

## The Treatment of Chinese Culture in the New Practical Chinese Reader<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Taking the position that learning a language is learning how to do things in that language and its cultural context, this paper is concerned with how a textbook can provide appropriate coverage of culture in the teaching of language. As a specific example we consider the first three volumes of a popular textbook for learners of Mandarin Chinese, namely the *New Practical Chinese Reader* (Liu, 2002), reviewing what sort of things this textbook enables learners to do in Chinese, including how well it supports the learning of aspects of culture that can be relatively independent of language learning, such as appropriate behaviour at Chinese banquets. We find that the first three levels of *New Practical Chinese Reader* ultimately build to an excellent approach to Chinese culture, but that the first level alone is relatively weak in this respect. Even for the first year of language study such materials should provide a good basis for learners to cope with the basic aspects of culture they would encounter in a visit to China.

**Keywords:** *Chinese, culture, interculturalism, mandarin, new practical Chinese reader*

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### 1. Introduction

The importance of learning culture in connection with language has long been recognised, but it has undergone some redefinition over the years. There was a time when ‘culture’ was generally taken to mean ‘high culture’, that is, the historical and artistic achievements of a people. This focus was generally displaced by recognition that being able to use a language (communicative competence) required not only the ability to produce and understand the language (linguistic competence), but also some appreciation of the everyday cultural norms and contexts within which the language was used. More recently still, the goal of attaining competence with such everyday cultural concerns has to some extent, and perhaps in just some countries, been displaced by a related but somewhat different goal of intercultural competence, which does not focus so much on mastery of a new culture but rather on attaining a higher level position — a ‘third place’ (Kramsch, 1993) — from which to be a mediator between the new culture and one’s own.

We feel there is merit in all three positions, but that the third tends to result from the second, which should not ignore the first. That is, the second position — working towards an ability to interact properly in a new culture — can certainly benefit from an appreciation of related aspects of the first, ‘high culture’. For example, even learners of Chinese for everyday purposes may find themselves in situations where it would be helpful for them to know what references to such figures as Lei Feng, Lin Daiyu or Sun Wukong<sup>4</sup> might actually mean. At the same time, the second position — an attempt to attain some competence in some particular culture — also seems to be an important step in the direction of the third position, since higher order intercultural appreciation surely cannot be learned in the abstract.

In order to avoid discussing these issues in the abstract, we will explore them here by examining the treatment of culture in the popular text *New Practical Chinese Reader* (Liu, 2002). Our intent is not really to critique this text as such, but rather to use it as a concrete basis for addressing the question of

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<sup>4</sup> Lei Feng has been portrayed as a selfless model Chinese citizen since the 1960s. Lin Daiyu is the beautiful but fragile true love of Jia Baoyu in the novel *A dream of red mansions*. Sun Wukong is the name of the monkey king in the novel *Journey to the west*, popularised in some countries through the television series *Monkey magic*.

what learners of Chinese should be taught about Chinese culture and how. Before we do this, however, we do need to look more closely at the rather problematic concept of culture and what it means to teach it.

## 2. Teaching Culture with Language

Culture is a difficult and complicated notion, and a potentially dangerous one to the extent it can lend itself to stereotyping. It has thus been criticised as ‘an all-encompassing notion that can reduce sociohistorical complexities to simple characterizations and hide the moral and social contradictions that exist within and across communities’ (Duranti, 1997, p. 23). Even so, it is difficult for language teachers to avoid some such notion if they are to help learners go beyond mere mastery of pronunciation, grammar and vocabulary to gain an ability to actually make use of the language. We will thus consider the problems with the notion of culture (in 2.1) and what this means for language teaching (2.2).

### 2.1 The Concept of Culture

While culture can be conceptualised in various ways (see Duranti, 1997), what is important for the language teacher is that it is involved in their typical aim of helping learners become able to use the language to pursue and hopefully accomplish their various purposes in life. This is essentially the notion of communicative competence pioneered by Hymes (1972), which involved not only linguistic competence — the ability to understand literal meanings and to create grammatical utterances — but also sociolinguistic competence, an ability to deal with how language fits in with the social situation at hand. Such situations are culturally defined: for example, to address your mother-in-law, the appropriate choices in Chinese culture (e.g. as *mā* ‘Mum’) are quite different from those in many Australian Indigenous cultures, where one would not address one’s mother-in-law at all (Dixon, 1980).

Some later views of communicative competence involve notions of culture more broadly. In particular, as elaborated by Bachman (1990) it involves a more general ‘knowledge of the world’ that Black (2004) referred to specifically as ‘cultural competence’. Whatever one calls it, it is clear that all sorts of cultural understandings affect how people understand and use language. As an example, consider how listeners or readers might react to the following sentence: ‘When the waitress brought the tea, I used it to wash the cups and dishes.’ In some parts of China this action would be viewed as a common practice, while in the context of an Australian restaurant it could cause an uproar.

Thus language teachers do need to deal with some kind of culture-like notion, but it is a complicated one. Communication involves drawing on understandings of one’s interlocutors and the situation one is in. Some of these understandings may be quite specific to the people and/or the situation: for example, a conversation between husband and wife may be based on a great deal of knowledge shared by them but not by most other people, who may thus find their conversation very difficult to follow. Other understandings may be quite general, such as more widespread expectations about how a husband and wife should interact. It is the latter, more general understandings that one might want to call ‘culture’, but it is not a simple dichotomy of the sort Halliday’s two-way distinction between ‘context of situation’ and ‘context of culture’ may suggest (Halliday & Hasan, 1985). There is a complex range of possible understandings between the most special and most general, based in part on the social characteristics of the people involved, such as their gender, age, upbringing, schooling, professions, hobbies, religion, political affiliations, and so on; see Clark (1996) and Holiday, Hyde & Kullman (2004). If two people are both doctors, chess players, or were raised in Wuhan, for example, then they will also share various specific understandings that can affect the way they communicate with each other.

Our cultural identities are thus actually made up of all of the various overlapping subcultures we are involved in. Moreover, even within the subcultures, there is no reason cultural expectations should not be dynamic and thus variable. The closer one looks at the notion of culture the more distinctions, imprecision and variability one sees, until it is no longer possible to clearly identify something called culture. To borrow a simile from the mathematician Mandelbrot (1967), it is like looking at the coastline of Britain. On a small map the coastline may seem quite regular and easily measured, but on a more detailed map one will see more irregularities, and if one follows them closely, one will find the coastline is actually much longer than first thought. If one then actually goes to the coast to measure it, one finds smaller irregularities within the larger ones, so that the coastline must be longer still. Studying the smaller

irregularities with a magnifying glass would find further irregularities within them, and the same would happen if one extended this to increasingly microscopic levels.

Mandelbrot (1967, p. 636) thus concluded that ‘Geographical curves are so involved in their detail that their lengths are often infinite or more accurately, undefinable.’ In much the same way, the closer you look at cultural traits, the harder they are to distinguish from all of the other sorts of commonalities and differences among people. To extend the simile, the problem is also exacerbated by cultural variability and changes, just as the detailed shape and length of a coastline varies with the tides and as each wave rolls in. At the same time, the simile itself suggests a practical solution in the case of culture. If you want to sail a ship around the British coast, you do not really need to know the length of the coastline in any detail; you just need to know where and how far to sail the ship. Similarly with culture, the language teacher just needs to help the learner become able to navigate around the culture, not to grasp every tiny, changeable detail.

## 2.2 Learning Culture

The fact that cultural expectations are so complex and variable highlights, on the one hand, the impossibility of teaching learners all they need to know about a culture and, on the other, the importance of helping them learn how to continue their learning on their own. This in itself is nothing new: helping learners ‘learn how to learn’ has commonly been taken as an important aspect of language teaching (Harmer, 2007), since one would hope that much more language and culture would be learned outside the classroom than it is possible to cover in a few hours a week of classes.

This view is shared by the recent intercultural approach to language learning, whose focus is not so much on mastery of another language and culture as on learners developing ‘an understanding of their own language(s) and culture(s) in relation to an additional language and culture’ (Liddicoat et al., 2003, p. 1). This is based on the position that learners cannot really hope to gain native-speaker mastery of a language and culture, which thus cannot be considered a realistic goal of language learning. At the same time, learners already possess a language and culture of their own, so a more realistic goal is for them to take advantage of this and develop an ‘intercultural competence’ that will help position them as mediators between the two cultures. As developed by Byram (1997), this intercultural competence involves five types of *savoir* ‘knowing’, including *savoir apprendre/faire* ‘knowing how to learn/to do’, as well as others relating to cultural sensitivity.

Whether or not one adopts intercultural goals, we believe it is clear that language teaching must involve serious attention to matters of culture, including helping prepare learners to learn more on their own. At the same time, learning how to learn more about culture, as about language, is not something done in the abstract: it surely depends on learning something about a culture to start with. As Liddicoat et al. (2003, p. 7-8) note, ‘In order to learn about culture, it is necessary to engage with the linguistic and non-linguistic practices of the culture and to gain insights into the way of living in a particular cultural context’, even though ‘Cultural knowledge is not... a case of knowing information about the culture; it is about knowing how to engage with the culture’. Accordingly we will now start to consider how much and just how learners of Chinese should be learning about the associated culture by examining how culture is handled in the *New Practical Chinese Reader*.

## 3. Culture in the New Practical Chinese Reader

### 3.1 The Nature of the Materials

The *New practical Chinese reader* (Liu, 2002), henceforth *NPCR*, is a set of six levels of Chinese teaching material created within the Beijing Language and Culture University under the sponsorship of the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOTCFL). It represents a substantial revision of an earlier *Practical Chinese Reader* first published in 1982. A second edition of some of the volumes of *NPCR* began to appear in 2010, but since the changes are largely in format rather than content, we will simply refer to the original, 2002 edition.

Here we will be concerned with only the first three levels of *NPCR*, since these are the ones we used as a basis for a three-year program on Chinese in an Australian university. Our program covered each level over two 12-week semesters, with up to four hours of class each week. Since the materials for each

level are extensive, our students found this a substantial workload, although we are aware of at least one other Australian university that covers a full level each semester in a more intensive program. Each of the three levels was represented by a textbook, workbook, and accompanying CDs and DVDs, as well as an instructor's manual. Here we will generally take the textbook to represent each level, except to comment briefly on the workbook at points.

The first three levels of *NPCR* include 38 lessons, with Lessons 1-14 in the first, Lessons 15-26 in the second, and Lessons 27-38 in the third. Each lesson begins with two dialogues (or just one in review chapters) accompanied by lists of new words and notes; it then continues with exercises and sections on grammar and Chinese characters. Lessons 1 to 6 also have a section on 'phonetics', while starting with Lesson 7 a supplementary text is added at the end of the exercise section. There is also a brief 'Cultural Note' in English at the end of Lessons 1-26, in Textbooks 1 and 2. The notes and lyrics of one Chinese song are also given in each volume of the textbook, in Lessons 13, 20, and 36. Each volume also ends with a small number of appendices, including lists of vocabulary and Chinese characters.

One of the strengths of this textbook is that the lessons are based on the daily lives of a small number of characters, including several Chinese and overseas students, as well as Chinese teachers, a reporter and (in later lessons) a tour guide. This continuity of cast, if not story line, across the lessons gives learners some familiar ground to stand on: they are hearing and reading dialogues about people they are getting to know, not about characters that are always entirely new.

### 3.2 The Handling of Culture

The intention of the designers of the text was to integrate structure, function and culture (Liu, 2003). The handling of culture actually changes considerably as the lessons progress. While all the lessons may be viewed as having cultural aspects, in the first volume these tend to be secondary to aspects of structure and function, while they become successively more prominent in the next two volumes. In Textbook 1, for example, the dialogues and exercises in Lessons 1-7 cover culturally appropriate ways of doing such things as greeting, introducing and thanking people, making suggestions, asking permission, declining offers and apologising, but the cultural aspects of these are left implicit rather than brought out explicitly. The accompanying cultural notes do not deal with those things, but rather basic facts about the Chinese language (Lessons 1-4), food (5), Beijing Opera (since it is mentioned in Lesson 6) and common surnames (7).

Culture gets somewhat more attention in the remaining lessons in Textbook 1. Lesson 8 deals with family, and while it introduces only a few basic kin terms, the cultural notes do point out such differences from English as how Chinese has distinct terms for paternal and maternal grandparents. The dialogues of Lesson 9 are about age and celebrating a birthday. The vocabulary includes 寿面 *shòumiàn* 'longevity noodles' and the verb 属 *shǔ* 'to be born in the year of (one of the twelve animals associated with years)', and there are explanatory notes on both matters. The cultural notes for the lesson are about region styles of cooking, including the Beijing roast duck mentioned in one dialogue. Lesson 10 is about buying things in a shop and the marketplace, including the practice of bargaining in the latter; it introduces Chinese measures and money, with the cultural notes providing pictures of Chinese currency. The focus of Lesson 11 is on optative verbs and how to tell time; one dialogue is set in a ride in a taxi, while the cultural notes are on loanwords in Chinese. Lesson 12 is about illness and seeing a doctor, with cultural notes on traditional Chinese medicine.

Lesson 13 is one of the culturally more interesting lessons. It is about a student wanting to rent an apartment to be able to spend more time alone with his girlfriend. In the second dialogue the student has found an apartment to rent, but complains that it is too expensive, so his classmate phones their reporter friend, who is a friend of the manager of the rental agency, and the students invite the reporter and manager out to dinner to seek their help. This illustrates a common use of 关系 *guānxi* 'relationship' in China, although the term itself is not introduced and any explanation is left entirely up to the teacher. Also in this lesson are examples (in the exercises) of addressing an envelope and writing a personal letter, and the notes and lyrics for 'A Love Song of Kangding'. The cultural notes are simply about how most Chinese university students live in dormitories.

The final lesson in Textbook 1 is a review lesson with a dialogue based largely on a Christmas-time phone call in which a Chinese-Canadian student brings his Chinese-speaking mother up to date on what he has been doing in China. There are cultural notes on prominent Chinese cities and rivers and the Great Wall.

The workbook accompanying Textbook 1 adds little relating to Chinese culture. Occasional newspaper clippings, advertisements, receipts and timetables provide the basis of some exercises, some of which actually require little knowledge of Chinese. There are some simple texts accompanied by questions, and they can touch on such matters as buying things in China. Reading a famous poem by Li Bai is given as a 'pronunciation drill' for Lesson 12, but the vocabulary is beyond what learners will have studied thus far and there is no translation or explanation.

While the coverage of culture is thus somewhat limited and often implicit in Textbook 1, it gradually becomes much stronger in Textbooks 2 and 3. At the beginning of Textbook 2, Lesson 15 has dialogues about visiting Xi'an (with its terracotta warriors) and Shanghai, including mention of how to say 'I don't know' in the Shanghai dialect. The cultural notes are on Xi'an and other former Chinese capitals. The next three lessons have less direct focus on things distinctive to China. Lesson 16 relates to obtaining a library card, with cultural notes on the Chinese educational system; a supplementary text does introduce learners to a noisy Guangdong tea house. Lesson 17 is about comparing and buying clothes, in particular traditional Chinese dress (the cheongsam), with cultural notes on traditional Chinese garments. The dialogues in Lesson 18 involve interacting in a post office and taking a bus; the cultural notes merely give gross figures on railway and road mileage and air routes in China.

Most of the remaining lessons in Textbook 2 have a clearer focus on things distinctively Chinese. Lesson 19 relates to traditional Chinese painting, including particular pictures by Xu Beihong and Qi Baishi. Lesson 20 is a review lesson whose dialogue relates to celebrating the new year; the cultural notes deal with festivals and customs in China, and the supplementary reading is based on a traditional story of drawing legs on a snake. After a lesson (21) relating to sports, Lesson 22 relates to Shaoxing opera and the classic novel *A Dream of Red Mansions* (红楼梦), with cultural notes on classical Chinese poetry, prose and novels. Lesson 23 is about a visit to the Great Wall, with largely geographical cultural notes on differences between Eastern and Western China. (The supplementary reading in this lesson is a readable humorous story, but not distinctively Chinese; it seems an adaptation of Aesop's fable of 'The two fellows and the bear'.) Lesson 24 relates to changes in living conditions in the rural areas of China; this seemed useful to us, though Zhang (2006) did not consider it very authentic. Here the cultural notes consist of simply a list of the administrative divisions of China and their capitals. After a lesson (25) on an accident and a visit to the hospital, the dialogue in the review lesson (26) has the overseas students reminiscing about their time in China and 'becoming a Chinese hand' (中国通).

The workbook accompanying Textbook 2 occasionally introduces other culturally relevant material, through brief texts with questions, exercises involving things like advertisements and tickets, and a couple of poems used as 'pronunciation drills'. For each lesson there is now also a 'cultural experience', which is generally a suggestion (in Chinese) for some sort of activity, such as to tell a friend what colour(s) you like and why (for Lesson 17).

There is a noticeable shift in how culture is handled in Textbook 3. While there are no longer cultural notes at the ends of lessons, the dialogues often deal quite explicitly with cultural issues and indeed cultural differences. The characters in the dialogues contrast Chinese and western practices with respect to eating (Lesson 27), gift giving (28), privacy (32), and paying for meals (37), with the final lesson (38) devoted to cross-cultural misunderstandings between a western man and the parents of his Chinese bride. In Lesson 35 the cultural comparison is not between East and West, but rather between different generations in China on their views of the merits of hard work and borrowing money.

Other lessons deal with culture without such explicit comparison. In a visit to a professor in Lesson 29, the student characters learn the maxim 弟子不必不如师 'Disciples are not necessarily inferior to teachers.' Lesson 30 has the students observing the bustling street activities, such as exercise, that can often be seen in China. Chapters 31, 33, 34, and 36 relate to China's scenic spots, environmental issues and climate, and include lines from Tang dynasty poems by Li Bai. Supplementary texts in these lessons include a story of a calligrapher and a monk (Lesson 27), an account of the moon goddess Cheng'e (28), a short

piece by Lao She on growing flowers (29), a text on General Zhang Xueliang's snuff bottle (34), a story about how the Tang poet Jia Dao refined a particular line of poetry, resulting in the expression 研究思考 'research and think deeply' (36), and a story about how Wang Anshi came to create double happiness character (38). Chinese culture becomes heavily implicated indeed, and the comparison of Western and Chinese culture can also contribute explicitly to the development of an intercultural position.

### 3.3 Critique of Textbook 1

The handling of culture in *NPCR* thus becomes excellent by Textbook 3, and this is in accord by a study by Zhang (2006) that found that many students believe that *NPCR* can help them understand differences between Chinese culture and their own. The way Textbook 3 leads students to compare aspects of Chinese culture with their own lends itself to an intercultural approach in a way that Liddicoat et al. (2003, 24) consider very important:

'An important dimension of intercultural language teaching is that it is possible to understand another culture only by comparing it with one's own... Intercultural language teaching, however, does not assume that students know their own culture, in fact, because our cultural practices are largely invisible to us, we do not usually see them as cultural and constructed. As a result in order to learn about another culture we need to learn about our own culture at the same time by comparing our own culture with the target culture.'

Textbook 1, on the other hand, seems much weaker on culture, and yet it provides the basis for the full first year of such Chinese language programs as our own. To the contrary, Liddicoat et al. (2003, p. 23) maintain that 'it is not the case that cultural teaching can be held over until a later time.' They continue as follows:

'Culture is taught from the beginning of language learning and is not delayed until learners have acquired some of the language. The key concern here is that delaying input about culture does not delay culture learning, but rather leads to false culture learning as a result of a lack of awareness of difference and does not begin the process of thinking about one's own culture.'

(Liddicoat et al., 2003, p. 24)

The weaknesses in Textbook 1 are of two types, namely in the extent to which culture is covered and how it is covered. To start with the first, the range of culture that should ideally be covered is of course a debatable matter. Hanban (2008) has created an *International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education* that includes specifications of cultural knowledge and understanding expected of five stages of Chinese study. For Stage 1 some of the expected cultural knowledge is indeed covered by *NPCR* Textbook 1, such as aspects of simple social etiquette, customs, and interpersonal relations, but some is not, such as allusion and connotation in simple Chinese stories, Chinese costumes, and understanding developments in education and culture. But why were the latter considered useful to cover in Stage 1?

Our own expectation for the first year of Chinese study is that it should prepare learners to accomplish various everyday tasks they will encounter when visiting or living in China, such meeting people, eliciting directions and other information, finding accommodation, food and transportation, and shopping. Textbook 1 touches on these topics, but it does not really take them very far. While Zhang (2006) thought *NPCR* better designed for use in English-speaking countries than another text, this may be because of the comparison of English and Chinese cultural background in some parts of Textbook 2 and especially in Textbook 3. Textbook 1 seems better designed for someone studying in China so that the text can be supplemented by firsthand contact with Chinese daily life.

As for just how culture is covered in Textbook 1, Wang (2010) found some aspects somewhat mechanical, and felt there should be more realism in the design of cultural points and exercises. We do not see this as much of a problem ourselves, considering the limitations in the level of language; our main concern is that much of the coverage of culture tends to be implicit, embedded in the language taught but not brought out well through explanation or discussion. This allows learners to miss such points, rather than 'notice' them in a way needed for cultural and intercultural learning (see Liddicoat et al., 2003). It also does

not invite learners to be active analysts of the culture and its differences from their own, which Corbett (2003, 34) suggests would ‘help them along the road to independent intercultural analysis and interpretation in a range of situations where they might otherwise be at a loss, and where authoritative guidance is unavailable.’

### 3.3.1 Example 1: Forms of Address

As an example of both the extent of and approach to coverage of culture, let’s consider how Textbook 1 deals with the very complex matter of how people address each other in Chinese. One would not expect a full and deep coverage of this in Textbook 1 alone, but it does take a reasonable approach of illustrating four types of options, thus providing some framework for learning additional specific forms later. At the same time, explicit discussion is more limited than one might hope. The four types of address are as follows:

1. By name alone, as when the university student characters and their reporter friend address each other (Lesson 1 and later). Lesson 4 deals with how people can introduce themselves with surname and/or full name, and how the surname comes before the given name.

Even this simple matter can deserve a bit more attention. Specifically, learners could wonder why the students Lin Na and Song Hua are consistently addressed with both surname and given name, while Ding Libo, Ma Dawei and Wang Xiaoyun are normally addressed by given name alone, as Libo, Dawei and Xiaoyun. This has to do with the numbers of syllables: Chinese tend to avoid using such single syllable names as Na and Hua unless the relationship is very close. Another matter is why the students address their reporter friend Lu Yuping with his full name of three syllables; this may be because he is a slightly older professional, rather than one of the students.

2. By a relationship (or kinship) term, as when one student calls his brother *gēge* ‘elder brother’ (Lesson 2), and when a teacher addresses a student’s grandmother as *wàipó* ‘(maternal) grandmother’. Relationship terms are briefly discussed in a note in Chapter 3 and in the cultural notes at the end of Chapter 8.

A common related usage does not seem to be covered in Textbooks 1 to 3, namely the use of kin terms that have no basis in actual relationships, such as a child calling an adult male friend of the family *shūshu* ‘uncle (father’s younger brother)’.

3. By a surname plus title, as when the students refer to their teachers by adding *lǎoshī* ‘teacher’ (Lesson 3) and *jiàoshòu* ‘professor’ (Lesson 7) after their surnames. This matter is discussed in a note in Lesson 3.

Some Western learners may wonder why the title ‘comrade’ (*tóngzhì*) is not found at all in Textbooks 1 to 3. Due to cultural change, perhaps learners are simply unlikely to encounter it nowadays.

4. By a title alone, as when a waitress is addressed as *xiǎojie* ‘miss’ in Lesson 5, a fruit seller calls a student *xiānsheng* ‘mister, sir’ and the student calls him *shīfu* ‘master’ in Lesson 10, where there are notes on these forms, and a teacher is addressed as simply *lǎoshī*, without the surname, in Lesson 11.

A common option not introduced in Textbook 1 is to address or refer to someone by their surname preceded by *xiǎo* ‘small’ if they are younger than the speaker or by *lǎo* ‘old’ if they are older; this is not mentioned until Lesson 32 in Textbook 3. This may be because the lessons are designed for students and others who may have little need for it. It would be different for learners who are married to Chinese speakers (as in the case of the present authors) and frequently encounter this usage within the family and among family friends and associates, but such learners can and do learn it from their spouses.

An aspect of address not introduced at all in Textbooks 1 to 3 is the use of nicknames, such as those formed by reduplicating a syllable of the given name, as in the case of *Ōuōu* for someone named 灵鸥 *Líng’ōu*, or by adding 阿 *ā* before part of the personal name.

For how to address people there thus seems to be some reasonable coverage in Textbook 1, but not as much explicit discussion as could be useful. In particular there is no discussion that might problematise address forms, highlighting them as an issue and inviting comparison with practices in one's own culture. (Nice examples can be found in the text on Chinese culture by Wu (1994), but this depends on the learner already being able to read Chinese at an intermediate level.) If forms of address were highlighted as an issue, English-speaking learners might appreciate how complex and variable the matter is in their own culture, such as how much more common the use of first names is in Australia (e.g. even by university students to their lecturers) than in some other English-speaking countries. This might make them better able to appreciate that Chinese culture could be no less variable and complex.

### 3.3.2 Example 2: Less Linguistic Aspects of Culture

Another issue arises to the extent that culture tends to be left implicit in the aspects of language being taught: how can learners come to grips with aspects of culture that generally do not come out in how the language is used? Some of these relate to basic survival skills for anyone visiting China, such as knowing that:

- a) Cars normally do not yield to pedestrians at pedestrian crossings;
- b) Holes and other hazards on the pavement are not normally marked;
- c) People do not normally queue to find seats on a bus;
- d) It is normal to take off ones shoes when entering people's houses;
- e) Some hotels are not approved for taking in overseas visitors;
- f) There will be many courses at a Chinese banquet, and that they can keep coming well after a Westerner may feel that they have finished eating;
- g) In such places as banks you may need to take a number, e.g. from a queuing machine, to be 'in line' to be served;
- h) To leave some supermarkets you need to present your receipt at the door and have it stamped;
- i) In shopping centres you often do not pay for goods where you acquire them, but rather take an invoice to pay at a central location, using the receipt to pick up the goods.

Such matters can of course be discussed in the language, and this would make an interesting activity, but learners at a beginners level would not have enough language for much discussion. An alternative would be to raise such matters in English, and this is exactly the sort of thing done in short intercultural training programs (Landis & Bhagat, 1996) for those who may spend some time in China for such purposes as business but who do not see the need or opportunity to study the language. It seems more problematic to integrate them into the study of the language in a way that nicely complements the language study rather than detracts from it.

We raise this as a problem, but we do not have a clear solution. For learners studying outside of China the best we can do is to suggest that multimedia could be a valuable tool for dealing with such matters. For example, such issues could perhaps be introduced through a series of videos on what learners are likely to encounter while visiting or living in China. Such videos could be in relatively simple Chinese, and it need not matter if the Chinese were somewhat beyond what learners could comprehend, since much of the information could be conveyed visually, and in ways that might actually help learners grasp some of the new language they hear on the video. To some extent less verbal issues could easily be dealt with in videos that also provide examples of the aspects of language being taught; for example, the common hazards of Chinese streets and traffic (*Xiǎo xīn!* 'Be careful!') could be illustrated in a video on asking and following directions. Perhaps there are already videos available that might lend themselves to this purpose, but we are not aware of them, and those that accompany *NPCR* Textbook 1 do not go very far in this direction.

## 4. Conclusion

Whether or not one cares to take an intercultural approach, it is clear that language teaching involves helping learners come to be able to use the language appropriately in the culturally complex settings in which the language is spoken. This involves introducing learners to relevant aspects of culture,

and since these are many and variable, it surely also involves preparing them to continue learning more on their own. In an intercultural approach it can also involve having the learners make explicit comparisons with aspects of their own cultures.

The *New Practical Chinese Reader* provides an increasing excellent introduction to Chinese culture as it proceeds through its first three levels, but the first level alone does not seem to provide a particularly strong basis for learners to cope with basic aspects they would encounter in a visit to China, even though learners may spend a full year on this level. The coverage of such aspects of culture is somewhat limited and not always brought out as explicitly as one might hope, and certainly not in connection with the learners' own cultures at this level. The failure to deal meaningfully with less linguistic aspects of culture is an additional problem for this and probably most other largely print-based introductions to Chinese.

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