly, and asked him about his name (Line 7) and where he was from (Line 9). The exchange clearly showed an unequal relationship between the two, with the old employee assuming a more powerful position than the new employee. The old employee took control of the conversation by stopping the new employee’s effort to introduce himself and posing questions to him about his identity. The discourse structure of question and answer was more or less like interrogation. After the new employee stated his purpose of coming (Line 10), the old employee did not address his request immediately. She put further question to him about his identity (Line 11), and the new employee replied that he was a new employee (Line 12). After that, the old employee’s attitude improved a bit, and she agreed to retrieve the document from her computer (Line 15). When the new employee expressed that he wanted to get the document on the same day or the next day (Line 16), the old employee did not specify when she was going
Comments from the Chinese students on the above performance were quite interesting. One Chinese student said that if he were the old employee, he would not so quickly tell the new employee that he had the document. He would say that he did not know where the document was and it would be a trouble for him to find it. When the amused instructor asked him why he would do that, he said that it was simply because he was an old employee, and the other was a new one. He said he needed to give the new employee some trouble to affirm his authority and status in the company. The Chinese expressions he used were “\textit{diaonan刁难}”, meaning causing someone some trouble on purpose, and “\textit{xian yixia weifeng显一下威风}”, meaning showing off one’s authority or power to others. Following that, a Chinese female student quickly jumped in and said that she wished that the above performance and comments would not frighten the Americans away from China. She proposed an alternative way to show off the old employee’s higher status, to ask a subordinate to come to the office, in the face of the new employee, and instruct the subordinate to help the new employee.

The performance and comments revealed an aspect of hidden culture in China, that is, it is acceptable that old employees show coldness and distance towards new employees due to a perceived importance to establish the old employees’ authority and status to the new employees. It may not sound so good, but it seems to be an expectation shared by the Chinese students as a reification of the hierarchy in the Chinese society. Attitudes taken by old employees towards new employees may vary widely, but underlying some arrogant, cold and distant behaviors is an idea
that it is more important to show the new employee an established hierarchical structure than to build a good relationship with him or her. Because of this, it is not surprising that some old employees show off their higher status, or exhibit their pride to the new employees. For a non-Chinese, it is important to learn to identify those typical behaviors of an uncooperative old employee, such as giving short response without facial expression, abruptly interrupting one’s talking, keeping posing question about one’s identity, not directly addressing one’s needs, or delaying offering help for others. More importantly, it is critical to understand the hidden cultural expectation beneath those behaviors and not so quickly take them personal. A foreigner needs to see the social function intended by those seemingly unfriendly behaviors and learn to use strategy to deal with old employees for a nice cooperation. In this aspect, the Chinese students provided some good models.

Utilizing strategies to solicit help from old employees

Following is a performance between two Chinese students (CS1 and CS2) in a context similar to the above one. The new employee (CS1) was asking the old employee (CS2) for the projection for next year’s sales. The two met for the first time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Performance in Chinese</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CS1: (做敲门状)</td>
<td>CS1: (Knocking on the door of CS2’s office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CS2: 哎?</td>
<td>CS2: Ei?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CS1: (半鞠躬走进办公室) 你好。是这样的。我是，呃，那个，呃，物流部新来的职员，然后。</td>
<td>CS1: (Bowing while walking into the office) Hello. The thing is - I am, um, the, um, a new employee from the Logistic Department, and –</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CS2: 哦?</td>
<td>CS2: Well?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 5    | CS1: 那个，老板他让我过来拿一下东西，我叫 XXX。(两臂夹紧，两手对握在胸前) | CS1: Um, the boss sent me here to get something. My name is XXX. (Holding her two arms tightly in front of her, with both
CS2: (Standing up) Oh, Xiao X, nice to meet you. (Holding a hand out)
CS1: (Bowling, and shaking CS2’s hand with both hands)
CS2: What does he want?
CS1: He wants the projection, um, the projection for next year’s sale.
CS2: Oh.
CS1: It might be here.
CS2: Let me look for that for you.
CS1: (Moving her body together with CS2, while keeping a distance form CS2.)
CS2: Um, I don’t have it here.
CS1: That’s fine, that’s fine. Or, or maybe sometime when you are convenient, at a convenient time, you could help me look for it.
CS2: Ok, I will look for it when I have time.
CS1: What time shall I come over again, - to pick it up?
CS2: Fine, fine.
CS1: When you have free time?
CS2: Ok. Later after I finish sorting out the stuff, I will help you look for it.
CS1: Ok. Then I will come, come a while later to check again.
CS2: Ok, ok.
CS1: Thank you, thank you. (Nodding head, and giving a small bow while backing off C2’s office)
CS1: I hope that you will continue to take care of me in the future.
that she was fully aware of the status difference between her and the old employee. The new employee employed linguistic, paralinguistic, and nonlinguistic strategies to help her achieve the goal of getting the old employee to help her.

   Linguistically, the new employee tactfully selected her words in interacting with the old employee. She did not say her name at the beginning of the conversation, but first introduced that she was a new employee from another department (Line 3). By saying that, the new employee clarified the relationship between her and the old employee, which saved effort for the old employee to explicate the status difference for her. Following that, the new employee said that it was her boss who sent her to get the document from the old employee (Line 5). By referring to her boss when explaining why she troubled the old employee, the new employee was trying to mitigate the possible unhappy feeling that the old employee might have towards her. In Line 11, the new employee said that the old employee *might* have the document that her boss wanted. She selected her words very carefully. First, she used the honorific term "nin 您" (you) to address the old employee to convey her respect to the latter. In Chinese, honorific "you" is often used by people to address someone whose status is considered to be higher. Here the new employee used it to show that she recognized her higher status and she was respectful to her. Second, while the new employee positioned herself as a messenger for her boss to trouble the old employee for help, she was careful not to impose the trouble directly onto the old employee in the name of her boss. She politely checked with the old employee if she had the document. Compared with directly asking the old employee for the document, the new employee’s question helped mitigate
the burden of the request that she put on the old employee. When the old employee said that she
could not locate the document, the new employee quickly consoled her and said it was fine.
However, immediately after that, she tactfully asked the old employee to keep looking for it at a
convenient time (Line 15). That was not the end of it. When the old employee agreed to keep
looking for the document when she had time (Line 16), the new employee took a further step by
asking her when it would be appropriate for her to come to get the document (Line 17). The
message was quite clear – she hoped that the old employee could help her get the document as
soon as possible. However, the message was conveyed very smartly. Instead of putting forward
her request directly to the old employee, she suggested that she visit the old employee again to
check her progress. It obviously gave the old employee some pressure to find the document, but
it did not sound so pushy as the new employee put the burden on herself by offering to visit the
old employee again. The new employee’s tact worked quite well because the old employee
quickly agreed to her suggestion. At the end of the conversation when the new employee was
ready to take leave, she expressed her gratefulness to the old employee for troubling her this time.
She did not forget to mention that she may trouble her more in the future. The new employee
said “yihou hai yao baituo nin duo zhaogu 以后还要拜托您多照顾” (I hope that you will
continue to take care of me in the future) (Line 24). The new employee continued to stress the
old employee’s power and higher status, and voluntarily put herself under her care. It was a good
strategy for a new employee to build a good relationship with an old employee.

Paralinguistically, the new employee used several strategies to help her achieve her intended
goal. One prominent strategy was her frequent use of hesitation and pause. In Line 3, when introducing herself as a new employee from the Logistics Department, she hesitated three times in a brief statement, “

wo shi, er, neige, er, wuliubu xinlai de zhiyuan. 我是，呃，那个，呃，物流部新来的职员，” (I am, um, the, um, a new employee from the Logistics Department.)

Hesitation is a contextualization cue (Gumperz et al. 1979) that helps convey some special meanings of the linguistic code. It is culture-specific, and requires cultural knowledge to understand and use. In this specific case, the new employee hesitated, and used the filler neige to soften her tone and show her humbleness and respectfulness towards the old employee. “neige 那个”, literarily meaning “that”, is a typical expression of hesitation in Chinese. It is true that hesitation often suggests indetermination, or lack of sureness and confidence, but in Chinese culture, it is also associated with humbleness and respectfulness, which in many cases helps project a positive image that many Chinese people appreciate. By hesitating in her self-introduction, the new employee was striving to stress the privileged status of the old employee and show her humbleness. It was a strategy that the new employee used for building good relationship with the old employee. In Line 5, the old employee hesitated again when mentioning her purpose of coming to visit the old employee. She said, “Neige, laoban rang wo guolai na yixia dongxi. 那个,老板他让我过来拿一下东西。” (Um, the boss sent me here to get something). Again, the new employee used the filler neige for hesitation. She hesitated before she put forward her request, showing her humbleness to the old employee in order to make her willing to help her. Once again, the hesitation served to soften the request tone by adding
politeness and humbleness to it. In response to the old employee’s question about what she actually wanted, the new employee said “ta shi yao yige shichang, er, shichang xiaoshouliang de pinggu jihuashu. 他是要一个市场，呃，市场销售量的评估计划书。(He wants the projection, um, the projection for next year’s sale.) The new employee’s hesitation here was intended to convey to the old employee that she was actually unfamiliar with the thing that her boss wanted. Indirectly, the new employee reemphasized that it was her boss who was troubling the old employee, and she was just acting as a messenger for him. The paralinguistic hesitation here reinforced the effectiveness of the new employee’s effort to mitigate the burden that was imposed on the old employee. It was part of the new employee’s strategy in getting the old employee willing to help her.

Pause is also a type of contextualization cue. When the old employee was unable to locate the document and agreed to look for it when she had time, the new employee asked, “shenme shihou wo zai wolai – na yixia? 什么时候我再过来 - 拿一下?” (What time shall I come over again, - to pick it up?) (Line 17). Clearly, the new employee was trying to tell the old employee that she needed the document soon, and she was not expecting procrastination. But the way she expressed that intention was very tactful. She offered to come over again to get the document, and she paused between “come over again” and “to pick it up”. The little pause here significantly softened the intensity of her demand, helping the new employee convey her message without sounding pushy or aggressive. Her strategy worked well with the old employee as she agreed to look for the document after she finished her work at hand. Then the new employee took a further
step to specify that she would come back after a while to take a look. In Line 21, she said, “haode. Na wo jiu guo yi – guo yihuier zai guolai kanyikan. 好的。那我就过一，过一会儿再过来看一看。” (Ok. Then I will come, come a while later to check again.). Obviously the new employee meant to get the document very soon and she tried to remind the old employee to quickly help her look for the document. However, the request did not sound aggressive at all because the new employee paused when she mentioned “after a while”. The pause here made the request sound quite humble, and not pushy at all although only a short time was given to the old employee to find the document.

Another paralinguistic feature that the new employee used effectively was repetition. Line 15 is a good example. When the new employee heard that the old employee could not find the document, she quickly said, “Meishi, meishi, huozhe, huozhe nin shenme shihou neng fangbian bang wo zhao yixia, fangbian de shijian bang wo zhao yixia. 没事没事，或者，或者您什么时候能方便帮我找一下，方便的时间帮我找一下。” (That’s fine, that’s fine. Or, or maybe you could help me look for it at a time that is convenient for you, at a convenient time, help me look for it.) In this short response, the new employee made three repetitions. First, she said “that is fine” twice, then she said “or” twice, and finally she repetitively stressed “at a convenient time”. Like the previously mentioned duplication of “thank you”, the repetitions here served to soften the tone of the new employee’s request, showing her humbleness while sticking to her agenda. It is a polite way to ask for help in the Chinese language.
In addition, the new employee used body language effectively to achieve the goal of getting the old employee to help her. In Line 3, she approached the old employee with a half bow, and as she introduced herself and stated her reason for coming to see the old employee, she held her two arms tightly inward with two hands clenched in front her chest. When the old employee offered her a hand, the new employee gave a deep bow and shook her hand with both hands. In Chinese culture, these body gestures are often perceived as humble and self-restrained, which was exactly the image that the new employee tried to project for herself to the old employee. Later an American student voiced his observation of a difference in shaking hands between Chinese and Americans. He said that when Americans shake hands, they often stand still, straight upright, while Chinese like to bow when shaking hands with others. In Line 13, when the old employee was helping the new employee look for the document, the new employee was also moving her body with her as if she was getting ready to offer a helping hand. The new employee’s eyes closely followed the old employee, and she moved back and forth together with the old employee. The new employee’s synchronizing movement with the old employee indicated that she did not want to be perceived as a bystander watching the old employee doing things for her. She tried to show that she was also giving efforts, ready to give a hand to the old employee. That may also help the new employee leave a good impression on the old employee, who would be more willing to help her. In the end, when the new employee was leaving the old employee’s office, she gave a small bow to the old employee while backing off the old employee’s office. This body gesture showed her consistent humbleness towards the old employee, and also her gratitude to
the latter.

To sum up, through strategic use of linguistic, paralinguistic and non-verbal features of Chinese, the new employee was successful in getting the old employee to help her look for the document she wanted, and more importantly leaving a rather good impression on the old employee. The new employee did not state her intention straight out, but conveyed it successfully to the old employee, who agreed to help her within a suggested short time. The two Chinese students’ behaviors showed that they shared an expectation of a new employee’s humbleness and respectfulness towards an old employee. The new employee’s action complied with that expectation, so she got what she wanted.

**Contrastive analysis with the American norm**

The Chinese behaviors and underlying expectation became more evident when compared with the American students’ performance. Different from the Chinese student’s humbleness, the American students displayed a “casual and informal” style in performing interaction between the new and old employee. Instead of emphasizing the status difference between the two, the American students tried to gloss over the difference. Several American students even said that they would not readily reveal their identity as a new employee when dealing with old employees. Furthermore, they would focus more on getting what they want than building a good relationship with a person from a different department. Following is a performance given by two American students. Similar to the previous context, the new employee went to an old employee in another department for a document on sales projection.
Line Performance in English
1 AS1: (walked into the old employee’s office, with two hands in the pockets of her jeans.) Hi.
2 AS2: Hey, what’s up?
3 AS1: I am new here. I was wondering if you could help me with something.
4 AS2: Sure. What do you need?
5 AS1: I am supposed to get the projection for next year’s sales. My boss wants me to get that. Would you be able to help me with that?
6 AS2: Who is your boss?
7 AS1: Tom.
8 AS2: Tom. Projection for next year’s sales. I don’t know. How soon do you need that?
9 AS1: Hopefully by tomorrow.
10 AS2: Hopefully by tomorrow. I think I will be able to do that. Will you stop by and pick it up?
12 AS2: Ok, I will have that ready for you. What time do you want to stop by?
13 AS1: Ah, three? Is that O.K?
14 AS2: Three is good.
15 AS1: Alright. Well, thank you, I will see you then.
16 AS2: No problem.

In the above interaction, the American student who acted as the new employee did not show much humbleness to the old employee. She went into the old employee’s office and directly asked him for help. She put her hands in her jeans’ pocket, looking very informal (Line 1). Also the old employee responded to her request in a direct way. He asked her how soon she needed (Line 8), and when she would stop by and pick it up (Line 10). The two persons interacted to mainly fulfill the task on hand, rather than affirming their relative status or building a relationship with each other. The new employee did not even mention her name, and the old employee did not bother to ask. Both used English in a casual and informal style and no
remarkable difference was identified between the two’s verbal behaviors. Obviously the American students were operating another set of expectation for the relationship between old and new employees, which was different from that in the Chinese students’ performance. While the Chinese students tried to distinguish the status of old employees and new employees, the American students try to equalize the two, at least on the surface. The two different expectations explained the humbleness and indirectness displayed by the Chinese students, and the casual and informal style of interaction exhibited by the American students. Both performances received overwhelmingly approving comments from the students with the same cultural background. Thus it can be concluded that the expectations are culture-specific, and culturally shared. Certainly, it would be wrong to expect all Chinese or Americans behave in the same manner in viewing the relationship between new and old employees, but it can be claimed with some certainty that many Chinese and Americans are familiar with their respective cultural expectation about the relationship, and they may apply it to their own behaviors or to their interpretation of other’s behaviors. Understanding the cultural specific expectation, a foreigner would have better chance to avoid misunderstanding caused by mismatching cultural expectation and cultural context.

c. There is a shared expectation among the Chinese students that some higher-positioned

Chinese can be difficult to deal with if no networking is done beforehand.

The hidden culture was not introduced by the instructor, but acted out by the Chinese students when they were asked to perform the role of Chinese government officials or school administrators who were interacting with the people requesting help from them. The context
designed by the instructor by no means suggested the difficulty in dealing with the 
higher-positioned Chinese, but the Chinese students’ performance clearly showed that, revealing 
their internal expectation of the role’s social behaviors in China. In the performance, the 
government officials and the school administrators treated their lower-positioned interlocutors 
rather coldly and showed little cooperation in addressing their needs.

In the following performance, the assigned context was in a Chinese university. An American 
graduate student was visiting the dean of an institute of the university and expressed his desire to 
get an internship in the institute. A Chinese student (CS1) performed the role of the American 
graduate student, and a Chinese visiting scholar (CS2) played the role of the Chinese dean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Performance in Chinese</th>
<th>English translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CS1: (作敲门状)</td>
<td>CS1: (Knocking on the door)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CS2: （坐在桌前）请进。</td>
<td>CS2: (Sitting at the desk) Come in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CS1: (鞠躬，走进房间)哎，王院长是吧？</td>
<td>CS1: Ei, are you the Dean Wang?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CS2: 啊，嗯，你是要找谁？</td>
<td>CS2: Ah, en, who are you looking for?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CS1: 那个，我是那个XX州立大学的一个学生。嗯那个我，我今年想到你们那个学校来实习，呆一段时间，嗯-不知道行不行？</td>
<td>CS1: Ah, I am a student from, ah, the XX State University. En, I am hoping to find an internship in your, ah, institute, for a period of time. En, I don’t know if it is possible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>CS2: 嗯，你没到办公室找小李吗？</td>
<td>CS2: En, why don’t you go to the office for Xiao Li?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CS1: 嗯，我刚刚去了。他说过了，要得您同意才行。嗯，这是我的研究的一个报告。（递给院长）那个您可以看一下。</td>
<td>CS1: En, I went there just now. He told me that I need to get your permission. En, this is a report of my research. (Handing the report to the dean) Would you please take a look at it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>CS2: 恩，我看看。（翻看）</td>
<td>CS2: Well, let me take a look. (Turning pages)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>CS2: 嗯，那你这个事我知道了。嗯，嗯，等我下去以后再研究研究。有什么结果你去问小李就行了。</td>
<td>CS2: Well, now I know it. En, en, we need to discuss about it. You may check with Xiao Li for the result.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CS1: Oh, ok, so shall I call the telephone number in your office?

CS2: En, you’d better check with Xiao Li. I will inform him about the result.

CS1: Oh, good, good. Thank you very much for your help.

After the performance, the Chinese students quickly commented that the visiting scholar’s act was very close to the reality. A close analysis of the interaction revealed the dean’s rather cold attitude towards the graduate student, and the student’s strategies in dealing with that awkward situation.

When the student entered the dean’s office, she first tried to confirm the dean’s identity. She mentioned the dean’s name and title, ending with a question marker (Line 3). While doing that, she bowed to the man to show her respect to him. However, instead of answering her question, the dean asked her who she was looking for (Line 4). Apparently, the dean understood the student’s question, so any possible misunderstanding on the part of the dean could be eliminated.

Despite that, the dean gave an irrelevant response to the student’s question. He did not say whether he was the dean or not, but asked the student who she was looking for. According to Gricean Cooperative Principles (Grice, 1975), the dean’s response violated the Maxim of Relevance because it is irrelevant to the student’s question. We can see that the dean was not cooperating with the student at this point, and he deliberately did not answer her question. In term of the body language, the dean did not make much eye contact with the student during the interaction. As he was sitting at his desk, he was mostly looking downward instead of upward at
the student who was standing there. This gesture also sent out a message that the dean was not so willing to cooperate with the student. By a common standard, the dean’s verbal and nonverbal behaviors could be viewed as rude and arrogant. Nevertheless, it typically demonstrated an attitude with which some higher-positioned Chinese deal with their lower-positioned interlocutors who do not have any connection with them.

On the part of the Chinese student, she seemed to have an expectation of that as she did not show much confusion or embarrassment. She went on to introduce herself and the purpose of her visit, with full humbleness and respectfulness. She hesitated a few times, and used the filler “neige 那个” for several times (Line 5). As mentioned before, hesitation and pause are two prominent paralinguistic features in Chinese language that can help convey humbleness and respectfulness of the speaker. However, that did not make the dean change his attitude much. Instead of directly addressing the student’s request, the dean questioned her why she did not go to the office and talk with a staff member (Line 6). The question was a rhetorical one, implying a critical meaning that the student should not have come to bother him. It also served as a reminder to the student that as a dean, he was a high-positioned administrator in school and she should not have expected him to take care of her personal request. The dean continued to treat the student coldly. Nevertheless, the student was not discouraged by the dean’s attitude, and she explained she had talked with the staffer who sent her to the dean (Line 7). Then she took a further step and submitted her research report to the dean (Line 7).
After skimming the report, the dean gave a very diplomatic response. He acknowledged that he had known the student’s matter, and he said that he would study it when he was “going down” (Line 9). Here “going down” may mean that he was going downstairs to meet other staffers in the main office, or may metaphorically mean that he went down to a lower-level administrators for a meeting. Both interpretations stressed his privileged status as a dean who either had his own office upstairs or met his subordinators occasionally. However the dean did not specify when he was going to do that. He used the expression “yanjiu yanjiu 研究研究”, literally meaning “to study it”. Anybody who is familiar with Chinese culture should know that expression quite well. It was frequently used as a diplomatic reply with connotative meanings ranging from “we need time to study it”, to “it is a difficult matter”, or “sorry, we will not deal with it”. The expression serves the function as hedging, giving the speaker a maximal flexibility to deal with a matter on hand. Its ambiguous meaning made the expression very popular, particularly among those Chinese government officials and administrators. Following that, the dean asked the student to check with the staffer for the result (Line 9). Again he reminded the student that he was the dean, and he should not be contacted by her for the result. The Chinese student seemed to be quite clear about the ambiguous meaning of the dean’s reply, and had a concern that the dean was hedging and her request may be neglected. She knew that the dean was the decision maker, so she asked if she could call the dean directly to check the result (Line 10). The student conveyed her request very politely. However, the dean flatly rejected her suggestion and insisted that she contact the staffer for the result (Line 11). Finally, the student had to accept that and withdrew
politely (Line 12). Throughout the performance, the dean showed a consistent cold attitude
towards the student, and the student continually used strategies to try to get help from the dean.

Several American students expressed their perplexity about the performance. They asked
about the meaning of “研究研究” and wondered why the dean was uncooperative. The Chinese
students analyzed that the dean perceived that his position was much higher than that of the
student, and he did not want to deal with the student in person. He was not so happy that the
student came to see him because he felt that it should be his subordinate to deal with the matter.
The American students eagerly asked what they should do if they encounter an uncooperative
administrator in China. The Chinese students suggested that they build *guanxi* 关系 first,
meaning networking with Chinese to build up a good relationship with the administrator. The
usual channel is to know someone in the person’s inner group, and through his or her
introduction or recommendation, get to know the person and become connected to him or her. If
the student had networked with the dean before she went to visit him, the situation could have
been a lot better. The administrator’s cold attitude may be replaced by a more friendly and
cooperative one. All Chinese students agreed that building *guanxi* is very important in Chinese
culture. People in China often seek to build *guanxi* before they talk about business. This is
somewhat different from American culture which is often more task-oriented. Chinese culture is
more *guanxi*-oriented.

Aside from showing the great influence of the hierarchical concept, the performance also
revealed a hidden part of Chinese culture: some Chinese people followed dual interactive pattern
with members from *inner group* and *outer group*. For some reasons, the concept of inner group and outer group has been deeply ingrained in Chinese culture, exerting a great influence on people’s social behaviors. Inner group refers to a network in which people are connected to each other by certain relationship. It may include family members, relatives, friends, colleagues, and so on. Outer group refers to people who are not related by any means. Generally speaking, people’s attitude towards members of inner group is caring, informal, friendly, and sincere, while that towards members of outer group is distant, formal, and maybe unfriendly and uncooperative. To have a smooth operation in the Chinese culture, a person must be familiar with the concept of hierarchy and the concept of inner group vs. outer group, and learn to build *guanxi*. It is not to say that these concepts do not exist in other cultures, but they play more important role in Chinese culture. Ignoring them would cause bad consequence.

**d. In Chinese culture, it is common that people make complimentary remarks on their higher-positioned interlocutor.**

**Addressing Chinese people**

The hidden culture was revealed when the Chinese students discussed how Chinese address each other for the first time. A general rule is that many Chinese do not like to be addressed by the general term of mister, (*xiansheng* 先生) or miss (*xiaojie* 小姐), rather they prefer to be addressed by their official title if they have one. Therefore, it is advisable to know about a person’s position before addressing the person and having further contact with him or her. It explains why Chinese often exchange name cards at the beginning of a meet, as opposed to many
Americans’ habit of doing that at the end of a meet. Chinese people like to know for sure the best title to address their interlocutors and make them pleased, for leaving a good first impression and creating a good start for building guanxi.

This also explains the prevalent use of name cards in a Chinese society. The American students said that they received a lot of name cards in China and they were surprised to get cards from their teachers, students, friends, and many others, which is normally not the case in America. They also noticed that Chinese name cards usually contain a lot of information about a person’s titles. Some people have multiple titles and list all of them on their name cards. Name cards show people’s status, and it is important to recognize that at the beginning of a meet.

The discussion about Chinese preference of official titles revealed a unique Chinese culture of guanbenwei 官本位, literarily meaning “officials as fundamental”, referring to the Chinese social system and the tradition of using official position as the fundamental standard to measure a person’s value and success. For thousands of years, China has been run by the authoritarian political system, and government officials are always granted higher status than any other professionals. During a very long history, Chinese scholars studied hard and competed in the national official examination in order to become officials. Once succeeded, scholars got immediate fame and power, which often brought them fortune and social status. For that reason, becoming officials has been a great honor for many Chinese and people take big pride in their official titles. Addressing a person by their official title shows recognition of that person’s status, and is therefore a compliment on that person.
The class discussion also revealed a more hidden norm that Chinese follow, that is, Chinese tend to address a person in the vice position with the full title. For example, a vice director is often addressed as so and so director, a vice mayor is addressed so and so mayor, a vice chairman a chairman, and a vice principal a principal. The affix “vice” in the person’s official title is often dropped by the addressers. This also reflects a direct influence from the Chinese culture of guanbenwei. In the authoritarian reign, the hierarchical structure is very clear and strict. Officials at each level enjoy certain power and benefits, and the higher the level, the more power and privilege is endowed to the persons. Naturally, persons in the vice position aspire to get promoted to the higher level, that is, the full position. It is thus pleasing to their ear when people address them with the full official title. It implies a flattery to them and helps them get a psychological satisfaction for being treated as if they were already in a higher position. It is a compliment because it also conveys a well-intended wish to the addressee that he or she may soon get promoted to the full position.

A few American students raised some interesting questions around the issue. One student asked how he should address a Chinese person in a vice position while the person in the full position was present. The Chinese classmates advised that both persons should be addressed by the full title. The hidden rule has been generally accepted by most Chinese, including the persons with the full title because they used to be in the vice position too and they understand the feelings. As such, except for some very formal occasions like conference or official visit, the affix “vice” is normally not mentioned in the Chinese context. It is a compliment to use the full title to
Making complimentary remarks

The second embodiment of the hidden culture was uncovered by the American students when they commented on the Chinese students’ performance in interacting with their higher positioned interlocutors. They observed that some Chinese students liked to make complimentary remarks on their higher-positioned interlocutor. However, they felt that some of these “sweet words” were unnecessary. In the American instructor’s word, Chinese students are good at deferential behaviors, but sometimes they may sound or look like “sucking up”. Following was a performance that led to the discovery of the hidden behavior. The Chinese student (CS) acted as a graduate student, and the American student (AS) acted as an American professor. The student intended to audit the professor’ class, and she needed the professor’s signature on the enrollment permission form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Performance in English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CS: (Knocking on the door.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AS: Oh, come in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CS: Hello, (bowing and walking into the professor’s office) Are you professor Jane?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AS: Yes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CS: (Giving another small bow) Ah, I’m actually the student who wanted to sit in your class. I sent you an email.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AS: Oh, yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CS: Did you get it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>AS: Absolutely, absolutely. Have a seat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>CS: O.k. Thank you. And this is a ah,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>AS: the form?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>CS: Yeah, the form. Would you please sign your name (Pointing with a finger) here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>AS: Sure.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>CS: Thank you. <strong>I am really interested in your class. It’s going to be very</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The above performance received different comments from the Chinese audience and the American audience. The Chinese audience said that they liked the Chinese student’s tone and body language, her respectfulness and humbleness, and her nice comments on the professor’s course (Line 13). One Chinese student said that if she were the professor, she would like this student very much. However, comments from the American students were quite different. Several comments were concerned with the Chinese student’s bowing, and a few American students felt uncomfortable about it. One student commented that bowing showed that the Chinese student was timid, and another student said that bowing was unnecessary because graduate students are not so much unequal with their professors in an American university. Above all, the American students felt that the Chinese student’s compliment on the professor’s course was abnormal. During the performance, while the professor was signing the enrollment permission form, the Chinese student said that she was really interested in the professor’s class and it was going to be very helpful (Line 13). Following that, the American student who acted as the professor expressed her happiness to hear the comments (Line 14). When she said that, the American audience burst into a big laughter and later some of them explained that it was because they felt that the professor’s reaction was unreal. One student even said that he felt that the professor seemed like “under the influence of something”. The comments indirectly pointed out
that the Chinese student’s flattery remarks were abnormal in the American context, and it was
can be stranger for the professor to accept it with excitement.

The point was even clearer when compared with the American students’ performance in a
similar context. The following performance was given by two American students. AS1 acted as
the master student, who asked AS2, the professor for a signature on the enrollment permission
form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Original performance in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AS1: (Knocking on the door)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AS2: Come in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>AS1: Hi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AS2: Oh, Hi, I am expecting you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>AS1: Hi, professor. My name is XXX, and I’d like to audit your class. Is that possible?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AS2: Yeah. That’s cool. Is this the form that I need to sign?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>AS1: Yeah, I just need your signature there, and there. Could you sign there please?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>AS2: What is the today’s-?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>AS1: Today’s October the first.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>AS2: O.k. that should do it. Let me know if you have more problems.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>AS1: Thank you. Professor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>AS2: You are welcome. Have a nice day.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparing this performance with the previous one, one can easily identify two major
differences: the American graduate student did not bow humbly to the professor and did not
make complimentary remarks on her. The student took a rather casual and informal interacting
style with the professor. Her performance received a sweeping approval from her American
classmates as they commented that her style represented a norm in American culture, “in and out,
and task-oriented”, summarized by the American instructor. As opposed to that, the Chinese
student seemed to be operating under two major guidelines. The first was the expectation that the professor had a much higher position than hers and she needed to show her humbleness and respectfulness to the professor. The second was that she perceived the professor to be important to her, and she needed to establish a good relationship with her. On the surface, the Chinese and the American student were all trying to fulfill the same task - to get the professor to sign on the enrollment permission form. However, the difference between the Chinese and the American student was that the former also targeted at establishing a bond with the professor. It is hard to say that the American student did not have that in mind, but at least her performance did not explicitly show her eagerness to please the professor. The behavioral difference indicated that two different cultural expectations were at work.

**e. In Chinese culture, it is expected that a subordinate should offer tea or coffee to his or her superior, but not the other way around.**

The Chinese cultural behavior was uncovered in an assigned context in an American company in which a subordinate and a boss met in the office kitchen as they both came to get coffee. A Chinese student (CS) acted as the subordinate and an American student (AS) acted as the boss.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Performance in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CS: (Entering the office kitchen, seeing the boss there) Hi, XX, how are you doing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AS: I am doing well.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CS: How was your weekend?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AS: It was alright. Just watched some football. How about yourself?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CS: Uh, nothing much special. Just relaxed and took a rest at home. <strong>So, uh, would you like to drink coffee?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AS: <em>(Showing surprise) Uh, ye-ah, s-ure.</em> <em>(The audience burst into a big laughter.)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CS: I wanna, I wanna, (looking around) get you some coffee here.
AS: Well, just grab your own, and I'll get it myself.
R: Alright.

In the performance, when the subordinate entered the office kitchen, the boss was already there. The two had a brief chat about the past weekend. In Line 5, the subordinate suddenly asked the boss if he would like to drink coffee. The boss was caught by surprise and his response showed that. He raised his head, looking around, said “uh’ first and hesitated when uttering “yeah” and “sure”. He paused there, holding his mug and not knowing what to do. The American classmates burst into a big laughter. This indicated an incongruity between the performance and the reality. In Line 7, the Chinese student was looking around for the coffee pot. Obviously he offered coffee to the boss not because he was in the middle of pouring coffee for himself or he was near the coffee pot. While looking around, he said “I wanna, I wanna, get you some coffee here.” The American students gave another big laughter as they saw it awkward that the Chinese subordinate offered coffee without even knowing where the coffee pot was. Seeing that embarrassing situation, the boss told the Chinese subordinate to grab his own coffee and he would get it himself (Line 8).

After the performance was over, the American students had a discussion on the Chinese student’s act of offering coffee to the boss. The American instructor asked if it mattered who offered coffee to whom. The American student shook their head and said that if the boss was close to the coffee machine, or he or she was in an act of pouring coffee, it was absolutely fine for a boss to pour coffee for others including his or her subordinates. Furthermore, if the
subordinate and the boss were across the room from each other, there was absolutely not need for the subordinate to go all the way around to offer coffee to the boss. The boss should get the coffee him- or herself. The American instructor stressed that American culture had a basic principle that everyone was equally capable of getting coffee, and it did not matter whether it was a boss, CEO, secretary or staffer. Another American student added that American culture is very casual. If a staffer was pouring coffee when the boss was walking in, he or she did not have stop suddenly to defer to the boss or have a special conversation. It was a norm to keep it casual in American culture.

On the other hand, the Chinese students’ expectation, supported by the hierarchical culture, was rather different. In Chinese culture, people hold an expectation that in a working unit, a lower-positioned subordinate should serve drinks, mostly tea, to the person in a higher position. The higher-positioned person should accept that service at ease. Here serving tea is more like a ritual for the subordinate to show respect to his or her superior. That was why the Chinese student in the above performance felt compelled to offer coffee to his boss although he was nowhere near the coffee pot.

In another performance, a Chinese student expressed her shock when the American student acting as the boss offered her coffee. Same as the above context, the Chinese student acted as the subordinate (CS), and an American student acted as the boss (AS).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Performance in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(The two met in the office kitchen) CS: Hi, How are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AS: Oh, not too good. I had a pretty rough weekend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CS: Oh,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When the boss offered coffee to the Chinese subordinate (Line 8), the Chinese student expressed surprise. She hesitated when she said “yeah” and she accepted it. But then she held one hand onto her chest, showing her surprise, and turned her body around and exclaimed, “She is offering something to ME!” The pronoun “me” was stressed by her. The Chinese student’s surprise was understandable: what she saw was out of her expectation. The Chinese expectation is that a subordinate offers coffee to a boss, not a boss provides that to a subordinate. Later in the commentary period after the performance, the Chinese student said that actually she was prepared to offer coffee to the boss, but she was caught by surprise when her boss offered coffee to her. The American student who acted as the boss said that she did not mind at all providing coffee to her employee. She explained that she wanted to show her employees that she was a
generous boss who treated her employees equally and kindly. She wanted to be nice to them and led a good role model for them. So offering coffee to her employees was one way that she built relationship with her employees and encouraged them to work hard. This reminded Chinese people, as the American instructor emphasized, to learn to accept service from their boss at ease, and also learn to provide service to their employees when they become boss in American culture. In traditional Chinese culture, it is important to make the boss happy to have a good career, but in American culture, one has to make the boss, the coworkers, and the subordinates happy to be successful. In American culture, Chinese also need to learn that the attitude of always providing service to the boss, not the others could be negative as the behavior can be taken as sucking-up.

f. In Chinese culture, seating arrangement at a banquet table may indicate people’s status difference.

One specific class unit dealt with Chinese banquet etiquette. Several Chinese and American students were asked to simulate a Chinese banquet. The Chinese students were assigned the roles of a director of a government department, an office manager, and a staffer. The American students played the role of the general manager of an American company, a manager, and a staffer. Confusion occurred when the students took seat. The Chinese students were discussing about the seating arrangement, and the American students were confused. When they finally sat down, the Chinese began to speak about the seating rule. It seemed that the Chinese students were not ready to verbalize the rule before everyone took the seat, but they were able to point out the errors when they perceived something wrong. They verbalized the general rule for seating
and explained the expectation behind it. As we know Chinese banquet always uses round table, and on the surface there appears to be no difference in all the seats. But in fact, there are some hidden rules that signify the status difference.

According to the Chinese students, when the banquet table is in a smaller room rather than in a big hall, the inner most seats which are farthest away from the door are usually reserved for the persons who are considered to have the highest status. Compared with other seats, these seats have the least frequent traffic, so the people sitting there are the least troubled. By that rule, the Chinese department director and the American general manger should have taken the two inner most seats in the corner that are most distant from the door. When the two highest ranking people are seated, other people’s seats become clear. They should have surrounded the two people in a receding order to the lowest-position staffer who take the seat that is closest to the door. The person who takes that seat is usually from the hosting party who takes care of the table and runs errands for the others. Since the seat is very close to the door, it is usually also close to where the waiting people serve food. A note here is that Chinese banquet is different from the western one in that meals are often shared by all guests instead of being served to each individual person. Most banquet tables have a lazy-susan turntable and waiters serve the food from one fixed spot. They do not need to walk around the table to serve, but just lay the plates on the turntable and turn it. This mostly requires the persons sitting next to the serving spot move their chairs a bit to make a room for the waiters. Also as the person sitting there has the most mobility, he or she usually takes the responsibility to take care of the people’s needs and run errands for them.
Of course, not all Chinese banquets follow that rule of seating arrangement, but it is necessary for people outside Chinese community to know the rule so that they will not break it when it is in place. In a word, developing an awareness of status difference is important.

**Conclusion**

The hierarchical concept has been found to play a big influence over the Chinese cultural behaviors and expectations. Its embodiment has been constantly identified in the students’ performance in various contexts. It has such a shaping force on Chinese social behaviors and its impact cannot be underestimated. For Chinese culture learners, it is important to understand the concept and see its role in Chinese hidden cultural behaviors.

2. **The principle of lishangwanglai**

*In Chinese culture, the principle of “lishangwanglai”, meaning a favor must be paid back, is fundamental for maintaining a good relationship among Chinese.*

_Lishangwanglai_ 礼尚往来, is a Chinese idiom, meaning favors should be exchanged among people. Literally, _li_ means gift, and _wanglai_ means come and go. The Chinese students frequently used the term to explain their social behaviors in various contexts. Particularly salient were giving gifts, offering meal invitation, and paying bill in restaurant.

**a. In giving gift, a balance should be kept between what was received and what is given.**

The rule _lishangwanglai_ was first revealed when the students were discussing about giving gifts. The two contrastive contexts designed by the instructors were a baby shower in American culture, and a baby’s first-month dinner party in Chinese culture. An American baby shower
takes place prior to a baby’s birth, while a Chinese baby’s first-month dinner party is often held when a baby is one month old. For the American baby shower, the American students prepared gifts of baby clothing, toys and diapers. For the Chinese baby’s first-month dinner party, all Chinese students prepared gift money wrapped in red envelop. The Chinese explained that nowadays in China it is a trend to give money as a gift on occasions such as wedding or birthday dinner party. The norm is that the host family spends money holding the dinner party in restaurant, and the guests give money to the host as a token of congratulations. In recent year in China, giving practical gifts such as toys and clothing to a new-born baby’s family has been gradually replaced by giving gift money.

Then the American students asked how much money should be given. The Chinese students replied that the amount is mainly determined by the local income standard and the relationship between the guest and the baby’s family. In a big city, if the guest and the host are mere acquaintance, maybe two hundred yuan is appropriate. But if they are close friends, the amount should be bigger, five hundred, eight hundred, one thousand or even more are possible. In response to the American students’ surprise, the Chinese explained that giving gift money in China is often like swapping money. One Chinese student said,

( Giving gift money in China is actually like a swap of money. The amount that you give to a person is often based on how much that you owe that person. Some Chinese metaphorically term collecting gift money as a withdrawal of a full amount after monthly deposits.)

One American student asked if a big gift money would give the recipient a lot of pressure, the Chinese student said no because either the recipient has given the giver a big gift money, or has
done a big favor for the giver in the past. If both do not apply, the recipient will simply return the amount to the giver on a future occasion, either in the form of a gift money or a big favor.

The discussion about gift-giving practice in China revealed the important principle of "lishangwanglai," which is closely followed by many Chinese for maintaining good relationship. Generally speaking, when a Chinese receives a gift from someone, he or she would roughly assess the value of the gift and remember it as a favor from the giver. If the recipient did a favor for the gift-giver in the past, the gift would be considered as a pay-back of that favor and then the recipient and the giver become balanced. If the giver gives the money as a good wish, the recipient would take it as an initiative of good relationship and remember to pay back the giver at a later time. The round of give and take continues, and people’s good relationship is maintained.

Failure to abide by the principle could hurt the relationship between two persons in Chinese culture. One typical case is giving a gift that is too small by a general expectation. Take the baby’s first month dinner party as an example. If a guest only gives 50 yuan while the general norm is 200, the giver probably would be negatively viewed by the host or others if they know that the giver makes an average income. The person would probably leave an impression on the recipient as being insincere or stingy. In the story mentioned earlier in Chapter One, the English hosts gave small gifts to their Chinese guests while holding a welcome party for them in an expensive hotel restaurant. However, because the gifts were too small or too cheap by the Chinese guests’ expectation, some guests left the gifts on the dinner table when they left the restaurant. Putting aside the appropriateness of such a behavior, giving a gifts that is too small
does lead to some misunderstanding.

It can be also problematic if favors that one takes and gives do not match. If a person receives gift money from someone, he or she should remember it and be sure to give a roughly equal amount back when occasions occur. If the person forgets to do that, the relationship may suffer. In Chinese, by the rule of *lishangwanglai*, a balance must be kept between favors one receives and gives. It is the rule that many Chinese follow in maintaining their interpersonal relationship.

However, this rule seems to be quite different from the American norm acted out by the American students. As they performed in the baby shower, the American students expressed happiness on every gift they received, whether it was a baby clothing, a toy, or a diaper. The American instructor said that the value of the gift is usually under $50, which is not a big amount by Americans’ income standard. It is no wonder that some American students expressed surprise at the idea of swapping gift money and the normal expectation of the amount in Chinese culture. Due to this cultural difference, a non-Chinese should learn the principle and follow it when they live in China.

**b. Treating others to a meal is a good way to offer a favor or return a favor.**

China has a well-developed food culture and people love to dine together. Inviting people to have a meal together is another popular practice to which Chinese apply the rule of *lishangwanglai*. Similar to gift-giving, treating a meal is also widely considered as a good way to give favor, or return a favor. A person invites another person to a meal, either because he or she
wants to take initiative to build a good relationship, or he or she wants to pay back a favor received from the invitee in the past. In the first case, the person is giving a favor, and in the second, the person is returning a favor. Both can be perfectly done at a dinner table. Around the topic of inviting others to a meal, the students had a lengthy discussion following several performances. The following was one performance between two American students. The assigned context was in a Chinese company. The marketing manager went to the financial manager’s office to get reimbursement of the spending on a recent business trip. The marketing manager invited the financial manager to have a dinner together in a nearby restaurant. An American student (AS1) acted as the financial manager, and another American student (AS2) acted as the marketing manger. Both students had lived in China for quite some time, and they were familiar with Chinese dining culture.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Performance in Chinese</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>AS1: 请进。</td>
<td>AS1: Come in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>AS2: X 经理，你现在忙吗？</td>
<td>AS2: Manager X, are you busy now?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>AS1: 不忙，不忙。请坐。</td>
<td>AS1: No, no. Sit down, please.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>AS2: 好。你今天晚上忙不忙？</td>
<td>AS2: O.k. Are you busy this evening?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>AS1: 不忙，不忙。</td>
<td>AS1: No, not really.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>AS2: 晚上我请你吃个便饭吧。听说那个附近的那间湘菜饭馆，挺好吃的。没事的话，我们一起去尝尝。</td>
<td>AS2: How about I invite you to have a simple dinner together? I heard that the Hunan Restaurant nearby serves quite delicious food. If you are not busy, we may go and taste it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>AS1: 不用不用，你太客气了。</td>
<td>AS1: No, no. This is too much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>AS2: 这个我已经订桌了。</td>
<td>AS2: I have already reserved a table.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>AS1: 是吗？你要是订了我就来吧。</td>
<td>AS1: Really? If you have done that, I will go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>AS2: 好，下班以后来找你。</td>
<td>AS2: O.k. I will come to see you after work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>AS1: 行，行。</td>
<td>AS1: Good, good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>AS2: 那--一会儿见。</td>
<td>AS2: Then, see you later.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The analysis of the context itself reflects the Chinese rule of *lishangwanglai*. Two interpretations of the marketing manager’s intention of inviting are possible. One is that the marketing manager already informed the financial manager about his reimbursement request, and the financial manager had agreed to help him. Then the marketing manager felt grateful to the financial manager, and he wanted to invite him to have a dinner together so that he could pay back the favor that the financial manager did for him. In this case, the marketing manager perceived that he owed a favor to the financial manager, so he offered him a dinner to keep them balanced. Another interpretation is that the marketing manager has not told the financial manager about his reimbursement. He considered it necessary to build a good relationship with the financial manager first. So he took an initiative to invite him to a dinner, and create a favor imbalance between him and the financial manager. If the financial manager accepted the invitation and had dinner with him, then the financial manager would owe him a favor. The situation became favorable to the marketing manager. He could ask the financial manager for a favor, and the financial manager would feel difficult to say no because he needed to pay back him the favor of having a dinner with him. In both cases, inviting the financial manager to a dinner is a good strategy for the marketing manager to build a good relationship with the financial manager.

Meanwhile, the performance also revealed two interesting features in Chinese interactive pattern in offering and accepting invitation.
First, a Chinese inviter would often find some good reasons for inviting others in order to reduce the possibility of rejection from the invitee. As a Chinese visiting scholar pointed out, an inviter was actually faced with a risk of losing face if the invitee declines his or her offer. After all, there is always a possibility that the invitee does not want to take the favor from the inviter and then owe a favor to the inviter. The risk makes the inviter try to think of extra reason to support his or her invitation so that the invitee would feel hard to reject. In the above performance, the marketing manager said that the restaurant served delicious food, so he would like to invite the financial manager to go and taste it (Line 6). It sounded quite reasonable, and it was hard to reject. Suppose the financial manager still rejected it, the extra reason would also help the marketing manager save some face. The rejection could be taken as out of some objective reasons, rather than the invitee’s blunt refusal of the inviter’s intention for building a good relationship.

Second, a Chinese invitee often shows objection before he or she accepts an invitation from the inviter. In response to the marketing manager’s invitation, the financial manager said, “No, no, that is too much” (Line 7). This response is a typical Chinese one. In English, it sounds like the invitee is rejecting the invitation, but in Chinese, it is a signal that the invitee is most probably willing to accept the invitation. In the above performance, the two American students showed their familiarity with the Chinese norm of objecting prior to accepting a meal invitation. For many Chinese, it is a natural reaction to object when they are offered an invitation without prior notice. This may sound weird to Americans, but it can be easily explained by a Chinese
cultural expectation. The traditional Chinese philosophy often stresses the importance of people taking care of themselves and not causing trouble for others. So when people are offered an invitation by others, they would first express objection to show that they do not want to impose burden on others. This objection is not a real rejection, but a polite way to express their thoughtfulness and consideration for others. The behavior has been so widely accepted that almost every Chinese knows that the initial objection does not mean refusal. Those who offer an invitation would continue to offer, because they know the other party would most probably accept the offer. In the above performance, the financial manager first showed his objection, but the marketing manager did not take it seriously, and went on saying that he had already reserved a table in the restaurant (Line 8). As expected, the financial manager agreed to go (Line 9).

Compared with the Chinese norm, the American norm is quite different. In American context, when a person is offered an invitation to a meal and he or she is willing to go, the person often accepts the invitation directly and expresses thanks to the inviter. The Chinese politeness of objecting first will cause confusion and bewilderment.

An even more interesting feature is revealed by a contrastive analysis of the American and the Chinese way of rejecting an invitation. Quite reverse to the indirectness in accepting an invitation, Chinese tend to directly express that they cannot go. Americans become more indirect. They would first say that they would love to go, and then apologize to the inviter that they cannot go. While directly expressing their rejection, Chinese often give a detailed explanation as to why they cannot take the invitation. Americans, however, usually do not like to be too specific.
A simple reason such as “I have plans” is acceptable. Following is an example of the Chinese way of declining an invitation. The context is similar to the above one. In a Chinese company, the marketing manager invited the financial manager to have a meal in a restaurant, but in this one the financial manager politely declined the invitation. A Chinese student (CS1) acted as the marketing manager, and another Chinese student (CS2) played the role of the financial manager.

<table>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CS1: (走进办公室)哎，XX。</td>
<td>CS1: (entering the office) Hello, XX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CS2: (抬头)哎，XX。</td>
<td>CS2: (raising head) Hi, XX.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CS1: 今天怎么样，忙不忙？</td>
<td>CS1: How are you today? Busy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CS2: 嗯，还好。</td>
<td>CS2: Well, it’s o.k.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CS1: 还好是吧？</td>
<td>CS1: Good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>CS2: 嗯。</td>
<td>CS2: En.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CS1: 你看今天下班有没有空？公司附近开了一家新的川菜馆，怎么样我请你去吃个饭？</td>
<td>CS1: Are you free after work today? There is a new Sichuan restaurant near the company. How about I treat you a meal there?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>CS2: 哎呀今天真的不好意思。今天我有事儿，几天之前就已经约好了。</td>
<td>CS2: Oops. I am really sorry. Today I have something to do. It was arranged a few days ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>CS1: 哦，是吗？</td>
<td>CS1: Oh, really?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>CS2: 跟我那个朋友约好一起去逛街，现在通知她已经太晚啦。</td>
<td>CS2: My friend and I planned to go shopping. It would be too late to cancel that.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>CS1: 哎呀，太不巧了。</td>
<td>CS2: Yeah, it is a pity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>CS2: 嗯呀，太不巧了。</td>
<td>CS1: Oh, really? That is too bad.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>CS1: 没关系，没关系。那我们下次吧。</td>
<td>CS1: That’s alright, alright. Let’s do it next time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>CS1: 行。</td>
<td>CS1: O.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>CS2: 谢谢，谢谢。</td>
<td>CS2: Thank you, thank you.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After a brief exchange of greeting, the marketing manager proposed to have a meal with the financial manager in a restaurant. For an extra support of his invitation, the marketing manager
mentioned that a new restaurant was just open near the company (Line 7). The financial manager replied with an interjection “哎呀”, which is equivalent to English “oops” (Line 8). It denotes something bad or unlucky. Then she apologized that she was unable to go, and explained it was because she had something to do on that day, and she made the plan several days ago. That was still not enough. In Line 10, the financial manager went into further details as to why she had to turn down the invitation. She said that she was going to do shopping with a friend and it would be too late to cancel that. The financial manager gave a lengthy explanation in order to help the marketing manager understand why she had no choice but to turn down his meal invitation. Indeed she was trying hard to reduce the face-threatening effect of her rejection so that the marketing manager would not feel embarrassed. In the above performance, it worked well with the marketing manager as he expressed his understanding of the financial manager’s situation and offered to invite her some other time.

In the discussion following the performance, the American students questioned the necessity of disclosing one’s personal schedule in order to turn down an invitation. They said that it was a person’s privacy and he or she did not have to tell others. One American said that he did not understand why saying no would threaten the inviter’s face if a person really cannot go. The Chinese students explained that because inviting a person to a meal is rather a big favor, turning down the offer would certainly threaten the inviter’s face and have consequence on the relationship between the two parties.
One Chinese student explained,

如果你说有事，为什么不能告诉我呢？如果你不告诉我，说明你不信任我。说明我跟你的关系不好。你拒绝我，却不告诉我一个合适的原因，就让我很丢面子，影响我们之间的关系。

(If you say you have plans, why don’t you tell me? If you don’t tell me, you don’t trust me. Then our relation is bad. If you turn me down, but do not tell me an acceptable reason, it makes me lose face, and damages our relation.)

For the above reason, giving a specific explanation is a must in Chinese culture if one plans to turn down other’s invitation but expect no consequence. The acceptability of the reason for rejection is critical for the future relationship between the inviter and the invitee. Some Chinese students further mentioned that lying sometimes is unavoidable when a person really does not want to accept an invitation but does not have a good reason to turn it down. A good rejection must be supported by a good excuse, even if it is a fake one.

To sum up, by the Chinese rule lishangwanglai, when one gets a favor from someone, or troubles someone for something, it is a good idea to offer to treat the person a meal to pay back the favor. Likewise, when one has done a favor to a person, he or she may be glad to accept the person’s invitation to a meal. At the dinner table, the favor is paid back and the relationship is strengthened.

c. Offering to pay bill when dinning in restaurant is an etiquette in Chinese culture, and other’s paying for you must be remembered as a favor and be returned.

The topic of paying bills in restaurant was brought up by the Chinese instructor. The rule lishangwanglai is also applicable to the situation. One note here is that in Chinese dining
culture, people usually order food together, share all meals and pay one collective bill. It is different from the norm in America where people often order food individually and pay bill separately. The American students shared their surprise at seeing Chinese vying for bills in restaurant. They said that they did not understand why Chinese had to fight to pay a bill. The students also described their experience of dining in China. They said that their Chinese friends liked to invite them to eat in restaurant. When the meal was over, the Chinese always proposed to pay the bill for them. The students wanted to know why those Chinese were so generous to them and how they should handle the situation. The Chinese provided several explanations. One possibility was that those Chinese really wanted to pay the bill for their foreign friends because they wanted to impress them with their hospitality. When dealing with foreigners, some Chinese take as their responsibility to help build a good image of China and Chinese people, so they treat the foreigners very nicely in order to make a good impression on them. They may want to show to the foreigners how wonderful Chinese food is or how generous Chinese people are. By doing so, they hope that foreigners will love China, which in turn makes them feel face enhanced. The second possibility was also those Chinese really wanted to pay the bill for them because of an influence from a traditional Chinese idea that a person from a local area has the responsibility to pay for a meal for his or her visiting friends. Accordingly the person from the local area should act like a host, showing hospitality towards their visiting friend. The third possibility was that those Chinese wanted to establish a good relationship with the American students, so that later they could feel more comfortable asking favor from them. As mentioned before, a meal
invitation can be a big favor and the Chinese offer it to their American friends with a possible expectation to have a mutually beneficial relationship with them. In all these cases, the Chinese really wanted to pay for the American students.

The fourth possibility, however, is trickier. The Chinese may propose to pay the collective bill out of politeness, and they actually expected the Americans to make the same offer themselves. Offering to pay the collective bill when a meal is over has become a widely shared social behavior among Chinese. By the rule of *lishangwanglai*, whoever offers to pay the bill does a favor for others, and whoever is paid for owes a favor to the payer. By offering to pay the bill, the person shows his or her generosity and care for others, and that is why many Chinese like to make the offer at the end of a meal. When more than one persons offer to pay the bill at the same time, there will be a competition for getting the bill. Sometimes it could go on quite dramatically if all parties are determined to pay the bill. For a foreigner who is not familiar with Chinese culture, the scene may look shocking as the people seem to have a fight. However, for Chinese people, it may look touching because these people are trying so hard to do favor for each other. Offering to pay bill at the end of a meal has almost become etiquette in the Chinese dining culture. For foreigners who do not know that, it can be quite risky because their failure to make offer may jeopardize their relationship with their Chinese friends. Understanding the rule helps foreigners handle the situation in a culturally appropriate way. At least they know that when their Chinese friends offer to pay for their meal, they need to make the same offer to their friends.
With that expectation clear, the American students asked what they should do if several people offer to pay the bill at the same time. They said that they had trouble vying for a bill like some Chinese do. After all, the American students were not used to such way of expressing care and generosity. Again, the Chinese students suggested that they should follow the rule of *lishangwanglai*, by keeping a balance between receiving and giving. More specifically, when more than one diners offer to pay the bill at the same time, after the vying process, one diner may pay the bill in the end. However, that does not mean that other diners just let it go and forget about it. They need to remember it as a favor from the payer, and they need to return that favor to the payer sooner or later. One way of returning the favor is to pay the bill when they dine together next time. Furthermore, some Chinese students suggested a strategy to avoid the vying process. One could leave the dinning table before the meal is over and get the bill secretly and pay it. In that way, other diners have no choice but take the favor done by the payer.

In all, the important advice for foreigners is that they need to bear in mind the rule of *lishangwanglai* when they are invited by Chinese to have meal together. They should carefully observe what other Chinese do and follow the suit. It is important to know the common expectation in Chinese culture that a meal invitation is a favor and it should be returned in due time. It is also important to know that offering to pay bill when dinning in restaurant is etiquette in Chinese culture, and people do it to show their generosity and care. Understanding the norm is important for foreigners to develop and maintain good relationship in China.
3. Dual interactive patterns with foreigners and Chinese

In China, some people follow different interactive patterns with foreigners and Chinese.

The hidden culture was revealed when the Chinese students talked about the performance between a dean and a student (see p.73-74). The student went to see the dean to apply for an internship in the dean’s institute, but the dean treated the student rather coldly. The context was designed to have an American student go to see a Chinese dean, but the actual student performer was a Chinese. Following the performance, one Chinese student commented,

我觉得这确实是我见过的最接近那个实际情况的。（对。笑，附和）刚才我给 XX 找的麻烦还比较小，像这个是属于更高等级的。不过我觉得如果你真的是美国人去的话，可能会稍微强一点儿，他会客气一些。但是，如果两个是同国籍的人，他可能会对你很不客气。因为他觉得他的等级很高。在一个学校里能当到院长就是很高的啦。

(This [performance] is the closest to the reality, so far as I have ever seen. (Yeah – laughter and agreement) The trouble that I gave to XX just now was still a small one, and this was bigger than that. However, if it had been an American, the situation would have been better. He (-the dean) may have been more polite. But if this is between two Chinese, the dean may treat you very unkindly. Because he felt that his status was very high. After all, a dean is a very high position in a university.)

The Chinese student suggested that the Chinese dean may have taken a different set of behavior had the student were an American rather than a Chinese. Although it was presumed so, the overwhelming approval of the comment from the Chinese students indicated that it is highly possible. Some Chinese show two different “faces” to foreigners and Chinese.

Throughout the course, that theme kept recurring in the Chinese students’ performance and their comments. For example, there was one performance in which a Chinese vice mayor, acted by a Chinese student, received a representative from an American education company, acted by
an American student. The vice mayor showed a surprise when she heard that the American said
his company was very small and had only three employees. She turned to her secretary to check
some previously collected information. After the performance, a Chinese student gave a negative
comment on the vice mayor’s behavior. She criticized that the mayor did not show a good
manner to the American. She stressed that the Chinese vice mayor had a duty to be nice with a
foreigner as he was a guest from far away. The student insisted that the mayor should have
treated the American in a nicer way, regardless of the prospect of future cooperation.

Several American students also made their observation regarding how they were treated in
China. The students expressed surprise at meeting some Chinese who treated them extremely
nicely although they barely knew each other. For example, on his first flight to China, one
American student had trouble with his luggage. Fortunately one Chinese on the same flight
offered him generous help. Later he wrote in his cultural journal,

Fortunately, one passenger on the same flight was also in the luggage office. That night, he
not only let me use his cell phone, but also sent me to the dormitory. Despite my opposition,
he paid the (taxi) fare. Later I was thinking, at JFK airport it would be rare to meet such a
generous person. Why did this man help me so generously? Is this the Chinese attitude
towards foreigners? Or was he a friendly person by nature? Maybe both were true.)

The American student noticed that the Chinese man’s generous behavior towards him was
incredible. It was beyond his expectation because he felt that few Americans would do the same.
The Chinese students also said that such generosity was very rare among Chinese, particularly
when people did not know each other. They reminded American students to take extra caution when communicating with strangers in places like train stations or bus stations in China. These places have been perceived to be quite dangerous with thieves and swindlers.

The Chinese students generally agreed that it is common to see some Chinese treating foreigners and their fellow Chinese in different ways. In many occasions, their treatment to foreigners is better than that to Chinese. The underlying reason is quite complicated. It may have to do with the concept of “face” and “collectivism”. Many Chinese consider it important to make foreigners have a good impression of China and Chinese, which in turn make them feel face enhanced. When interacting with foreigners, some Chinese would quickly assume themselves as representing their home country and the whole nation, and take as their responsibility to show their best side to the foreigners. They believe that their friendliness and hospitality would help foreigners feel good about China and its people. As such, it is not surprising that some Chinese treat foreigners in a better way than they treat people from their own ethnic group.

However, it would be wrong to assume that foreigners would always get a better treatment than Chinese in China. One performance revealed that foreigners could be put in a disadvantageous position in some Chinese contexts. The designed context was a minor car accident involving two cars. One driver braked his car suddenly to avoid a jay walking pedestrian, and the car behind it collided into its bumper. The two drivers argued about who was responsible for the accident, and who should make the compensation. The authenticity of the context was affirmed by the Chinese students who shared a perception that in China, small car
accidents are often resolved through arguing or even verbal fight. Many Chinese get mad at seeing their car scratched or damaged. Instead of resorting to their insurance company for help, many Chinese like to resolve the accident by themselves. In many cases, the police would even encourage the drivers to do so. Therefore, in China it is a common scene that people argue or have verbal fight following a car accident. On the surface, it looks like both parties are venting their anger, but it is actually the way that these Chinese negotiate with each other for their respective interest. When the Chinese students performed, they all displayed their skills of arguing and having verbal fight. They talked loudly, spoke fast, asked rhetorical questions, and used scathing words to criticize each other. With the mediation of the spectators, the two drivers finally reached an agreement regarding compensation after a heated argument.

Nevertheless, when later some American students tried to imitate the Chinese students’ arguing and verbal fighting in their attempt to resolve a car accident, the Chinese instructor and the students quickly stopped them. The strategy may work well with Chinese, but not with foreigners. The main reason is that in China, an argument is often witnessed by many spectators, and their opinion often has a big influence on the result of the argument. When a verbal fight is going on, some bystanders may exchange their thoughts based on what they see and hear, and gradually a general opinion may take shape. Some spectators may finally jump in and give their opinion to the arguing parties. That may speed up the resolution of the issue as the arguing parties weigh their advantage or disadvantage by considering how much support they get from the spectators. Generally speaking, spectators’ mediation is helpful for resolving an argument.
However, when an argument or verbal fight involves foreigners, the spectators’ participation may cause some bad consequence for the foreigners. For some political and historical reasons, many Chinese are sensitive about the open conflict between Chinese and foreigners. Those who hold the fundamental nationalism tend to lose their ability to make sensible judgment and quickly take a stand to support the Chinese and oppose the foreigners. Therefore, it is dangerous for foreigners to have an argument or verbal fight with Chinese in a public place. That is why the Chinese instructor and students quickly stopped the American students from learning how to argue or have a verbal fight with Chinese. For foreigners, the most important thing is to avoid any argument or verbal fight with Chinese in the public place. The best strategy to resolve a dispute over a car accident is to call the police, or the insurance company, or get their Chinese friends to the scene as soon as possible.

The hidden culture revealed here is that some Chinese take different behaviors with foreigners and Chinese. It is important for a non-Chinese to build that expectation and choose their behaviors carefully.

4. Higher tolerance for smaller personal space and interpersonal distance

There seems to be a cultural difference in perception of personal space and interpersonal distance.

The issue about the personal space and interpersonal distance was brought up by the American students when commenting on the Chinese students’ performance in a context where a graduate student was approaching an American professor for help. The context was mentioned
previously, but the performance was a different one. In the following performance, two Chinese students acted as a master student and a professor in an American university. The student wanted to audit the professor’s class and needed his signature on the enrollment permission form.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Performance in English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>CS1: (Knocking on the door)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>CS2: Oh, come in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>CS1: (Giving a small bow, and walking to CS2’s desk). Hi. Professor X. My name is XXX, and I’m from the department of East Asian languages and literatures. Ah, I want to take your class this quarter, and I need your signature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>CS2: So you were the one who contacted me?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>CS1: Yeah, I emailed you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>CS2: (Standing up, and offering hand) How are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CS1: Oh, I’m fine. How about you today?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>CS2: Good, good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>CS1: O.K.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>CS2: (Sit down again) So you need my signature?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>CS1: Yes (Placing the form in front of CS2, bending over CS2, and pointing at the place for signature with her index finger)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>CS2: (Signing) And today is October first?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>CS1: Oh, yeah. (Continuing bending over CS2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>CS2: O.K. Great. So why do you want to take this class?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>CS1: (Bending over CS2 with both arms placing on CS2’s desk supporting her upper body) Oh, yeah. I think it’s a-, I am doing my dissertation now, and I think your class just, just fits my need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>CS2: O.K, great. So there you go.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>CS1: Oh, it’s all set? (Taking the form)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>CS2: Yeah.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>CS1: Oh, thank you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>CS2: You are welcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>CS1: Have a good day. Bye. (Leaving)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>CS2: Bye.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The CS1’s posture received a lot of comments from the American students. The first comment was that it appeared “aggressive” when the Chinese student placed the form in front of
the professor and tapped on the places for signature with her index finger. The commenter said that it would be better if she had waited to show the place when the professor asked where to sign. If the professor did not need such a help, the student should not take an initiative to show the place. Interestingly, two other Chinese students displayed a similar behavior in their respective performance. When they heard the comments, they expressed a big surprise. The Chinese students said that they pointed out the place for signature because they wanted to help the professor by making it easier for him to sign. They had not expected that it made the American students feel uncomfortable.

The second comment on the student’s posture was that it was inappropriate for a student to bend over the professor with such a close distance from him. An American student said that he felt that the Chinese student should have backed up a little bit or sat down across the professor. He felt that bending over the professor created a pressing atmosphere as if the student were looking over the professor’s shoulder. It would make an American feel uncomfortable. When the performing student heard about the comment, her first response was to ask if it was true that she behaved so. She seemed to be completely unaware that she was so close to the professor. After the American instructor imitated her posture by leaning over the desk so much that she had to support her upper body with two arms on the desk, the student recognized her behavior and saw the point raised by the Americans. The instructor advised that the student keep a larger distance from the professor.
The student discussion on postures bought out an interesting point on the appropriateness of physical distance between unfamiliar people in different cultures. It seemed that the Chinese students and the American students had somewhat different perception and feeling about the personal space and physical interpersonal distance.

Another issue brought afore was related to the synchronizing movements in different cultures. Like one performance described previously, when a Chinese new employee asked an old employee for help, the Chinese student moved together with the old employee in looking for a document in her office. In that context, the new employee’s syncing movement had more metaphorical meaning rather than practical function. As the new employee was not familiar with the old employee and her office, she could not offer any real help to the old employee in searching for something in her office. However, the new employee moved with her anyway because she did not want to show that she was just standing idle there doing nothing while the old employee was busy helping her. She wanted to show to the old employee that she was also giving effort to participate in whatever she was doing, and she was ready to offer a hand whenever it was needed. Synching movement like this was intended to serve to reduce the burden that one had to impose on others by asking them for help. In the above context between a graduate student and a professor, three Chinese students all showed a similar behavior of bending over the professor and pointing out the places for signatures. Moreover, they kept that posture while the professor was signing the form. The Chinese students’ behaviors could be interpreted as their effort to synchronize with the professor to try to make it easier for him/her to sign the
form. The Chinese students perceived that showing the professor the places to sign would help reduce the burden of the professor’s work, so they took initiative to bend over the professor and give instruction as to where to sign. They continued to keep themselves physically close to the professor because they wanted to watch carefully if the professor encountered any problem. They were getting ready to offer help and they observed their interlocutor very closely. The short physical distance between the student and the professor received different interpretations from the Chinese and the American students. The Chinese students considered it natural because they perceived it as a well-intended gesture for offering help, and as a demonstration of thoughtfulness and consideration. The American students, however, felt that keeping such a small distance with the professor was impolite and aggressive. They insisted that each individual should have a personal space, and it must not be intruded upon.

The two different interpretations reflected two different cultural expectations, and the underlying theme was that personal space was defined rather differently in Chinese and American culture. Keeping the physical distance short between two unfamiliar persons is more acceptable with Chinese in that it could signify care and attention, than in American culture where personal space is more valued and protected.

Some American students also noticed the different perception of personal space when they were visiting China. Into his cultural journal, one American student wrote about his uncomfortable feeling about some Chinese people getting too close to him. The journal entry was written in Chinese.
I encountered a perplexing problem when I was interviewing the Chinese students today. I went back to sit on my favorite bench and waited for the students to come. I was not sure why, but sometimes when I sat with my Chinese interviewees on a bench, some of them sat very close to me. Even as I moved to the left side of the bench, the Chinese student would sit in the middle, with his leg touching mine. I could not help feeling uncomfortable. What is the reason for that? My guess is that China has such a huge population that people are living in narrow space and the distance between people is thus very small.

The American student voiced his confusion about the Chinese students’ sitting too close to him. The unintentional physical contact made him feel rather uncomfortable. Fortunately, he did not take it personal by giving a value judgment on the behavior. He guessed the reason, and maybe his guess was right. But one possible reason that he may not be aware was that maybe the Chinese students were trying to show their attention to him and hoping to follow his interview questions better. By sitting close to him, they could better observe him, understand him, and better cooperate with him. The students were using their Chinese cultural expectation about personal space and interpersonal distance and were comfortable with sitting close together. They may not have been aware that American student was uncomfortable with that because he had a different expectation of personal space.

Another American student mentioned his confusion when he was hosting party in China. He invited his Chinese friends to his place and everyone seemed to have a good time. However, when it was getting late, the problem occurred. He found that it was very hard to get his Chinese friends to leave. Every time when he came up with a good reason to end the party, his Chinese
friends would persuade him to continue staying and playing. They played cards, drank beer, and chatted, and he was stuck there not knowing how to make them leave. It often ended with his Chinese friends hanging around in his place for the whole night and they finally took leave when everyone was completely exhausted. The American student’s experience was another example of the Chinese concept of personal space and interpersonal distance. His Chinese friends took him as a friend, or an inner group member. They took their interpersonal distance to be very small, and they could share his personal space at ease. They may not be aware that the American student wanted to maintain his personal space independent even with his very good friends.

The issue about personal space and interpersonal distance can be rather sensitive, and sometimes can be face-threatening. That was why the American student did not bring up his confusion with the Chinese students. He wrote in his cultural journal and tried to figure out the reason by himself. This also underscores the difficulty of uncovering hidden culture, and determining the reasons behind it. It is important that Chinese and Americans develop an awareness of the possible difference in expectation of personal space and interpersonal distance, and apply that to their behaviors in their cross-cultural interaction.

5. Make personal pleasure tour on business trip

In Chinese culture, it is acceptable that people make personal pleasure tour on their business trip.

The norm was revealed in a class project undertaken by the students. The instructor assigned the students to make brochure for the Chinese and American government workers who need to
receive the officials from the other country. The class was divided into four groups. Two groups worked on English brochure for American hosts, and two groups worked on Chinese brochure for Chinese hosts. Each group had American students and Chinese students. The students had a whole quarter time to work on their project, and each group gave a lot of efforts to enhance the content and the design. Both English brochures reminded the American hosts that many Chinese government delegates plan to make tour for personal pleasure on their overseas business trip. The students worked out some details to satisfy that special need. They suggested accompanying the delegates to the scenery spots, helping them shopping, taking them to museums and musical concerts. Following was an American student’s presentation on the shopping part. He spoke Chinese during the presentation.

美国人应该怎么招待他们的中国官员客人？我们认为一个很好的方法就是帮助他们买东西，送他们去高级的商店买名牌的东西。可能这些中国人回国和他们的朋友聊天的时候，他们会说，我这儿有个 Gucci。但是他的朋友会说，这个不算什么，我也有一个 Gucci。但是那个中国人会说，我的这个 Gucci 是在美国买的。那么他的那个朋友就没话说了。

(How should Americans receive their Chinese official guests? We think a good way is to help them do shopping, sending them to luxury stores to buy brand goods. After they return to China, they may tell their friends, I have a Gucci here. But his Chinese friend may say, I have a Gucci too. But the first Chinese would say, I bought this Gucci in the US. Then his friend has nothing to say.)

The American student’s presentation may be a little bit of exaggeration, but he made the point that some Chinese government officials love to buy top brand goods when they visit America.

The second group made a similar point, and explained the reason why it is so.

中国的官员代表要去旅游，要去买东西。他们喜欢去高档的购物中心，特别是化妆品，电器，还有名牌服装。这些东西在这里买比较便宜。
The Chinese official delegates love touring and shopping. They like to go shopping in expensive shopping centers. They are particularly interested in cosmetics, electronics and brand clothing. It is cheaper to buy them here.

Top brand goods are the favorite items that many Chinese delegates purchase because the same goods are usually more expensive in China because of the higher import duty in the country. Some people also perceive that buying overseas has better guarantee of quality of the goods.

The brochure project was a team work of the Chinese and American students, and the hidden culture was uncovered as the result of the Chinese students’ acquaintance of some Chinese governmental officials, and some American students’ personal experience of receiving Chinese delegates. The students seemed to all agree that many Chinese governmental delegates expect to have a pleasure tour of the host country, so they often request assistance from their hosts to visit places of interest and go shopping.

This Chinese norm, however, is often negatively viewed by many Westerners. Under the democratic political system, the governmental officials are not allowed to spend public money on personal pleasure tour. Business trip is narrowly defined as a trip for business, not for touring or shopping. Any government officials who are found to have violated the rule would be accused of abusing the tax money and get punished. However, the prevalence of Chinese delegates having pleasure tour on their business trip indicated a rather different perspective from the Western one. The Chinese students explained that in China it is widely acceptable to combine business trip with personal pleasure tour. There is a historical and social reason behind the phenomenon. For several decades in the twentieth century, China’s economy was really bad and few people could
afford pleasure tour. For many Chinese, having business trip was the only chance that they could visit a new place. Only with the funding from their working unit were many Chinese able to afford the traveling and accommodating cost for touring a new place. The practice of combining business trip and personal pleasure tour thus became popular among the people working in the state-owned entities. The practice goes on today even when more and more Chinese can afford their own pleasure tours. There is also a political reason why the practice is mainly popular among Chinese government officials. Different from the democratic political system, China has been under the one-party rule of the Communist government. The government officials generally enjoy more privileges than the public, and they have more opportunities to get funding from the government to make business trip abroad. Furthermore, under this political system, it is not surprising that some government officials become rich and develop a taste for luxury goods. That explains why they love to go shopping in the top brand stores when they travel abroad.

While the students were trying to uncover the hidden culture, it is interesting to notice an effort from Chinese to cover it. Here is one comment from the Chinese instructor.

关于这个工作和娱乐部分, 部分表述会不会造成一个中国官员来美国并不想工作, 只想玩儿的印象? 假如这样表述的话, 肯定是不合适的。我觉得在句子的运用上面, 请同学们一定要注意到怎么能恰到好处地让人只能意会, 不可言传。因为这样的表述很明显对于中国官员代表团有不礼貌的地方, 这样的写法就已经不礼貌了。所以一定要用非常合适的语言来写它, 用得体的方式来表达它。

(About the work and pleasure part, does this give an impression that Chinese government officials come to America not for work but for pleasure only? If it is so, this is definitely not appropriate. As I see, you must be very careful in your language use, how to appropriately convey the meaning without directly saying it. This writing obviously is not polite enough to the Chinese government officials. This writing is impolite. It must be expressed in a proper language, in an appropriate way.)
A Chinese student agreed that the shopping part should be rephrased and the idea should be conveyed in a more implicit way. A second Chinese student termed the norm as a *qianguizé* 潛規則, meaning that it is tacit rule shared by everyone but never explicitly expressed. The hidden culture becomes hidden because people try to suppress it. Putting the value judgment aside, it is important for Americans to know about that hidden norm and understand the reasons behind it.
CHAPTER 5

IMPROVING THE PEDAGOGY OF PERFORMED CULTURE

The present study identified certain aspects of hidden Chinese culture that have a big influence on Chinese interactive social behaviors. The findings have some implications for culture training and culture research.

1. Implications for Chinese culture training

a. Enriching the content of Chinese culture training program

One direct implication of the study is that it provides an answer to the question regarding what aspects of Chinese culture should be included in the training of language and culture learners of Chinese. Hidden Chinese behaviors and expectations have been found to be prevalent and pervasive among the Chinese communicators, playing a significant role in their social interactions. Hidden Chinese culture is concerned with Chinese people’s daily work and life as they build and maintain interpersonal relationships, and manage to achieve what they want from their social interactions. As such, it is very important for Chinese language and culture learners to learn the hidden aspects of Chinese culture if their aim is to effectively communicate with Chinese native speakers in Chinese contexts.
Although this study reveals only a very small part of Chinese culture regarding Chinese social behaviors and expectations, it helps illuminate some fundamental cultural principles that Chinese people follow in their daily life, for instance, the hierarchical principle for dealing with people with a status difference, and the principle of favor giving and taking in maintaining good interpersonal relationships. These principles are something that a foreigner must know in order to learn to guide their behaviors in socializing with Chinese people in Chinese contexts.

In this respect, this study contributes to Chinese culture training by enriching the content of the training program and also providing concrete evidence to help program administrators and instructors understand why these issues should be addressed in their training program. It is hoped that there will be more studies on hidden Chinese culture based on real life interactions, and provide more rich contents for Chinese culture training.

b. **Recommendations for conducting culture training**

This study investigated hidden culture presented in a course based on the theory of performed culture (for a detailed description of the course, refer to Chapter 3, p.30-33). The research suggests that the pedagogy is powerful and effective for training learners in Chinese culture, as well as other cultures. Following are some guidelines for organizing and implementing culture training programs, drawn from the pedagogy of performed culture and this study.
Set the course objectives

Setting the course objectives is the most important thing for constructing a curriculum. It directly impacts every aspect of curriculum designing and implementation. Certainly, it would be ideal for a culture training program to be able to train second language or culture learners to be able to handle every social situation with native speakers in the target language context. However, the complexity and amount of needed culture information make such a goal impossible to achieve. If curriculum designers set that as the course objective, it would undoubtedly cause confusion for the course trainers, and misguide the training process. Though it sounds appealing, the goal is highly unrealistic and quite misleading.

Drawn from this study, the course objectives of a culture training program should be set as following:

Help culture learners develop cross-cultural awareness

Cross-cultural awareness, in simple words, means one sees another culture differently from his or her own. It refers to at least two levels of understanding. First, one spots different social behaviors and realizes that other people may be using a different set of cultural system. Second, while seeing another cultural system, one is aware of his or her own culture (Robinson, 1991). The two levels of understanding are closely related to each other, and reaching one level will lead to the other.

The current study testifies to the success of the pedagogy of performed culture because the social interactive performance and discussion helped the students see another cultural system at
work and also become aware of their own culture.

Here is a good example. The instructor designed a context for performance: in an American university, an American student and a Chinese student shared an apartment. The Chinese student often left the bathroom floor wet after taking a shower, and the American student was unhappy about that. He (she) wanted to bring this issue to the Chinese student and hoped to resolve it in a nice way. Several pairs of American and Chinese students performed, and tried their best to resolve the issue. The initial performance showed that the American students shared an expectation that getting the bathroom floor wet was an unacceptable habit. However, in the follow-up cultural discussion, a few Chinese students voiced a different opinion. They said that in China, many apartments do not have a bathtub in the bathroom, and that people take showers on the bathroom floor. Many Chinese bathrooms are tiled from the floor to the ceiling and getting wet was not a problem at all. For that reason, some Chinese students did not understand why the American students felt unhappy about the wet floor. After the performance and discussion, the students realized that there are two different sets of behaviors and expectations that are shaped by two different living habits. When they began to see that, they were developing a cross-cultural awareness.

Another example showing that the students were developing a cross-cultural awareness was that most students exercised caution when making cultural comments, particularly when they tried to interpret a social behavior that was noticeably different from their own. Many students learned to describe an “unusual” social behavior without putting a value judgment on it. Neither
did they take that behavior personally. They learned to ask questions about different social behaviors and frequently check with the native speakers for an explanation. They also learned to compare another culture with their own, and verbalize what they had discovered. These were all good signs of achieving cross-cultural awareness.

**Help culture learners develop a complex view of culture**

A successful culture training program should present the cultural reality to culture learners. Although certain level of generalization of culture is necessary in culture training, culture trainers must rigorously guard against over generalizing and oversimplifying the target culture. Culture trainers should train learners to develop a complex view of culture, knowing that any given culture is diverse, changing and contextualized.

Culture is diverse and no single native speaker can represent the culture of his or her national or ethnic group. Chinese culture is particularly diverse because of China’s large territory, complex regional traditions and history. When introducing certain cultural behaviors and expectations, it is important for the culture trainers to define the boundaries of those behaviors and expectations, so that learners learn a culture within its proper constraints. In this respect, the course instructors did a good job. For instance, when training the American students on Chinese banquet etiquette, the Chinese instructor kept asking the performing Chinese students where they were from, and what local culture they were familiar with. She kept reminding the American students to understand Chinese behaviors in association with the Chinese students’ hometown culture. The American students learned that Chinese drinking etiquette varied widely from place to place.
to place, and there was no sweeping rule that could apply to all Chinese contexts.

Culture is constantly changing and this is particularly true of Chinese culture. In recent decades, mainland China has undergone dramatic changes at an amazing speed. The cultural behaviors and expectations are quickly changing too. Several years ago, *xiaojie* 小姐 (miss) was still a popular term to address young ladies, but in recent years the term has acquired a negative connotation and many Chinese take offence at the term. Culture learners need to develop an awareness that culture is not fixed and monolithic.

Furthermore, culture must be learned in context. Some people take culture as a set of rules or abstract principles and believing that remembering the rules can guarantee their successful communication in all target language contexts. However, culture reality is much more complex than that. Learning culture is different from learning science in that no easy formulae can be applied to real contexts and work well all the time. Culture learners need to learn culture from what is happening in real context and internalize culture together with various situational factors. Teaching abstract culture rules to learners and expecting them to apply the rules well to social interactions is simply unfeasible. The failure of that is analogous to teaching novice players the rules of tennis and then expecting them to go out and win games. Besides, it can be also dangerous because rigidly applying rules regardless of contextual particularities may put culture learners in difficult and embarrassing situations.

An American student’s real experience vividly illustrated that. In a study-abroad program in China, the student was taught about the rule of making drinking toasts in a Chinese banquet. The
rule said that a guest needed to make toasts to the people at the table. The first toast should be made to the person with the highest status, and the second to everyone else at the table. Soon afterwards, the student was invited by his Chinese language partner to his rural hometown and attended a high school union feast with his partner’s old classmates and teacher. At the dinner table in a restaurant, the American student saw that all the Chinese were excited about their union and they were happily chatting with each other in their local dialect. He did not understand what they were talking about, but he was determined to practice the rule that he had just learned. In the middle of the feast, he stood up and raised his glass to the teacher and made a toast to him. Immediately he noticed something wrong. The people stopped talking all of a sudden, and the table became deadly quiet. Despite that, the student continued to make the second toast to everyone else, and then he sat down. Afterwards, he noticed that his language partner walked around the table and whispered something to everyone. Then suddenly, one by one, the people at the table began to toast back to him. The American student realized that his earlier toasts were a mistake, but now he had no choice but to drink one glass after another.

Obviously, in this feast, the toasting rule did not work well. Rather than being taken as good manners, the American’s toasts were interpreted as his effort to grab attention. The language partner asked his old classmates to toast back to him to show that they did not forget him as a guest there. This story clearly demonstrates that learning cultural rules independent of context does not work well because real life situations are always complex. Culture must be learned in context and learners need to build memory of culture in real interactions (Walker & Noda, 2000).
Help culture learners to be ethnographers

The culture training program should aim to train culture learners to be field ethnographers, able to conduct research on the target culture by themselves. This is because any culture training programs can only train a limited amount of the target culture, so culture learners should learn ethnographic skills to explore culture on their own. They learn the skills to identify social behaviors, interview cultural members, evaluate their responses, and make analyses for approaching new cultural behaviors. The culture trainers should guide learners through various procedures for collecting data and analyzing data. Learners should be given chances to try their skills, present their study, and get feedback.

Chinese has an old saying, “giving a man a fish is not as good as teaching him how to fish”. When culture learners have the skills to research culture, they embark on a life long journey to explore new cultures as well as their own, and they will gain endless benefit from it.

Help culture learners experience the target culture by performing themselves

Culture is not just a set of abstract rules. It is embodied in social behaviors, verbally and non-verbally. Therefore, culture cannot be learned by laying back not participating. As Walker (2000) emphasizes, “to know is to do”. People can only learn culture by participating in the target culture within which they engage in personal interaction. Culture trainers should thus create maximal opportunities for learners to experience the target culture and build memories by means of their own acting out of the performance (or social event) (Walker & Noda, 2000). The research course did a wonderful job in getting the students to act in various social interactive
contexts. The course instructors designed many social contexts in the target language setting and had the students perform in the contexts with the native speakers.

**Organize training activities**

With the course objectives clearly set, the training activities should be organized under the following guidelines.

**Construct lessons on the principle of performed culture**

The research clearly evidenced that the pedagogy of performed culture is effective for culture training. Through performing, the native speakers act out social interactions in various L1 contexts, and demonstrate the target cultural behaviors. Having exposures to the performance, the culture learners are provided with invaluable opportunities to observe native speakers’ social behaviors and understand the underlying cultural expectations. L1 speakers’ performance thus becomes the best learning materials for L2 speakers to explore the target culture. Furthermore, performing enables culture learners to experience first-hand the target culture. They interact with native speakers of the target culture, try the target cultural behaviors, and even develop a better understanding of their own culture.

**Get native speakers into the program for providing culture learners with maximal exposures to the target culture**

A culture training program should provide abundant opportunities for learners to interact with native speakers. The research course did it very well. The course was offered by the Chinese master program to help the American students learn Chinese culture. In order for the students to
get ample opportunity to interact with Chinese native speakers, the course recruited Chinese students for training in American culture. The arrangement put the target culture and the base culture together, and both the American students and the Chinese students had opportunities to socialize with the native speakers of their target language and culture. Furthermore, the coexistence of two different cultures helped highlight differences in cultural behaviors and expectations. Of course, this arrangement is only possible in a context where there are different cultural communities. For training programs in a much less diverse cultural context, culture trainers can utilize online sources and connect culture learners with native speakers of the target culture. Furthermore, there are also many ready-made materials like video, film, and TV drama, which can provide culture learners with frequent exposures to the target culture.

**Ensure the authenticity of social interactions from the target culture**

It is important that culture learners are exposed to authentic social interactions of the target culture. As most cultural behaviors and cultural expectations are learned from the native speakers’ social interactions, the authenticity of the cultural behaviors shown to the learners is a critical precondition for the success of culture training. In this aspect, the research course needs some improvement.

First, some cycles of performing and commenting lacked native speakers’ performance. Sometimes, the course instructors only called on L2 students to perform, leaving no time for L1 students to perform. This reflected the instructors’ efforts to give as many opportunities as possible to L2 students to experience interactions in the target culture context. However, one
An important aspect of culture training was missing: exposing L2 students to native speakers’ social behaviors. Without such exposures, L2 students simply brought their L1 culture to handle the given contexts, and they lost precious chance to approach native speakers’ social behaviors. Their performance was simply reenactment of their home culture, rather than a constructive process of learning the target culture. Thus it is important for a culture trainer to get learners to experience authentic social behaviors of native speakers.

Second, some performances given by native speakers were not authentic. As stressed before, no single native can represent his or her national or ethnic culture. A person’s cultural knowledge and cultural understanding is shaped by his or her life experiences. It would be unrealistic to expect a graduate student to give an authentic performance as a vice mayor or a government official. In the research course, many contexts designed by the course instructors concerned business and government sectors. However, the majority of the Chinese students did not have any experience working in business or government. When they were asked to perform as a Chinese business person or governmental official, they could only rely on their second-hand knowledge about those roles. How authentic their performances were was questionable. It was not surprising to see several Chinese students always give a similar performance regardless of roles they were asked to play. Instead of acting the assigned roles, the students played themselves as Chinese graduate students. To solve the problem, culture trainers could either modify the performing contexts according to the participating native speakers’ background, or use ready-made materials such as video, film, and TV drama to introduce native speakers’ social behaviors.
interactions. Again, authenticity of cultural behaviors is critical for success of culture training.

**Elicit the internal context from the performing native speakers**

One more recommendation for the research course is that the performing L1 students should have been given chance to verbalize their internal context that had shaped their performance in the follow-up discussion period. In the research course, the course instructors often encouraged the audience to give comments on a performance, but not asked the performers themselves to explain their performance. Thus a great opportunity for eliciting the internal context was often missed. Eliciting internal context is indeed important for culture learners to understand natives’ social behaviors. The contexts designed by the course instructors were generally simple and brief, with the basic information of time, place, roles, audience, and reason for interaction. For example, one of the contexts was given as an interaction between two colleagues. One person was criticized by the boss at a meeting for not fulfilling the sales target, and he was unhappy. He complained about his boss to one of his colleagues. The time was in an afternoon, and the place was in a Chinese company. The roles were two colleagues, and there was no audience. The students were asked to perform with the given contextual information. Obviously, there was a lot of information missing here. In order to perform, the performers must fill in the missing information by themselves, for example, what kind of company it was and how it was run, who was the boss and what was his personality, what was the real reason that the person did not fulfill the sales target, what was the relationship between the two colleagues, what was the relationship between the other colleague and the boss, what was the position of the two employees in the
company, etc. Any single piece of information had an influence on the performers’ acting in dealing with the situation, and any difference there could lead to different behaviors. The performance presented to the audience was actually the result of the performers’ internal interpretation of the context, which was heavily influenced by their previous life experience. As such, it was important for culture learners to access the performers’ internal context in order to better understand the performers’ behaviors and see the influence of the target culture on those behaviors. Eliciting performers’ internal context was thus a wonderful learning opportunity for culture learners to study the target culture. The recommendation for a culture trainer is that following native speakers’ performance, be sure to ask them why they perform so.

Provide comments and feedback following performance

Comments on performance are extremely important. The study shows that the cycle of performing and commenting is invaluable for culture training. Comments on native speakers’ performance help elicit performers’ internal context, and reveal hidden cultural behaviors and expectations. Comments on L2 speakers’ performance help learners verbalize their perceptions of the target culture and home culture, and get precious feedback on their performed social behaviors. Comments are so important that any performance that goes without comments or feedback is a waste of time. In the research course, sometimes the instructors skipped the commenting period because of the time constraint. On the surface, it seemed that skipping commenting saved some time for performing, but in fact, it wasted time because performing without commenting was ineffective. The follow-up comments are really important because they
help learners achieve a higher level understanding of a performance. It is critical for success for culture training.

An important note here is that culture trainers need to help foster a habit in the trainees to provide feedback to others honestly and constructively. Making negative comments on others’ behaviors are naturally face-threatening, and some people have psychological problems with that. Thus it is important for culture trainers to explain to the trainees the great use of feedback for their culture learning, and train them to use strategy to make comments and receive comments. Culture trainees learn to overcome their psychological barrier and given honest comments to others to facilitate culture learning for everyone in the program.

**Co-construct the training process**

The research suggests that culture training should be co-constructed by culture trainer, native speakers of the target language, and learners of the target culture. A culture trainer’s role is rather different from that of a traditional teacher or instructor. Rather than being considered as the major source of knowledge and passing that knowledge to students, a trainer works more like a coordinator in helping elicit the target culture from the native speakers and managing students’ performing and commenting. Meanwhile, the native speakers and the culture learners make significant contribution to the construction of cultural knowledge, and to the learning process. In the research course, the Chinese students were the major source of the Chinese cultural knowledge, and helped the American students learn Chinese culture. Similarly, the American students provided American cultural knowledge and helped the Chinese students learn American
culture. The two groups of students were teaching each other and also learning from each other. Furthermore, the two groups of students also helped each other see their own culture by introducing different sets of cultural behaviors and cultural expectations. In a word, the native speakers and the L2 speakers learn from each other in developing cross-cultural awareness. A good culture training program should be a co-constructing process.

**Facilitate culture training with technology**

Technology can play an important role in culture training.

First, technology can help bring the target culture to culture learners. When the resource of the target culture is limited, either because few native speakers can join the training program, or because the available native speakers have little experience in the targeted contexts, video or internet technology can help fix the problem. Culture trainers can select film, TV dramas, or other video programs and use them as resources for culture training. Learners observe native speakers’ social interactive behaviors shown on the video programs, and then perform themselves to experience the target culture. Many such ready-made materials are also available online. The internet technology can also make connections possible between culture learners and the native speakers of the target culture. By going online, people living in different geographic locations can meet and communicate to fulfill their wish to learn foreign language and culture. As we see, culture learning is never unidirectional. Both parties benefit from the communication by developing cross-cultural awareness. When an American student is learning Chinese culture from a Chinese, the Chinese is also learning American culture from the latter. In the mean time,
both are learning about their own culture. Internet can bring people from different cultures
together and let them help each other learn new culture.

Second, technology can enhance learning in the training process. One of the course
objectives of culture training programs is to help culture learners acquire ethnographical skills to
study culture by themselves. To be a good ethnographer, one needs to be good at observing,
interviewing and analyzing. These skills can be trained with the help of technology. For example,
video recording of social interactions helps learners view social behaviors with a close eye.
Reviewing interactions help learners see many hidden behaviors that are normally ignored in
daily life. The recording provides concrete evidence for learners to pinpoint certain cultural
behaviors. In addition to that, video recording facilitates self-reflection and discussion. Watching
one’s own performance helps one recall the internal context, and evaluate one’s verbal and
nonverbal behaviors in social interactions. More comments can be elicited based on that, and
more opportunities are created for learners to acquire hidden cultural behaviors.

**Incorporate language training with culture training**

Given the close relationship between culture and language use, culture training programs
should incorporate language training. This study has clearly shown that culture heavily
influences language use, and culture itself is embedded in language use. Learning the target
culture thus cannot be separated from learning the target language, especially how the language
is used in real social interactions. Language learning embedded in culture training is more
concerned with communicative competence rather than linguistic competence. In other words,
the priority of training is on the skills of using language in a culturally appropriate way.

In the research course, the instructors often guided the students to identify some useful ways of speaking commonly used by the native speakers in handling certain social interactions, and copied the sentences, phrases, or expressions on the board. The L2 students were encouraged to use the linguistic code in their performance in dealing with the similar communicative interaction. Such a way of language training is effective because learners do not learn linguistic code in isolation, but well situated in context. They learn to identify key contextual elements from native speakers’ interactions, and associate their language use with the contextual elements. Then in their own performance, they analyze the context, and once they recognize any familiar contextual elements, they retrieve the linked linguistic code that has been saved in their memory and use it to handle their social interaction. With the feedback from their interlocutors and their audience, the L2 learners evaluate the usefulness of the linguistic code and the process furthers their acquisition of the target language and target culture.

2. Implications for culture research

This study shows the great importance of researching cultural behaviors and cultural expectations. Culture is not just some information about a social group. It is something ingrained in people’s daily life, and embodied in people’s social behaviors and their interaction. If L2 learners study a foreign language for the purpose of having good communication with the native speakers, they need to learn the behavioral culture. The biggest implication of the study, therefore, is that it calls for more attention to behavioral culture. More studies would generate
more cultural findings, and culture trainers can have more resources to organize culture training programs. More studies can also generate more evidence to support the cultural statements and avoid misinterpretation and misrepresentation of a culture.

Related to that, another implication of the study for culture research is that it calls for more qualitative culture studies. Participating observation, interviewing, and studying cultural artifacts have proved to be powerful tools for exploring behavioral culture. Qualitative studies target at real-life cultural interactions, and their findings are more relevant to culture education.

The third implication for culture research is that hidden culture must be studied by contrast and comparison. Hidden culture stays below people’s consciousness, and only when it is put in contrast with a different culture can it be really revealed. As such, an ideal research site should have two different cultures at present, and involve two different groups of cultural members. The coexistence of two different cultures helps reveal the hidden aspects of both cultures.
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