
CHAPTER FIVE

RESISTANCE TO THE COMMUNICATIVE METHOD OF LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION WITHIN A PROGRESSIVE CHINESE UNIVERSITY

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This study argues that at the grassroots level of specific school communities, individual students and teachers always have their own interpretations about and appropriation of any curriculum reform launched by the state from above. The case rests on my longitudinal participant observation of how and why students and teachers in a pro-reform university in mainland China complained about native English-speaking teachers from the West.

The historical context against which this case is set is the great national reform of the past 20 years. In moving toward openness to the outside world and modernization, China needs personnel that are more independent, creative, and productive than it has had. However, the traditional methods practiced in the Chinese classroom, which are based on conservative ideologies and rote learning, have been inadequate to fulfill this goal. Therefore, since the late 1970s the education authorities have carried out a national campaign of reforming the curriculum toward a more Western-style liberal pedagogy. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which advocates student centeredness, communicative learning, a humanistic approach, and practical learning, has become increasingly prevalent. "CLT" has therefore become a buzzword, especially in modern English-language teaching in China. In fact, CLT has gradually become popular globally since the late 1970s, spreading
its main tenets that language is better acquired by learners as free, equal, independent, and rational decision makers using the language in authentic communicative contexts, in a process of discovery. This is in sharp contrast to the traditional notion that language is a set of rules that should be taught and learned by rote in the form of knowledge transmitted from the authoritative teacher to passive learners. Believing that CLT can bring about learner autonomy and creativity, the Chinese English-language teaching authority has established its reform in line with this international trend (Dzau 1990).

To speed up this reform process, hundreds of native speakers of English from countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Canada have been invited to work in China. These native speakers of English were invited as foreign teaching experts to demonstrate "advanced" CLT. They are often assigned to teach in programs jointly managed by the Chinese education authority and international agencies such as the British Council or the British Overseas Development Agency. These foreign experts have usually been granted important responsibilities, including teacher training and in-service teacher development, textbook composition, and test design, to help spread the CLT type of reform nationwide, from the central cities to the more remote regions (Hayhoe 1989). Although no official documents explicitly say so, it is generally assumed that the foreign teachers are experts or authoritative role models for the new and "advanced" methodologies like CLT, since they originate from the West, as do the reforms. In fact, they are often literally addressed as "foreign experts," a term used interchangeably with "foreign teachers." Their expert status, relative to their Chinese colleagues, is also evident in preferential treatment in their living conditions and welfare. They exercise the privilege of making independent decisions in their work and of not having to conform to the collective and uniform decision making of the institutions to which they are assigned.

Given this situation, it is logical to assume that the foreign experts and their teaching will be and should be accepted by the Chinese wholeheartedly. Nevertheless, although many of the foreign experts have had very successful experiences working in China, it is an undisputable fact that many of them have not. To cite one of these foreign experts, the situation has been such that "a large number of foreign teachers returned from China with dampened enthusiasm, feelings of disappointment and in some cases bitterness and rancor. . . . Their Chinese hosts often privately feel that these foreigners are a weird lot and wonder if it is worth all the time, energy and money they expend on having them" (Maley 1990:103).

As compellingly proven by Martin Schoenhals' (1993) ethnography of a middle school in Beijing, students' evaluations can be very useful in revealing the real state of teaching. However, relatively little substantial work has been available concerning students criticizing their foreign teachers. Interestingly, the scant literature on such criticism springs not from the students themselves, but rather from foreign experts reflecting on problems they encountered with their students (for example, Oatey 1990). Interpretation or explanation of the students' criticism backed up with the insider's knowledge is also rare (but see Dzau 1990a; Cortazzi and Jin 1996a, 1996b). I believe that by critically examining the details of how Chinese students and teacher colleagues evaluate the foreign experts, and why, we can come to understand the extent to which the top-down CLT reform is appropriated, rationalized, or resisted at the level of the school community.

Although this paper examines criticisms of the English experts, most Chinese students still regard having a native English-speaking teacher as a luxury and many foreign teachers do have a very successful teaching experience in China. It is not the intent of this study, nor is it even possible, to measure the merits of the foreign experts against their demerits in the Chinese students' eyes. Rather, one of the chapter's purposes is to point out that often the same students who have praised the foreign experts file complaints about them.

The present study is largely ethnography based. The voices of the Chinese students and teachers as well as of the foreign teachers will be presented as verbatim as possible, however limited or even possibly "biased" the informants' perspectives could be. Besides collecting and presenting the data in a naturalistic or qualitative way, I have provided some of the background or historical information necessary for explaining the opinions. My explanation revolves mainly around the research site as a community of practice with more or less shared norms, "forms of membership, and construction of identities" (Lave and Wenger 1991:123). I have close contact with the research site. After four years of undergraduate study at the site as an English major, I have worked there as an English teacher since 1983. I have served as a teacher educator and a course coordinator for two teacher education programs jointly organized by the Chinese Ministry of Education and the British Council for over ten years, and currently serve as the head of the English Department at the site. Presumably, my knowledge about this community would grant me the status of a reliable insider, or a longitudinal participant observer in a loose sense.

GUANGWAI AND ITS 20-YEAR JOURNEY OF CLT REFORM

The research site Guangdong University of Foreign Studies (hereafter Guangwai) is located in the city of Guangzhou (also known as Canton), which, with a geographic closeness to Hong Kong, enjoys many more opportunities than
most Chinese inland cities to have close interaction with the outside. The interaction is especially enhanced by millions of Cantonese-speaking Chinese overseas who are the relatives of the Guangzhou citizens. Guangxi is the city's main institution for producing qualified personnel to communicate in nine foreign languages, including English.

Since the late 1970s, the British Council and some North American agencies have played an important role in assisting Guangxi to become the most pro-reform institution in Chinese tertiary education. The English Department, which is the research setting of this case study, has received much foreign aid as well as support from the education ministry to implement various reform-related projects. Dozens of its Chinese teachers have been sent to pursue a master's in applied linguistics or English-language teaching with British Overseas Development Agency scholarships for one year in some of the top universities in the United Kingdom.

CLT had been introduced into the Department of English in Guangxi in the late 1970s, largely due to an influential textbook series called Communicative English for Chinese Learners (better known as CECL, see Li 1987) for use by first- and second-year English majors. This pioneer project is regarded as "an attempt at a thorough adoption of the communicative approach" (Dzau 1990b:7) and a very successful one (Malcolm and Malcolm 1988). CECL replaced the old textbook for undergraduate English majors beginning with the class of 1979–1981. I still remember its shocking impact as an experience totally different from what we had been used to in a classroom dominated by the traditional methods. The traditional method, which combines grammar-translation and audiolingual methods, requires students to read a short passage of classical literature (300–400 words) intensively, take notes on the teacher's lectures on the language points and grammar rules involved in the text, memorize the list of its vocabulary and phrases, then practice the grammar in exercises. These activities usually took two weeks of eight class hours each. With CECL, we were given about 50 pages of texts and exercises to cover in the same amount of time. The texts were authentic English newspapers, magazines, or daily communication. We skimmed, scanned, and listened to dozens of passages while guessing the meanings of the main ideas and new words from the context. Meanwhile, we were to participate in dozens of oral English activities of simulation and role-play. The overriding criterion was that insofar as our meaning got conveyed, our communication would be valued as successful—regardless of how broken or half-baked our linguistic form might be. The teacher's role was supposed to be that of friend, monitor, and mentor.

In evaluations at the end of the second year, half of the students praised CECL highly, saying that it had aroused their interest to learn, provided opportunities to use English, and increased their confidence. The other half, usually the older ones, criticized CECL sharply, complaining that it wasted their time and that they learned nothing solid. The older students got support from the teaching staff members who were relatively senior in age and more conservative and who were in charge of the third and fourth years of undergraduate study. Together they arrived at the decision, over the complaints of the other half of the students, that from the third year on, all students should revert to grammar study and intensive reading of literature classics.

From the mid-1980s, CECL took root and gained predominance at Guangxi. These CLT-formulated textbooks spread to the first two years of all departments with English majors. Gradually the teachers of CECL have become those young graduates who got master's degrees in applied linguistics, where CLT represented progress. Other teachers more senior in age and in position, who were more critical of CECL, have retreated from the first two years' teaching groups to teach more traditional courses (such as literature, intensive reading of classics, writing, grammar, and translation) to the third- and fourth-year students. In fact, some of the most senior teachers left the Department of English for good and founded their own department, partially due to this split in opinions over CECL. On the other hand, the textbooks have also gone through revisions since 1985: Some lists of vocabulary, Chinese translations, and more grammar exercises were added, responding to complaints from those teachers who were educated in traditional methods or were skilled in using them. Although there are still divergent opinions about CECL and CLT among Guangxi faculty members, today as a collective they tend to see CECL as a source of institutional pride vis-à-vis colleagues from other universities. Moreover, Guangxi students have become critical of the "traditionalism" of secondary teacher trainees who come to the institute (Ouyang 2000b).

Beginning in the mid-1980s, as part of the endeavor to prove that CLT was good and CECL effective, Guangxi went on to spend over ten years successfully reforming the national university entrance examination toward a more communicative competency-oriented test in place of the former grammar rules-dominated one. Guangxi has set up the first program of linguistics and applied linguistics both at the MA and PhD levels in China, and the program is now the only key national institution of linguistics and applied linguistics.

Given this background, it would be interesting to see why Guangxi students and teachers, given their identity as pro-CLT reformers, should have made complaints about its foreign teachers.
DATA AND INFORMANTS

The English Department, with a working faculty of about 70 active instructors, has hosted on average over a dozen foreign experts each year. The data for this study were collected from 1997 to 2000 as part of a larger project (Ouyang 2000a). The research questions asked in interviews, questionnaires, and focus group discussions were: 1) What do Chinese students most often complain about regarding their foreign teachers and their teaching? 2) How do students make such complaints? 3) How do the leadership and administration handle the complaints? 4) How do foreign teachers involved take the complaints? and 5) Are there any other factors the informants see as relevant to the complaint issue? This chapter focuses on the first question.

Six xuexi weiyuan, or "class committee members in charge of academic affairs," each representing one fourth-year class of about 30 students (hence representing altogether 180 students), were chosen to give a detailed report on the research questions. One of these students' responsibilities was to collect their classes' opinions on teachers' teaching twice a year. So far, these students had had nine courses taught by foreign teachers, including oral English, reading-writing, American society, American literature, organizational behavior, and British literature. All these students had had CECL in their first two years of study in Guangwai.

Of the faculty colleagues whom I interviewed, nine were finally selected to be my key informants. Among them, there were department heads, coordinators, and teachers with highly varied experience in working with foreign colleagues. Given their duties and background, they had been most heavily exposed to foreign teachers and had been closely involved in and had functioned crucially in many complaint events. I also consulted two Guangwai Foreign Affairs Office officials in charge of the evaluation, who had many routine interactions with the foreign experts. Seven foreign experts gathered in a focus group discussion with me and shared their opinions and experiences about students' complaints. The data from the students and foreign experts were in English, and other data in Chinese (sometimes interspersed with English) were subsequently translated by me.

Because of my research questions, I elicited many reports of complaints. Nevertheless, to quote one student representative:

Before I write down my complaints about their teaching, I would like to make it clear that these complaints do not apply to all of them. I should admit that some of them are excellent teachers. They are skillful in making class lively and interesting, and we do learn something from their teaching.

However, compared with their Chinese colleagues, foreign experts were criticized more often by their students. My own estimate, based on my observation as course coordinator and on my foreign experts' focus group discussion, was that about 60 percent of the foreign experts drew criticism about their teaching, while about 10 percent of them received very serious criticism (such as when students as a class wrote a written report to the dean's office demanding replacement of the foreign teacher involved). About 10 to 15 percent of foreign experts were highly praised for their teaching, with half of that number having actually "gone native," that is, having learned about the Chinese traditional methods of teaching or somehow met the local requirements for excellence (see a case below for details).

GUANGWAI COMPLAINTS ABOUT FOREIGN TEACHERS

As we shall see, much of Guangwai students' criticism about their foreign teachers and their teaching have to do with things that are not exactly related to differences between CLT and traditional methods. Rather, they are often results of students adopting the standard for ideal teachers and teaching and using it to measure the foreign teachers' teaching performance and roles. However, it is exactly my point that any grand methodology or approach is substantiated by and contextualized in such students' expectations and ideals as a major part of the preexisting practices in any school community. In addition, we can use this reality to check how the new methods and its agents fare at the grassroots.

"Just Improvising":

Complaints about the Teaching Method

The most frequent complaint, agreed upon by over 70 percent of the Guangwai students, teachers, and leaders, was the lack of systematic organization and linearity in the foreign teachers' classes, which resulted in a lack of a sense of achievement for the students. In almost all courses taught by the Chinese teachers in Guangwai as well as other universities in China, some fixed textbook is used. For this uniform textbook, every step of the lesson is given in the teachers' book and is usually followed, and a good sense of linearity is usually not a problem with students. Even in the CECL course, all the activities were detailed by the teachers' handbook. Teachers teaching CECL had spent hours collectively preparing the lessons each week, planning which parts to emphasize or skip over, the correct answers to the exercises, the pace of the lessons, and other issues, so as to "standardize" the
process of teaching and the teaching methods. The amount of lesson preparation for teachers is so meticulous that one foreign expert who used to teach at Guangwai exclaimed, "It is amazing how they manage it, and it would be extremely difficult to teach in that way for foreign teachers." (Tim Boswood, formerly the British Council senior lecturer, personal communication). As the working language used in the collective lesson planning and preparation is Chinese, foreign experts do not usually participate in it. This abstention is often taken as a privilege enjoyed by the foreign experts.

In other courses using more traditional methods (where the student representatives were in their fourth year), teaching in general was very often equated with accurate delivery or transmission of prescriptive knowledge from the teacher as an expert to the student as an apprentice. Students in these courses learn not in the form of active participation, as in questioning and performing activities where they could use or explore the language in class, but by taking notes and reviewing the lecture after class. After consulting various dictionaries or grammar manuals for almost every new word and expression in the text to be covered in the lesson, teachers transfer all those language points onto the blackboard—each with several concrete examples for illustration of its usage in varied contexts—for the students to copy into their thick notebooks. Most examinations still stress how well the lessons as discrete or countable pieces of knowledge have been learned by students, who prepare themselves for the examinations by reviewing and digesting their notes. Therefore, the quality and quantity of the notes students can get from a class is a major indicator of their capacity to learn, as well as an important reassurance of their sense of achievement and progress in learning. A department head remarked:

The most common complaints from students is that foreign experts like to talk wild in their teaching, from the south of the earth to the north of the sky; they improvise too much, and this makes it difficult for students to prepare for their teaching. This is especially frustrating for those good students: we all know that they want to take detailed notes from the lessons. Without that, they felt they had not got anything useful.

A student representative confirmed:

We are not very used to their style of teaching. Most of them only speak, speak and speak, instead of writing something on the blackboard. Chinese students, incapable of taking notes, put down nothing when a marvelous speech is over. Moreover, I find that many foreign teachers' presentation is not as orderly or systematic as their Chinese counterparts. I think it is also an obstacle for students to take notes.

“Kindergarten Teaching”: Complaints about the Activity Type

The “fun” style of teaching, which is typical of foreign teachers, is to encourage students to move around in the classroom physically through various game-like activities. The teachers would use personal anecdotes or jokes to make the teaching lively, and invite free and active participation from the students. However, these teaching methods were not well received by the Chinese students, who often thought that these foreign teachers did not teach "seriously." Students did not just complain about the oral classes but also about writing, literature, and culture-and-society lessons. One typical complaint from a student representative was:

The foreign teachers usually treat us like kindergarten kids, making us sing, dance, and interact like children in oral classes while we are wondering what on earth is happening.

It is my observation that having fun whilst learning is an idea alien to most Chinese teachers and students, who believe that learning should be hard and that achievement is proportional to the hardship endured. Chinese teachers will praise those who study hard but not those who are born intelligent—a view supported by scholars studying Chinese psychology (for example, Gow et al. 1996). Almost all primary school teachers remind their first-year pupils that learning in kindergarten can and should be fun but that the fun is over forever when they move to primary school. In other words, for most mainland Chinese children from the age of six or seven, learning is socially constructed as a serious and tough task. Since such fun activities are typical of learning only in kindergarten in the Chinese education system, they often gave rise to a feeling among students that they were being humiliated.

“They Don’t Correct Our Mistakes”: Complaints about Error Correction Methods

Most of the foreign teachers I interviewed criticized the traditional and still prevalent Chinese practices of teachers correcting mistakes extensively and of not allowing peer or self-correction. Some of them argued that errors are not only tolerable but also valuable and normal in the learning process. Despite the fact that all students in Guangwai have learned English for two years already with CECL, with its strong emphasis on fluency over accuracy in oral English communication, when it comes to writing in English, almost
without exception they insist that correction of their mistakes in the English language is an indispensable means for them to improve their learning. In addition, the amount of time that the teacher spends on correction is seen as a clear indication of the teacher's teaching quality and attitude. The exclusive power of teachers as the standard for evaluating students and students' expectation that teachers will correct them explain the common practice of denying students free access to teachers' books or the answer key; such information falls strictly within the teachers' sovereignty. It was not until very recently that some market-oriented bookstores began to sell such materials to students, which is creating tremendous pressure and a threat to teachers' authority (Zhang Xiaoling, personal communication). Even students in Hong Kong, according to a recent study (Li and Chan 1999), still tend to favor error correction from their teachers.

Thus the foreign teachers' practice of no error correction led to complaints about foreign teachers being lazy and not fulfilling their responsibilities. Two students reported:

They don't correct our mistakes. I know I have made some grammar and lexical errors, and how disappointing to see that they are not corrected with the right answers. How can I learn anything from this teacher if she does not do her job?

The foreign teachers like to give us praises as remarks to our written work, such as "excellent," "very interesting," and "fascinating"; it seems to us that all they look for is enjoyment for themselves as readers. They don't know that we don't need that; what we need is the provision of the correction that all Chinese teachers painstakingly do.

These remarks are confirmed by my own teaching experiences from 2000 to 2002 in an academic writing course, where my efforts at exploring peer review and peer feedback as a substitute for the teacher's marking encountered persistent resistance and failure.

"Self-Made Unsuitable Material": Complaints about the Syllabus

In China, teaching has almost always been centered on or prescribed by one single standard textbook. To some extent, this is comparable to the role of the Bible for Christians or manuals for novice car drivers. A unified textbook has social implications. Firstly, teaching has to be conducted as a collective rather than individual action. Secondly, decision making is not the business of ordinary teachers but of top central authorities. Thirdly, Chinese textbooks have to go through a strict censorship to exclude potentially politically incorrect content (Dzau 1990a). Lastly, standardization of a textbook makes standardized testing and centralized evaluation easy. It is also desired that, by using the standard textbook, those teachers in the less developed areas can have a more guaranteed teaching quality.

However, coming from a much more individualist and liberal system, these foreign teachers all displayed a radically different opinion about the use and role of textbooks in learning and teaching, which too was a source of potential complaint, as shown in the following excerpt from a student:

Our teachers like to use materials composed from only they know where, in bits and pieces, and we get worried about what can be learned from such materials since most of them don't seem to have a coherent or consistent theme or subject. In fact, very often they are just what the foreign teachers are interested in themselves.

The Chinese teachers and leaders confirmed the use of idiosyncratic criteria in selecting teaching materials as biased and lacking quality control. One of the departmental leaders said:

The foreign teachers usually complain that the textbooks we use are too much and meaningless for them to teach with, and they don't listen to our idea that they could use partly what is in the standard textbook and integrate into it something they think good. So they chose to have their own. But after a while of taking some extracts from here and there, they end up with using no materials at all! They use their family anecdotes, personal experiences, and anything that happens to be their interest.

To the Chinese students, who are used to the reassuring standard textbooks, the way foreign teachers use materials of their own choice could lead to a sense of insecurity and confusion. While the self- or tailor-made materials could, as confirmed by most of the focus discussion group, better cater to students' interests or proficiency levels, the Chinese teachers and students at the interviews claimed that such matters as "family anecdotes, personal experiences, and anything that happens to be their interest" should be kept for chats between friends outside of class and should not be used in class. Studies of Chinese social psychology seem to support this view in that in-class teaching is regarded as public and formal communication and thus should engage as much as possible in the real business of learning about the syllabus content (for example, Bond 1991; Gow et al. 1996).
"Biased": Complaints about the Grading Criteria

Complaint about the criteria used by some foreign teachers to evaluate students' performance, although it involved fewer students than the prior five complaints, was the one most strongly expressed by the Guangwei informants. This is understandable, since all students tolerate least well any low grades, from foreign and Chinese teachers alike, especially when the students think they had good reason to believe the criteria used were unfair, as in this case. As exemplified in a student's words:

In writing courses, some foreign teachers regarded highly those works they think [of] as "creative," "with individual opinions," or "interesting" according to their own views, and those who usually achieve high marks because of their good language and structure in other teachers' classes were labeled as "lack of opinions," or "not critical enough." So the top students in our class got not as good scores as those middle-level ones with "opinions" that foreign teachers liked.

When I confronted the foreign teachers in the focus group with this complaint, most of them did not deny it. Instead they stressed that they had the right to award marks according to what they thought to be the right and fair standard. Actually, some of them articulated that it was an individual teacher's business or authority to make whatever judgment concerning his or her teaching, once they have been offered the contract, which to them implied authorization or endorsement for such decision making. During our focus group discussion, they were somewhat shocked when I informed them that in New China, in spite of the fact that classrooms have four walls, teachers have in practice no authority in the final say concerning students' performance. The teacher's assessment of students' performance in their class is always subject to a superior judgment. Such higher-order judgment could come from several sources: political instructors (who are responsible for students' daily life matters ranging from political participation in campaigns, to social and collective activities, to dormitory relationships with other roommates, and even to matters of personal hygiene), head-teachers, course coordinators, heads of department, and student representatives; all of them could intervene in the assessment of individual cases. Should there be any dispute regarding their assessment, the superior authority always has the discretion and right to alter an assessment, often to the detriment of the teacher who made the original assessment. The foreign teachers in the focus group discussion had no idea of how their Chinese colleagues managed to align their grading closely with other colleagues teaching the same course. In fact, Chinese faculty members often discuss in groups or consult each other to ascertain what criteria should be used in their evaluation, a routine job conducted in the collective lesson-preparing time (Ross 1993).

"Not Caring": Complaints about Interaction with Students and about Foreign Teachers as Role Models

It seldom failed to surprise most foreign teacher informants that they were judged not only by their teaching performance inside the classroom, but also by their way of interacting with students outside of class, not only as professionals but also as citizens in terms of their virtue as a moral exemplar, judged by the Chinese standard. For instance, in Guangwei, Chinese teachers usually are authoritarian figures in class when lecturing, showing a serious face and focusing only on academic matters. However, they usually balance this with a much more humanistic mothering attitude after class when interacting with students in private settings. (This observation of mine is supported by many studies of Chinese leadership such as Bond 1991; Bond and Hwang 1986.) A model teacher said, "I will never give away the authority to decide what is best for them in class, in syllabus choice, in teaching and learning methods." Yet it is the good teacher's responsibility to approach students to find out what help they need in private visits and contacts, for instance in students' dormitories. Through such informal and private interaction, teachers could establish close and personal relationships and knowledge about students, and offer help accordingly. The same teacher went on to say, "I am very much like my students, listening to them as friends after class, and trying to boost their independence and self-esteem."

Many Chinese students expressed their displeasure at not seeing this in-class and out-of-class balanced teacher-student interaction pattern in their foreign teachers' behavior—for example, in responding to students' questions after class. One student articulated:

It is shocking for some of us to find out that in fact our foreign teachers don't like us to ask them questions during the class break time or after class—they indicate that we take advantage of their private time—"exploiting them," as one of them said. This is especially disappointing if you contrast it with the kind of warm and encouraging faces they show us during their teaching time; some of us even suspect that they are putting on an act in class to be so egalitarian and friendly while they withdraw into such cold selfish reaction when we approach them outside the class.
It is a well-established finding (Cortazzi and Jin 1996a, 1996b) that in general Chinese students do not raise questions actively during class time, for they are concerned that both the teachers and they themselves might lose face. Cortazzi and Jin reported that if teachers fail to answer the question, they would very likely lose credibility and authority in public, which will in turn make the student lose face for making this happen—something improper in the eyes of the majority of students (1996b). However, as indicated above, such a pattern of question and answer is compensated for by what happens during class breaks, when students actively approach teachers for individual questions. I have learned in my years of practice as a teacher that in fact most Chinese teachers embrace those questions, seeing them as positive indicators of students’ respect for their authority and face, as well as a high motivation to learn in class. As a result, the break time very often becomes a time of more intensive labor for many teachers. Often the foreign experts’ enthusiastic invitation of active participation from students during the lesson would create a very strong impression on students (and perfectly logically) that: “If you are already so friendly in class, you must be doubly friendly after class.”

Almost all foreign teacher informants considered the practice of asking questions during the break as taking advantage of their private time and their friendliness. As some foreign experts said in the focus group discussion: “I need the rest time to clear my mind”; “I had no rest at all”; “It is such a large class and they don’t know how tired you can be.” With these feelings, many foreign teachers said they were either very reluctant or simply refused to be bothered during the break as well as in their private time. They preferred to give fixed office hours, which students are not used to, for about 15 Chinese teachers use one office. Another concern of the foreign teachers about mixing with students outside of class time, one shaped by their own sociocultural interpretation, was a fear that such behavior could be suspected as sexual abuse on the part of the foreign teachers. Actually, since all the teachers and students live on campus, visiting students in their dormitories can be convenient and is conducted under public surveillance, hence there is no chance for teachers to abuse their authority through such visits.

Most of the foreign teacher informants ridiculed the notion when I informed them that they were also judged on the basis of how they comported themselves outside of class, in their private time. Their habit of going to bars to make casual friends, dating local girls,2 wearing casual clothing, sitting on desks in class, and so forth, could possibly convey a negative impression to students, who hold strict standards for their teachers’ proper behavior as citizens.

This critique may sound biased and unfair, since almost all the foreign teachers in the group discussion and interviews claimed that they had made an effort to inquire about what students needed, something they were proud of doing as part of their democratic tradition. However, it was how they asked that made the difference: The Chinese ask in private, and ask the class committee members. I observed in my ten years of work as a course coordinator for foreign teachers that since they failed to ask in this local, “appropriate” way, they usually either elicited some very superficial answers from those “who talk but don’t know” rather than those “who know but don’t talk,” or complained about the passivity of students when asked to give them answers they wanted (see Ouyang 2000a for a fuller description).

When the complaints became serious and students explicitly demanded a replacement for the foreign teacher involved, the Guangling department leaders, course coordinators, or the head teachers of the class would talk to the foreign teacher and suggest or even demand change. Yet, most such warnings or orders were made so indirectly, out of concern for preserving the foreign teacher’s face and dignity, that most of the message was lost on the teacher. Sometimes the foreign teacher was not sensitive to the seriousness of the matter. In other cases, the foreign teacher would argue back strongly, demanding hard evidence of students’ complaints and justification. Only about one third of them would accept the complaints and try to patch things up with changed action in class (Ouyang 2000a).

One major reason for this defensive reaction to the complaints was probably the self-perception of being a foreign expert. According to the Chinese
coordinators and students, not a few foreign teachers seemed to be indeed misled by or carried away with the title of "foreign expert," believing that their way of teaching English was precisely the much more advanced know-how that they were paid to demonstrate and pass on to the Chinese students (cf. Harvey 1990; Maley 1990). Quite a few foreign teachers responded to Chinese suggestions with an attitude explicitly verbalized in the group discussion by some: "How could you expect no change when what you wanted from me in the contract was something so different from your routine?" One interviewee went to the extreme of saying, "Isn't it stupid to criticize me for what I am paid to demonstrate to them? I am the best that can happen to them?"

Guangwai's Ideal: A Foreign Teacher Who Has "Gone Native"

It is best to conclude this complaint section by presenting a piece of Guangwai's evaluative comments on a foreign teacher who won the 1994 "Friendship Award" offered to 100 foreign experts working in China (from Guangwai Application for 1994's Friendship Award, in-house document). This teacher later took part in the Beijing celebration of the 45th Anniversary of the People's Republic, which included a grand dinner hosted by the premier. Despite the fact that such foreign teachers "gone native" are few in number—five or six in about 20 years of Guangwai's history—they have demonstrated that when given long enough employment and enough sensitivity and effort, foreign teachers can become as good as their best Chinese counterparts. In fact, many aspects of this foreign expert's behavior can be seen as more traditional and "Chinese" than most Chinese teachers' behavior. The comments succinctly reveal that in Guangwai the excellence of a teacher consists of what is best of both the newly Western-imported and the traditional expectations for ideal teachers. Here are parts of the comments:

... He has very good professional ethics, is responsible, holds a sincere attitude, and works with conscientiousness. ... Many Chinese teachers like to discuss with him about teaching, for he is very friendly, agreeable, and always ready to help. He listens to the evaluation results with modesty, and adjusts his teaching in a timely fashion. ... He adjusted the teaching materials to students' level. He prepares lessons seriously. He motivates students well. He lectures with good linearity, clarity, and emphasis. Students can follow him, comprehend him, learn a lot by heart. Besides, he strictly requires students to do everything. He treats tests and assignments very seriously. He gives assignments and very seriously marks them, and makes detailed feedback. ... He treats students with heartfelt warmth and gives patient tutoring. In his private time, he actively approaches those students who are backward in study, and discusses their problems, gives objective suggestions, and helps them overcome difficulties in learning. He actively marks students' work in addition to the assignments, he helps them to revise their drafts, tutors them in oral tests, and actively approaches students during break time in class and after class to talk with them, which not only enhances their relationships as teacher and students and enriches his understanding about students, but also provides students with plenty of opportunities to practice oral English ...

CONCLUSION

Complaints arise mostly out of disappointment at things and people that one has too high an expectation for or an unrealistic assumption about. From this study, it seems logical to conclude that Guangwai contradicted itself in that the foreign teachers were invited to demonstrate what Western pedagogy was like and yet were punished for doing exactly that. This self-contradiction is shocking if one considers Guangwai's status in Chinese English-language teaching reform as one of the most radical promoters in Chinese tertiary education, where CLT reform has been implemented for over 20 years. If Guangwai could react to the reform like this, other universities or institutions in less developed places, being less pro-CLT, would most probably resist the reform and the reformers further and more deeply. On the other hand, it seems equally logical to claim that since the reform is a Chinese one and the setting is in China, the foreign teachers should fulfill the expectations of the Chinese if they are the employers or clients—to do as the Romans do in Rome. After all, Guangwai has had its own 20-year history of CLT implementation.

Perhaps the most important fact to bear in mind is that obviously both sides use their own versions of how CLT should be conducted, and yet neither had ever realized exactly what sociopolitical ramifications the foreign teachers' CLT practices in the Guangwai community would bring about for individual teachers and students there. It was a real case of experiential learning through discovery for both sides. Both had to improvise because policies from the top are always abstract and provide only general guidelines for direction and resource allocation. When the general concepts land on the ground of specific schools, they are inevitably substantiated and mediated by individual students and teachers (including the foreign teachers), with specific histories and idiosyncratic ways of seeing and doing things, in a particular institutionalized mechanism of social control and interaction like
Guangwai. In other words, there would be hardly parallel readiness and synchronized adjustment for innovation at top and bottom societal structures. Indeed, as I have shown elsewhere (Ouyang 2000a), the social organization of Guangwai—job and residence immobility, egalitarian social welfare, and antibureaucratizing administration—supports and demands many features of the traditional system.

Thus the CLT umbrella terms have become creolized in Guangwai, taking on characteristics of the Guangwai community of practices. We have seen that the process of Guangwai's appropriation of CLT was never smooth, simple, or clear-cut. Rather it was always full of inconsistencies, struggles, and a dualistic psychology of "not only...but also." In a sense, it was the failure or inadequacy in appreciating and practicing/appropriating this CLT with Guangwai characteristics that pushed foreign teachers to the margins, even though they had been invited by the Chinese Ministry of Education as presumably authoritative role models for the "Western-imported advanced technology."

We see that in Guangwai the faculty and students as a collective were proud of its CECL and CLT pioneer status in China, for these had brought them benefits such as free study in the United Kingdom and the acquisition of Guangwai-style fluent English and appropriate communication skills. However, the conflicts of interests resulting from splits in values toward CLT had driven some of the faculty staff to retreat elsewhere. We see that the extreme CLT practitioners coexisted with colleagues skilled in traditional methods, although each occupied different grade levels as its territory. The same inconsistency led Guangwai to criticize rural middle school teachers sticking to traditional methods as being too conservative and backward while complaining that the foreign teachers from the West were too liberal and self-conceited. We also see that, living in a ritualized communal routine of collective lesson planning and preparation, Chinese teachers had taken great pains to standardize the choice of textbooks, teaching pace, and grading criteria. In this context, they saw the foreign experts' lecturing style, class activities, methods of error correction, teaching materials, and marking as individualistic and egocentric. Students habituated to ritualistic and collective teaching thus found foreign teachers' lessons missing the familiar sense of linearity, achievement, and psychological security.

Finally, we see that in the transition from traditional methods toward CLT, the best teachers of Guangwai, including the few foreign teachers gone native, have married the best features of the Western liberal and humanistic approach and of Chinese traditional practices, with the latter's emphasis on moral shaping. It is these teachers who can maximally satisfy students' "greedy" demand for a teacher: These teachers not only allow and encourage them to be free, egalitarian, and self-assertive, but also set up a strict moral role model and paternalistic leadership for them while offering authoritative delivery of grammar and vocabulary knowledge of English. Failure to observe this "not only CLT but also traditional best" standard caused many foreign teachers to be seen as not fair, not caring, or not morally sound enough.

All of these observations suggest that at the grassroots of schools, there is no such thing as a universally identical CLT or global schooling, as is often assumed by people who believe in or make top-down policy. CLT at the level of global schooling remains largely something general and vague. Bottom-up forces, such as the community's history and institutionalized practices and the stakeholders' past experiences, interpretation framework, and subjective agency can determine the exact extent to which CLT is accepted, rejected, or creolized. The locals always appropriate the top-down schooling, giving it meaning on their own terms, for, after all, it is their business, their classroom, and their well-being in their own territory that is at the stake.

NOTES

1. "Foreign" is a term used by the Chinese people with no intent of discrimination.
2. In the West these behaviors are usually hidden as part of a teacher's "private" life, for if they were known, they could also have a detrimental effect on a teacher's reputation, explained one foreign teacher.

REFERENCES

CHAPTER SIX

WORLD-CULTURAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS OF "CHOICE PROGRAMMING" IN TANZANIA

Amy Stambach

This chapter examines the culturally contingent roles of parents in the organization and operation of public schools (called "government schools") in Tanzania. Specifically, it explores a recently introduced English-language primary school program, proposed and initiated by U.S. Protestant missionaries working in Tanzania, and several Tanzanian parents' reactions to this program.

Until recently, Tanzanian parents had been viewed by policymakers and school administrators as largely irrelevant to the administration of government schools. With the exception of a handful of wasaazi, or "parent-run" schools, parents had had little say in their children's schooling. For roughly the past two decades, however, Tanzanian parents have played increasingly central roles in the administration and organization of public education, and the role of administrators has waned in the face of growing involvement by parents and nongovernmental organizations.

The apparent waxing and waning of the roles of parents and the state, respectively, occurs in the context of a more general and seemingly worldwide debate over the organization and administration of mass education. Is mass education best administered through public agencies, or is it better controlled through market forces that revolve around ideas of

References:


