



---

Theses and Dissertations

---

2014-12-01

## Analyzing the Instructional Methodologies and Ideologies Underlying English as a Foreign Language Textbooks in China and Evaluating Their Alignment with Assessments and National Standards

Anneke Garcia  
Brigham Young University - Provo

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>



Part of the [Educational Psychology Commons](#)

---

### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Garcia, Anneke, "Analyzing the Instructional Methodologies and Ideologies Underlying English as a Foreign Language Textbooks in China and Evaluating Their Alignment with Assessments and National Standards" (2014). *Theses and Dissertations*. 4364.  
<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/4364>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).

Analyzing the Instructional Methodologies and Ideologies Underlying English as  
a Foreign Language Textbooks in China and Evaluating Their  
Alignment with Assessments and National Standards

Anneke M. Garcia

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of  
Brigham Young University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

Peter J. Rich, Chair  
Randall S. Davies  
Richard E. West  
Lynn E. Henrichsen  
Michael D. Bush

Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology  
Brigham Young University

December 2014

Copyright © 2014 Anneke M. Garcia

All Rights Reserved

## ABSTRACT

### Analyzing the Methodologies and Ideologies Underlying English as a Foreign Language Textbooks in China and Evaluating Their Alignment with Assessments and National Standards

Anneke M. Garcia

Department of Instructional Psychology and Technology, BYU  
Doctor of Philosophy

The current study is a collection of three publishable articles addressing a similar theme. Each article is an examination into the role textbooks play in Chinese English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms and, specifically, a look at textbooks as an element in the classroom environment, their relationship to pressures from high-stakes exams, and an exploration into any paradigms about the nature of EFL learning they may be explicitly or implicitly promoting through their content and methodologies. The first article, a grounded theory look at underlying methodologies and ideologies in common Chinese textbooks, reveals that there may be competing paradigms promoted by different texts that could be sending conflicting messages about the nature of EFL study. The second article, a critical discourse analysis of textbooks as items of cultural discourse, finds that subtle wording and structure in common textbooks could be reinforcing ideologies of the dominant paradigm about English study. The third and final article again uses grounded theory to compare the content of a common textbook series to passages from the national college entrance exam and to goals of the national syllabus to suggest that while in several aspects, the textbook series is in harmony with stated educational standards, there are certain ways in which the textbook and the exam seem to be misaligned in their goals and structure.

Keywords: China, EFL, textbooks, communicative language teaching, cultural ideologies, TESOL

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank those who have helped me come as far as I have with this work. Thank you Dr. Peter Rich for all of your help and advice, often from thousands of miles away, and for your patience as I completed much of my work outside of the traditional setting. Thank you Ruth Owen for your excellent skills of an editor. Thank you as well to Jiang Qiliang for his insight, advice, and for helping a pregnant lady carry a pile of textbooks on a bus across the city. Thank you most of all to my family, especially Simon, my little *colochón*, for providing the resistance without which no progress can ever be fully appreciated, and to the love of my life, the twenty-seventh best person in the world, Erick Garcia, for solving problems left and right since 1985.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE .....	i
ABSTRACT .....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS .....	iv
LIST OF TABLES .....	vii
LIST OF FIGURES .....	viii
Description of Dissertation Structure.....	1
Research Agenda .....	2
Textbooks as a Factor in the Classroom Environment .....	3
The Relationship of Textbook Curriculums to Exam Pressures .....	3
Competing Paradigms .....	4
The Articles .....	6
Article 1: The Ideology Behind the Book:.....	7
Abstract .....	8
The Ideology Behind the Book: An Analysis of Typical High School EFL Textbooks Used in Mainland China.....	9
Review of the Literature .....	10
Success of Implementing CLT in a Chinese Context .....	11
Analyses of English Textbooks in Use .....	19
Suggestions for Future Textbooks .....	19
Research Question .....	20
Methodology .....	20
Selection of Materials .....	21
Trustworthiness and Limitations.....	24
Analysis of the Textbooks .....	26
Coding and Themes .....	28
Response to Research Question .....	42
Conclusion .....	44
Possibilities for Future Research .....	44

References.....	46
Article 2: Curriculum as Discourse: .....	52
Abstract.....	53
Curriculum as Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of English Textbooks in China.....	54
Review of the Literature .....	54
Examination of Beliefs and Attitudes of English Teachers .....	55
Discourse and Learners' Identities.....	57
Textbooks as Discourse .....	58
Research Question .....	59
Methodology.....	59
Previous Examples of Chinese Textbook CDA in the Literature .....	61
Choice of Passages for Inclusion in Current Study .....	62
A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Passages.....	63
A (Limited) Range of Reading Topics.....	64
A Revealing Grammatical Footnote .....	68
A “Correction” of Pronouns.....	70
Discussion—Response to Research Question .....	72
Conclusion .....	75
References.....	77
Article 3: Examining Alignment Among Curriculum, Assessment, and National Standards in Mainland China.....	81
Abstract.....	82
Examining Alignment Among Curriculum, Assessment, and National Standards in Mainland China.....	83
Review of the Literature .....	83
National Education Policy and Assessment Changes.....	84
Textbooks and Existing English Curriculums .....	89
Research Questions.....	90
Methodology.....	91
Selection of Materials .....	92

Analysis of the Texts .....	93
Themes in the Curriculum .....	94
Themes in the Assessment .....	100
Themes in the Standards .....	106
Comparison and Alignment .....	108
Language Skills .....	108
Knowledge of the Language .....	109
Attitude .....	110
Study Strategies .....	110
Cultural Awareness .....	111
Conclusion .....	112
Avenues for Further Study .....	113
References .....	114
Dissertation Themes–Conclusion .....	118
Textbooks as a Factor in the Classroom Environment .....	118
The Relationship of Textbook Curriculums to Exam Pressures .....	120
Competing Paradigms .....	121
Avenues for Future Study .....	122
References .....	123

## LIST OF TABLES

**Article 1**

Table 1. Textbooks Selected for Analysis, with Publisher and Author Information.....	27
Table 2. Textbooks by Recommender .....	28

**Article 2**

Table 1. Summaries of the first 11 lessons' reading passages (Alexander, 1997).....	66
---	----

**Article 3**

Table 1. Sections and Sub-Sections of the Typical Gaokao Exam.....	102
Table 2. Themes Identified in Grounded Theory Analysis Shown with Thematic Overlap .....	108



## LIST OF FIGURES

**Article 1**

Figure 1 Illustration from Jiang, 2009b, p.15 .....39

**Article 3**

Figure 1 Average frequency of each type of learning activity per book .....95

Figure 2: Sources of the gaokao passages examined .....106

## **Description of Dissertation Structure**

Teaching English as a foreign language is an expanding professional field and has a correspondingly robust research literature. The most recent iteration of best practices lies in an approach called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Brown, 2007; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1995; Sauvignon, 1991). In recent years, CLT appears to be yielding good results in some contexts; most development of its practices and corresponding materials has taken place in Western countries and in teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts.

Translating CLT ideologies and methodologies to other cultural contexts, though, has met with some obstacles. In East Asia, efforts to implement practices promoted by CLT researchers have met with limited success (Achren, 2007; Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Han, 2008; Johnson, 2006; Li, 2007; Littlewood, 1999; Rao, 2002; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Sun & Cheng, 2009; Taguchi, Naganuma, & Data, 2006; Wang, 2008).

Existing research has begun to tackle the question of why CLT hasn't integrated as easily in Asian contexts as it has elsewhere; possible obstacles range from practical concerns like funding and class size (Anderson, 1993; Penner, 1995; Rao, 1996; Rao, 2002) to more abstract ideas like a mismatch between ideology and methodology (Anderson, 1993; Deng & Carless, 2010; Han, 2008; Wang, 2008). Many researchers have looked at Mainland China particularly to determine what can be done to improve pedagogical reform since governmental sanction for more communicative language goals has already been granted in the form of reformed national syllabuses for the English curriculum (Deng & Carless, 2010; Hu, 2007).

Though many existing studies have explored various factors in the educational environment that are contributing to trouble implementing CLT, few have addressed the role that English textbooks may be playing. Though textbooks may seem like one of the more outmoded

of the educational technologies available, they still play a key role in Chinese classrooms. As one author explains:

It is axiomatic in studies of contemporary Chinese language education that curriculum form and content has been driven by textbook selection. This is due, in part, to the difficulty of achieving consistent teacher quality and systems communication across geographic and regional diversity. It is also due to the Chinese cultural tradition where textbooks are regarded as the major source of knowledge and authority (Liu, 2005, p. 305).

Since textbooks do play such a large role in dictating classroom practice in China, more in-depth studies of textbooks would serve to benefit the discussion on the CLT dilemma. With that intent, the current undertaking, a series of three articles to be submitted for publication in academic journals, seeks to place textbooks at the center of the questions involving CLT and paradigm changes in Chinese contexts.

### **Research Agenda**

Taking advantage of the option to publish a dissertation as three separate articles rather than as one longer document has given me the flexibility to address several different aspects of the central issue. However, the three articles remain intertwined with one another and overlap in their efforts to speak to three central themes. The first theme is an examination of textbooks and analysis of their contribution to the educational ecosystem in the Chinese English classroom; the second, an exploration of the obstacles to better English language instruction that are posed by problems stemming from exam pressures as reported in the literature; and the third, identifying a possible dominant paradigm in the underlying ideology of EFL teaching and its possibly adversarial relationship with the minority paradigm. In this case, the dominant and minority

paradigms have been defined in Garcia (2013), and are more thoroughly described in the upcoming section titled “Competing Paradigms.”

### **Textbooks as a Factor in the Classroom Environment**

Recent approaches to educational research tend to be moving away from what some have called the “technological approach” and toward a more “ecological approach” (Tudor, 2003). This is a move away from more formulaic evaluations and methodologies in distant and laboratory settings and toward methodologies that allow for an understanding of larger and interacting contexts (Hu, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Tudor, 2003).

To examine textbooks in this context may help open up some more definite lines of study through what may be viewed as an impasse in attempts to integrate more communicative approaches to language teaching in China. The first and second articles of this dissertation address this theme directly by searching for underlying methodologies and ideologies that may be affecting the way textbooks are seen and used by teachers and students.

### **The Relationship of Textbook Curriculums to Exam Pressures**

Probably the most oft-cited obstacle to methodological and pedagogical transformation in Chinese classrooms is the persistent pressure from a system of national examinations at the secondary and tertiary levels that can totally dominate teachers', students' and parents' concerns about English education (Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Deng & Carless, 2010; Hu, 2005; Penner, 1995; Rao, 2002; Sun & Henrichsen, 2011; Wang, 2007; Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009). While the omnipresent exams and their washback (i.e., teaching to the test) effect in the classroom were identified in the early stages of China's attempts to reform their educational approaches (Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Penner, 1995), subsequent years have shown a continued pressure exerted by these exams in spite of change and

innovation on many levels (Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Deng & Carless, 2010; Hu, 2005; Rao, 2002; Wang, 2007; Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009).

The third article in this project specifically addresses the relationship between these high-stakes exams and the textbook element of the schooling environment. A typical high school English curriculum is compared with items from the national college entrance exam (*gaokao*) and also to the stated goals for English education in the national curriculum. This comparison is intended to facilitate an examination for alignment or misalignment in content, structure, and goals.

The word “alignment” is used here to denote a concept broader than some of its more nuanced definitions. The concepts of *content validity* (between curriculum and assessment) and *alignment* (between curriculum and standards) are both indicated by my use of the term “alignment” here and throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

### **Competing Paradigms**

The final theme that the proposed dissertation addresses is the idea that there are competing paradigms in Chinese classrooms that need to be reconciled if progress is to be made in overcoming the kind of obstacles to pedagogical change that have been previously identified in the literature.

Garcia (2013) identified an existing dominant paradigm in Chinese textbooks and methodologies that is at times in conflict with a smaller, but present, minority paradigm.

The dominant paradigm prizes such methodologies in its text objects as: a direct translation of meaning between foreign and native language, an assertion of correct and standard use of language as defined by authoritative textbooks, and a minimal and information-based form of monotony-breaking. The minority paradigm, on the other

hand, aims for more learner-centered and open-ended approaches to communicating meaning, a reliance on learners finding their own sources of authority in outside sources or communicative partners, and a use of visual and enrichment material that is integral and enriching to the content of the text. (Garcia, 2013, p.49)

Other research, much of it done by Chinese researchers, confirms the idea that a dominant paradigm of traditional approaches pervades current textbooks and practices. To cite just a few: Chen & Klenowski (2009) concluded that a traditional emphasis on reading and writing in assessment continues to create washback effects that impact teaching and learning and even the wider society at large in spite of an increase in assessment practices geared more toward speaking and listening. Deng and Carless (2010) of the University of Hong Kong discussed how the exam pressures observed are not just a trend but a cultural paradigm: "An examination-oriented culture is firmly embedded in China ...and other Confucian-heritage contexts. In those contexts where examination-oriented education dominates, test formats are likely to have a greater influence on pedagogy than the latest government exhortations" (Deng & Carless, 2010, pg.286). Hu (2002) stated that current practices in China come from culturally rooted assumptions and that "The Chinese conception of textbooks as the source of knowledge is largely incompatible with the tenet of CLT that students are negotiators, discoverers, and contributors of knowledge and information" (Hu, 2002, p. 98).

Methodological contradictions in textbooks or among curriculums, assessments, and standards, is a topic I have not found addressed directly in any other existing literature, and its elucidation forms an important goal behind the three articles composing this dissertation.

### The Articles

The three complete articles are presented here in their current form. Article one has been submitted for review to the *Asian EFL Journal* and may be further revised after feedback from reviewers is received. Article two has also been submitted for review; since its approach as a critical discourse analysis (CDA) is slightly less common than other types of research articles it has been submitted to a publication where CDA articles have been previously published, the *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*. The third and final article has not yet been submitted, but I have worked on editing it to a publishable length and format. It will be included here in its most recent form and my goal is to submit it shortly to the journal *Language and Education*.

The Ideology Behind the Book:  
An Analysis of Typical High School EFL Textbooks Used in Mainland China

Anneke Garcia  
Brigham Young University



### Abstract

The present study examines textbooks used in Mainland China to determine what role they may be playing in the conflicts centered around the successful implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches. To identify the predominant underlying philosophies and methodologies of English textbooks typically used in high school classrooms in Mainland China, this study uses grounded theory to identify and analyze themes common in 10 textbooks. The six themes identified are: communication of meaning, language authority, visual and content-based “monotony breakers,” focus on British usage, focus on intensive reading, and methodological sabotage. The textbooks fall into two groups in respect to their characterization under each of those themes, which are identified as a dominant and a minority paradigm. The study concludes with an analysis of how these paradigms are portrayed in the structure and content of textbooks and a call to further study of how this may be impacting larger CLT integration efforts.

*Keywords:* China, EFL, textbooks, communicative language teaching, TESOL

## **The Ideology Behind the Book: An Analysis of Typical High School EFL Textbooks Used in Mainland China**

The teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) in East Asia is a large and complex effort, comprising a variety of motivations, goals and approaches. In recent years, differences in pedagogy between West and East, and a literature dominated by Western research, have brought to light some very pressing concerns and some very lively debate about what EFL education should look like as Asia raises a new generation of students who are entering a rapidly-changing business and education world (Achren, 2007; Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Han, 2008; Hu, 2002; Johnson, 2006; Littlewood, 1999; Rao, 2002b; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Sun & Cheng, 2009; Taguchi, Naganuma, & Data, 2006; Wang, 2008).

Reform efforts in East Asia, and particularly the People's Republic of China, have set bold and progressive goals, including the mandatory nationwide teaching of English beginning in elementary schools (Hu, 2007; M. Li, 2007). National syllabuses created by the PRC's Ministry of Education (MOE) mandate efforts toward an increase in students' English competence at all levels, from these new primary school programs through secondary and into tertiary education (Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Deng & Carless, 2010; M. Li, 2011; Wang, 2007; Xiong & Qian, 2012; Zhao & Zheng, 2006). However, these efforts, for a variety of reasons, are falling short of many of their stated goals, particularly that of increasing students' communicative competence (Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Deng & Carless, 2010; Han, 2008; Hu, 2002; Hu, 2007; M. Li, 2007; M. Li, 2011; Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009; Zhao & Zheng, 2006). Very recent reform has reacted to this uncertain environment, with some areas announcing that they will be reducing the scope of English education in the very young grades and nationwide changes planned for the weight that the English portion of the national exam will have (Han, 2013; Luo, 2013)

One of the most pressing problems identified by researchers is the mismatch between ideology and methodology in Chinese English classrooms (Anderson, 1993; Deng & Carless, 2010; Han, 2008; Majors, 2010; Wang, 2008). One study aptly likens the situation to “putting old wine in new bottles;” that is, traditional curriculum content and ideology is being repackaged, rather ineffectively, in new teaching philosophies (Hui, 1997).

In order to facilitate future progress in this effort, the current study intends to conduct a limited but rigorous survey of a small sample of existing Chinese English-learning materials and determine what their underlying educational philosophies are, what methodologies they are employing, and how this corresponds with stated national English education goals.

### **Review of the Literature**

English education in China has been examined quite extensively in the international research literature beginning in the early 1990s and accelerating since then. Decisions by the Chinese government as well as research done in other East Asian countries have all spurred interest in how the teaching of English as a foreign language in the PRC is moving forward.

One of the biggest and possibly most predominant conflicts addressed in the literature is the stereotypical “East meets West” schism that arises between traditional practices in Asian countries and educational innovations encouraged by the international community, though some researchers provide evidence that the culture clash is even more prevalent within “East” and “West” as it is between them (Han, 2008; R. Li, 2007). Beginning in the 1990s, the dominant approach to the teaching of English as a Second Language (ESL) and, controversially, that of teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been what is commonly known as the communicative approach or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Brown, 2007). This broad umbrella of teaching methodologies includes other approaches with other names such as

Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), but for the purposes of most studies found in the TESOL and assessment literature, as well as the current study, they are treated collectively as part of the effort toward a communicative approach to the teaching of English in both ESL and EFL contexts.

Much of the existing literature approaches the question of how successful the implementation of CLT has been in China and related East Asian contexts. Because the current study seeks to explore the underlying methodologies and ideologies of textbooks currently used in China, an understanding of how CLT as a major ideological framework has or hasn't impacted the structure and design of these textbooks is a logical place to start.

### **Success of Implementing CLT in a Chinese Context**

A commonly addressed issue within the broader realm of English education in China is the attempt to implement Communicative Language Teaching and related approaches in Chinese classrooms. While it may seem from the English-language literature that this issue is forefront in the minds of most educators and researchers in the field, it is worth noting that the current exploration is biased toward the Anglophone discussion of the situation. I am an American researcher who has worked in the EFL field in both China and Taiwan, but my knowledge of the Chinese-language research field is nowhere near that of a native Chinese researcher.

Unfortunately, I was able to locate and consult only one article from a Chinese journal (Zhao & Zheng, 2006) that I could identify as falling within the purview of this study. The view of the situation represented in this study, therefore, is decidedly that of a Western audience. However, many of the authors writing in the English-language literature are Chinese themselves and have consulted and cited resources in the original Chinese (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Cheng & Wang, 2004; Deng & Carless, 2010; Han, 2008; Hu, 2002; Hu, 2005; Hu, 2007;

Hui, 1997; M. Li, 2011; Liu, 2005; Rao, 1996; Rao, 2002b; Wang, 2007; Xiong & Qian, 2012; Zhang, 2009). Again, however, we should note that the great majority of these researchers are working from universities outside of the PRC, often in locations such as Singapore, Australia and Canada, with access to Western colleagues, conferences and publications and they potentially speak from a very different viewpoint than some within the PRC.

With this in mind, the discussion of CLT implementation in Mainland China can be characterized as one coming from a culture and academic community that largely accepts communicative approaches to foreign language teaching as “correct” and superior (Brown, 2007).

Another note on the extent of inquiry into CLT implementation is that while many studies have documented different aspects of the efforts, the scope of educational contexts being explored is wide. China is rather homogenous in terms of educational policy compared to other nations with similar cultural roots like Japan and South Korea, but it is also an enormous and diverse country with huge disparities in opportunity and resources across geographical areas. Many researchers note these disparities in their analyses. The focus of research into CLT innovations also varies. The articles consulted in this study ranged from inquiries into CLT implementation in university settings (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Henrichsen, 2007; Rao, 2002b) to secondary schools (Anderson, 1993) to primary schools (Deng & Carless, 2010) and several were written from an over-arching cultural perspective in an article or essay format (Hu, 2002; Hu, 2005; Penner, 1995; Rao, 1996). With that in mind, there was a great deal of correlation in what the various studies found in regards to obstacles facing the successful implementation of communicative approaches and also in their proposed solutions to the current problems.

**Obstacles to successful implementation of communicative approaches.** Nearly every study in recent years seeks to tease out the obstacles that stand in the way of a more successful implementation of CLT practices in Chinese schools. While there is much variation in the studies reviewed, there is a remarkable amount of overlap in the factors they point out as being crucial pieces to the CTL puzzle. The factors identified in these studies can be grouped into four major categories: exam pressures, teacher factors, resources and class size, and cultural factors.

*Exam pressures.* As briefly described earlier, exam pressures have been often discussed in terms of their impact on teaching and learning in EFL contexts in China. They were identified as relevant to the success of CTL by early researchers (Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Penner, 1995) and continue to be cited in more recent studies (Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Deng & Carless, 2010; Hu, 2005; Rao, 2002b; Wang, 2007; Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009).

The examination that plays the biggest role in education in China could well be the National Higher Education Entrance Examination, commonly known as the *gaokao*, that graduating high school students complete. However, entrance into a university does not mark the end of high-pressure English tests, as Chinese students in all majors are required to take college English courses, still highly subject to washback pressure from the College English Test (CET), which has a huge annual test population and is far more prevalent among Chinese university students than international tests like the TOEFL, TOEIC and IELTS (Henrichsen, 2007; Sun & Henrichsen, 2011; Zhao & Zheng, 2006). Exam pressure is also felt directly by teachers as test scores are often used in their professional evaluations (Cheng & Wang, 2004). It is often resource-poor schools and less-qualified teachers that feel the most pressure to ensure that their students perform well since the test is commonly perceived as an instrument of social mobility and since teachers' job evaluations often hinge on student test success (Hu, 2005).

High-pressure exams may even be exerting an influence on education at the primary level: "... training students for future high-stakes examinations seems to be one of the rationales for emphasizing testing in the early years of schooling" (Deng & Carless, 2010, p. 293). Deng and Carless (2010) stated that while the format of national exams has changed in recent years, with more time and emphasis being given to communicative skills such as listening and speaking, the majority of teachers still stick to traditional teaching models and school administrators still select textbooks based on their perceived similarity to the content of national exams.

These recent findings suggest that exams don't bear the entire burden for constraining CLT teaching. Teachers' perceptions of exams, school differences, and teachers' individual beliefs also play a factor. Teachers often have an incomplete idea of what examinations entail and operate on their personal beliefs.

**Teacher factors.** Teachers are agentic actors in the educational environment and variations in their personal beliefs, attitudes and motivations can go a long way toward influencing pedagogical or methodological change in the classroom. One common finding among researchers who have conducted qualitative studies of teachers through surveys, interviews or class observations, is that teachers' own sense of self-efficacy is often faulted in their hesitancy to implement change. Various studies cite lack of teachers' own English proficiency (Anderson, 1993; Wang, 2007), unreasonable demands on their time (Penner, 1995), and their feelings of inadequacy as second-language learners of English (Penner, 1995; Rao, 1996) as part of this complex mix of complicating factors.

In addition, the larger school and community context can play a role. Teacher prestige in a society that has long prized authoritative, knowledgeable masters of their subject may be

tarnished by CLT approaches that encourage a student-centered, exploratory approach to learning (Burnaby & Sun, 1989). Teacher training may also be a factor, as a focus on training in pedagogy is not highly valued in teacher education (Hu, 2007; Hui, 1997; Penner, 1995).

Finally, one of the most oft-cited factors making the transition to a student-centered classroom difficult within a Chinese context is the traditional concept of student and teacher roles (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Hu, 2002; Penner, 1995; Rao, 1996; Rao, 2002a; Rao, 2002b). Whether this is, as is often claimed, a remnant of centuries-old Confucian tradition (Hui, 1997) or, as some suggest (Penner, 1995), a more modern borrowing from Soviet schooling techniques, the conflict between a traditional Chinese teacher at the center of a lecture-based classroom who is seldom questioned or interrupted and the Western ideal of a sidelines coach orchestrating students' interactions is one that is still influencing analyses of education in the PRC.

***Resources and class size.*** The research literature also highlights a lack of classroom resources for communicative activities. While China's economic growth in recent years is remarkable, many classrooms and particularly those in less developed areas still lack resources such as computers, projectors, and other audiovisual equipment that would facilitate the use of authentic language materials and the use of communicative activities (Anderson, 1993; Penner, 1995; Rao, 1996; Rao, 2002b).

A related struggle is the typical class size in Chinese schools. While most CLT activities are ideally suited for small groups of no more than 20 or 25 students, many Chinese teachers are asked to manage groups of 50, 60, or even 70 students at a time. Most of the classroom management skills they have developed in these contexts rely on strict disciplinary techniques and centralized methods of disseminating information. Even classrooms equipped with somewhat modern technology are using it mainly for amplifying a lecturing teacher's voice or



transmitting static information. The logistics of orchestrating activities in which students are supposed to have individual time to speak, listen and interact in English pose a huge obstacle to many educators (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Hu, 2005; Hui, 1997; M. Li, 2011; Penner, 1995).

**Cultural factors.** Finally, researchers are faced with a complex and interconnected set of factors that influence their ability to effect methodological change in their classes. These are grouped together here as “cultural factors,” since present space constraints don't allow for a fuller treatment.

Rao (2002a) framed a discussion of cultural differences in terms of learning styles, giving examples of situations in which Chinese students were comfortable in more traditional, passive learning styles and weren't adapting well to communicative activities encouraged by their teachers. Anderson (1993) spoke of “cultural resistance” to change in educational philosophy, which is also articulated as a conflict of cultural norms (Deng & Carless, 2010; Hui, 1997), specifically educational norms such as a traditional focus on memorization and repetition (Hu, 2002; Penner, 1995; Rao, 1996) and a cultural belief in learning as the accumulation of knowledge from a trustworthy source (Hu, 2005; Hui, 1997). This is manifested in predominant classroom practice, for example, as an emphasis on intensive reading (Rao, 1996; Zhao & Zheng, 2006) and a preference for accuracy over fluency (Rao, 1996).

Some researchers, however, dispute the idea that cultural factors are necessarily an East vs. West schism. R. Li (2007) provided evidence through video observation of both Chinese and foreign teachers that showed more variation within the two groups than between them. In light of evidence like this, it is important to frame a discussion of cultural factors in terms of CLT culture vs. traditional classroom culture rather than assuming it is an incompatibility between Chinese and Western cultures.

Other cultural factors that influence teaching and learning include the Chinese view of textbooks (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Penner, 1995). Hu (2002) says, “The Chinese conception of textbooks as the source of knowledge is largely incompatible with the tenet of CLT that students are negotiators, discoverers, and contributors of knowledge and information” (p. 98). This trust in and reliance on textbooks may turn a transition to teacher-generated and authentic language materials into a frightening shift of trust and confidence.

**Proposed solutions to current obstacles.** The variety of obstacles to implementing CLT identified in the research literature are often accompanied by suggestions for possible solutions, and enough years have passed that some of these solutions are being attempted and reported on in later studies, such as that by Wette & Barkhuizen (2009) which examined teachers' attitudes and remaining challenges in the wake of recent reforms in testing and national curricula.

Many researchers have called for a compromise of the two competing traditions that could possibly work better in Chinese contexts. Anderson (1993), Hu (2002), Penner (1995), and Rao (1996, 2002b) all called for a cultural compromise that would synthesize approaches or combine communicative and non-communicative activities.

It is unclear how this compromise would play out in terms of developing assessments and materials. Since these first proposals were written, newer assessments have been revised to include a greater emphasis on communicative skills such as listening and speaking (Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Henrichsen, 2007) and the national syllabuses for English education have also been updated and revised (Zhao & Zheng, 2006), but this does not appear to be accompanied by a corresponding shift in teaching methods in all cases (Hu, 2005; Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009; Zhang, 2009). This may be because changes have been largely ceremonial, coming top-down rather than including and working with teachers and administrators at the ground level (M. Li,

2011; Liu, 2005; Xiong & Qian, 2012). Some of the criticism is quite pointed. M. Li (2011) says, "Policies have been developed around the socialist ideals of the CCP government, rather than a practical curriculum being designed to enhance teaching and learning" (p. 197).

A more nuanced and potentially more helpful suggestion toward developing a compromise of approaches is articulated by Xiong and Qian (2012): "We advocate a multicultural and cosmopolitan perspective on language curriculum planning and material development marked by an intercultural understanding of both the global and the local" (p. 86). This focus may help orchestrate change in situations where top-down mandates are so far unsuccessful.

Some suggestions that have been offered aim to overcome obstacles related to teacher beliefs and cultural assumptions. Hui (1997) advocated both preservice and inservice training for English teachers, and Hu (2005) promoted the notion that an ecological perspective is more appropriate for solving methodological problems, as it takes into account the complex factors at work.

Finally, Zhao and Zheng (2006), who spoke specifically about the development of textbooks that more fully match the philosophies set out in the national curricula, suggested that the any new approach should begin with underlying theory and aim for something more interdisciplinary. They said that developers should integrate both constructivist and behaviorist theories, as well as information processing and SLA research and theory and communicative language activities (Zhao & Zheng, 2006, p. 378). This call toward reformation at the textbook level forms the basis for the current study.

### **Analyses of English Textbooks in Use**

Due to the nature of the present research question, the literature review also focused on the textbooks currently used in Chinese contexts. Three separate textbook analyses were consulted, two of which (Liu, 2005; Xiong & Qian, 2012) critiqued the underlying philosophies of language textbooks and one of which (Zhao & Zheng, 2006) examined the previous four “generations” of textbooks mandated by the MOE and gave suggestions for the development of the next, the fifth, to bring it closer into line with the current goals of the national syllabus. Liu's (2005) study focused on primary-level texts, Xiong and Qian's (2012) on secondary-level, and Zhao and Zheng's essay addressed primary through tertiary level texts.

### **Suggestions for Future Textbooks**

While the first two studies (Liu, 2005; Xiong & Qian, 2012) explored the unspoken messages inherent in the textual discourse of textbooks, Zhao and Zheng (2006) examined existing textbooks available in China and compared them to the stated aims of the current national syllabuses. They reinforced earlier findings that textbooks to a great degree dictate classroom practice, saying, “Generally speaking, textbooks are the main content of classroom teaching and should match foreign language learning standards in source material and study methods” (Zhao & Zheng, 2006, p. 375). Their study found that the current generation of textbooks continues to use traditional teaching models, focusing on reading ability, although they do integrate the four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) more fully than in the past. In an assessment of how textbooks are used in university classrooms, they found that students purchase and use many different textbooks but the material is covered unevenly in class. Even at the country's most prestigious universities, most time is spent on intensive reading exercises, little on speaking and listening, and virtually no class time is devoted to extensive reading. They

also found that audio materials that come with textbooks are underutilized, computers are not fully integrated into classroom activities, and that many CD–Rom and technological features that are developed to accompany texts achieve little more than to present the printed material again in an electronic format.

They encourage the developers of the next generation of texts to more fully utilize technological and multimedia features to transform and enrich classroom learning. "In the information age, foreign language courses should be fully integrated with the computer network" (Zhao & Zheng, 2006, p. 377).

### **Research Question**

Since studies exploring textbooks as elements of the classroom environment are few and many questions remain to be explored, the current study used a grounded theory analysis of textbooks in an effort to examine the question "What are the predominant philosophies and methodologies underlying existing English textbooks used in a typical area of Mainland China?"

### **Methodology**

For a small sample size of books used in a particular geographical area, an exploratory, qualitative method that allows themes to emerge from existing data is more suitable than a quantitative approach that would test a hypothesis of the researcher's own creation. Grounded theory is one method that allows for concepts and themes to emerge from the data itself, rather than imposing a preconceived hypothesis, and is thus appropriate for a study of this type (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, Glaser's (1965) approach known as "Constant Comparative Analysis" allows for the conscious involvement of the researcher in identifying themes and creating meaning from the information that emerges from the data (Boeije, 2002). Through this Glaserian grounded theory approach, the study tentatively

identified themes in existing textbooks that allowed for some initial answers to the research question about underlying methodologies.

### **Selection of Materials**

The choice of which materials to analyze has a great impact on the credibility of any study, and should display academic rigor. Either arbitrary or biased selection of materials could have unfortunate consequences for both the credibility and usefulness of the study. At the same time, I wanted to best represent a cross-section of the educational environment in which a student in a given Chinese context may be immersed. To this end, I tried to select materials using criteria that would simulate, though not totally encapsulate, what this educational milieu may be.

A guideline for selection can be found in Patton's explanation of purposive sampling (Patton, 1990), a non-probability sampling technique that, while it relies on the subjective judgment of the researcher, adheres to a set framework to maintain a level of academic rigor. There are several techniques within the umbrella of purposive sampling to suit various needs; the current study uses the technique known as typical case sampling. Within this approach, the primary aim is to represent normal or typical units within a given population.

Prior to 2001, primary and secondary level textbooks in China were identical nationwide, all being produced by the Ministry of Education. Perhaps as a result of the reforms to the national syllabus in 2001, textbook production has been diversified and tailored a bit more specifically to the needs of students in various regions of China, with the biggest distinction lying in those produced for the wealthier, more modernized schools of the Eastern seaboard versus the poorer, resource- and talent-scarce schools of the rural West (Wang, 2007).

The textbooks chosen for the present study were obtained in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, from the national bookstore chain Xinhua. While the books were easily obtained due to my living in Nanjing, there was an intentional choice to include books from this area rather than to

order them from an online national retailer, and that choice had two motivations: First, I thought that books popular in a city like Nanjing would represent a typical area in which a large segment of China's population lives (Eastern seaboard provinces) and thus be somewhat generalizable to a larger segment of Chinese contexts and secondly, the availability of local retailers and teachers to recommend the most widely used books provided an opportunity to choose the books that would best represent a typical case in that context (more information on those retailers and teachers in a moment).

Nanjing is a sub-provincial level city and the lifestyle in Jiangsu Province is a reasonably typical representation of a large segment of China's population (125.8 million people live in sub-provincial cities like Nanjing; 429.8 million live in Eastern seaboard provinces like Jiangsu). Residents of relatively wealthy, high-population provinces like Jiangsu are not necessarily afforded the same cutting-edge educational innovations as students in provincial level cities like Shanghai would be, but are still privileged to have college and job prospects that are considerably brighter than those from the West or from smaller counties and villages. Along with these prospects comes increased social pressure toward English mastery. For this reason, an examination the textbooks of an average student in a Nanjing, Jiangsu school are typical for a rather large portion of population of the PRC. It must be emphasized, of course, that these findings may not generalize to all Chinese contexts as circumstances in both much poorer areas and much richer areas are likely to be quite different.

The materials selected were limited to texts intended for third-year high school students. I sought to simulate the cross section of an educational environment described earlier, and decided to simulate the English learning milieu of the third year of high school, a time when

pressure from the upcoming national exam may be in the forefront and English study would be likely to hold a high priority.

To properly determine which materials would be likely to exist in this milieu, I consulted three sources, asking them which books a typical high school student would use, and created a frequency count of their suggestions. First, I met with a Chinese university student who is a graduate of a high school in Jiangsu Province and currently works as an academic tutor at a high school in Nanjing. Secondly, I consulted an American owner of a private English school. Finally, I asked a manager of a prominent textbook retailer (Xinhua Bookstore, the largest and only nation-wide bookstore in China) for the top titles in terms of volume sold. I asked each of these three sources for the ten most common texts or educational books related to English learning, and from that pool of materials selected overlapping and prominent suggestions to decide on the ten to use in the study. This method was intended to get as close as possible to a true typical case sample while also enabling me to narrow the sample size enough to conduct the in-depth case study planned.

Between the recommendations of the tutor and the bookstore manager there was a great deal of overlap. Six of the 10 books were recommended by both. The American owner of a private English school diverged the most from the other two in his recommendations; the books he recommended were all produced by Western authors, which is consistent with his style of teaching and the fact that instruction at his school is conducted entirely in English. While his recommendations did vary greatly from those of the other two, I chose to include his texts in this study to more fully simulate the cross section of a typical educational environment that I was aiming for. His typical student attends his school in the evening and on weekends on top of a



public school education. This practice of attending an extra-curricular “cram school” in addition to a regular public school is common in China among the wealthier classes (Luo, 2013).

### **Trustworthiness and Limitations**

An important factor in qualitative methodology is trustworthiness. According to Shenton (2004), there are numerous provisions that authors can make to preserve trustworthiness in qualitative research. These include such measures as: the adoption of research methods that are well established in practice, the early development of familiarity with the culture of the people or organization in which data gathering will take place, and the examination of previous research findings, among others (Shenton, 2004).

The current study does strive to fulfill these provisions where possible. By using well-established research methods such as Patton’s purposive sampling and a Glaserian approach to grounded theory, I hope to increase the credibility of the data produced.

Shenton (2004) cites multiple other authors who encourage “prolonged engagement” with the people or culture whose environment is the object of study, and this provision is particularly important in efforts to maintain credibility when analyzing a culture different from one’s own. To accomplish this, the current study grows out of previous work I have completed on the same topic which has increased my familiarity with the culture in question. These previous studies and experiences include a research project, three previous unpublished papers, and an internship as an EFL teacher in Taiwan. I have immersed myself in both the literature and the environment of Chinese EFL education and have studied the Chinese language for five years.

An extensive survey of the literature was also completed as part of an effort to be able to compare the findings of the present study to work being completed in a similar vein.

Additionally, I sought to use triangulation to verify whether the books I selected were as well-known as the three recommenders indicated. Finding numerical data on textbook

publication in the PRC is difficult; reporting of sales is not as transparent there as in other areas. Also, the largest bookstore chain, Xinhua, is state owned and doesn't report to public investors (Fang & Xu, 2005). However, in an attempt to find some sort of indication of the prevalence of some of the books selected, I searched a variety of online sources. While I did not find many authoritative sources, I did find a post on Quora.com (an online community where users ask and answer questions and the usefulness of answers are voted on by the community) addressing the popularity of English textbooks in China (Cheng & Zhu, 2014).

To the question “What are the commonly-used English language textbooks used in mainland China's elementary/high schools?”, the highest-rated answer was from a user in Shanghai who stated that his high school used *Oxford English: Shanghai Edition*, which is simply another region's locally published version of the Aldred & Kent (2003) *Advance With English* text chosen for this study. Another user answered that he also used *Oxford English* and stated additionally, “I also want to mention that *New Concept English* by L.G. Alexander is famous and widely used in China. Although it's not used in full-time schools. Most of these texts, if not all, use British spelling.” (Cheng & Zhu, 2014). The Alexander (1997) text is another of the books chosen for this study.

While I sought to maintain credibility and to simulate this specific cross section of an educational environment to the best of my ability, there are of course limitations to what we can learn from any individual qualitative study as well as inevitable biases from the subjective researcher. Choosing which texts to analyze based on the recommendations of individuals in the environment, while it represents the authentic experience of those individuals, cannot speak definitively to larger group or population trends.

The results of this analysis, therefore, can be interpreted as a portrayal of the materials that a high school tutor, private English school owner, and bookstore manager view as important and prominent factors in a third-year high school student's environment, and a possible simulation of what that environment would be for a typical student. Future studies may be designed in a way that is able to capture a broader picture of a similar environment by looking at national sales numbers of textbooks or working directly with a large sample of high schools.

### **Analysis of the Textbooks**

The 10 textbooks, selected for their qualification as a typical case for the average Nanjing high school student, were diverse in their layouts, intended usages, and popularity. To avoid confusion due to multiple texts by the same author, I've assigned each of the textbooks a number by which they can be easily referred to in the my discussion of the analysis, but have also provided author and publisher information for reference purposes. This information is available in Table 1.

Table 1

*Textbooks Selected for Analysis, with Publisher and Author Information*

ID #	Author(s) and year	Publisher	Publisher's Country
1	Wu, 2011	Donghua University Press	China
2	Alexander, 1997	Waiyu Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu Chubanshe, Pearson/Longman	China/UK
3	Hua, 2005	Foreign Language Press	China
4	Aldred & Kent, 2003	Oxford University Press (China)	China/UK
5	Xiong, 2007	China Youth Press	China
6	Qu, 2012	Education Science Publishing House	China
7	Qu, 2007	Education Science Publishing House	China
8	Richards & Sandy, 2011	Waiyu Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu Chubanshe, Cambridge University Press	China/UK
9	Jiang, 2009b	Yanbian Educational Press	China
10	Jiang, 2009a	Yanbian Educational Press	China

In addition, Table 2 provides some additional information about each textbook by identifying which of my three sources suggested the item as a typical case (the Chinese tutor, the American EFL teacher or the bookstore manager).

Table 2

*Textbooks by Recommender*

ID #	Recommended by tutor	Recommended by American teacher	Recommended by bookstore manager
1	Yes		Yes
2	Yes	Yes	Yes
3	Yes		Yes
4	Yes	Yes	Yes
5			Yes
6			Yes
7			Yes
8		Yes	
9	Yes		Yes
10	Yes		Yes

The books fell into five basic categories in terms of usage. Texts 2 and 4 are extensively used as complete curricula for high school students, with text 4 predominating. Texts 1 and 3 are commonly purchased by students as supplementary reference materials; texts 5 and 7 as a supplement or “decoding” tools when their school uses text 4 as its curriculum; texts 6, 9 and 10 as study aids by high school students specifically for studying for the national exam; and text 8 by private tutors and cram schools for extra English education above and beyond that which is mandated in school.

### **Coding and Themes**

I read through at least one unit of each text and took notes of any characteristics that indicated the methodology or underlying assumptions of each as well as outlining the basic structure of information and describing what kind of information was presented to students and

what sort of assignments and exercises were given. I included the introductions and appendices of each text in my review. From the initial notes, I created codes, noting where they overlapped and spoke to larger themes. Overall, six larger themes emerged, with three of them divided into sub-categories. The six main themes that emerged during the grounded theory process were: communication of meaning, language authority, visual and content-based “monotony breakers,” focus on British usage, focus on intensive reading and, finally, a theme I called methodological sabotage. An explanation of each follows.

**Theme 1: Communication of meaning.** One of the main distinctions I saw across the varied approaches to language teaching that these textbooks represented lay in how meaning was communicated to the student. Foreign language texts vary from direct presentations like the ubiquitous “Speak Spanish in 20 Minutes a Day!” products which present phrases paired with one-to-one equivalents in your native tongue, all the way to carefully crafted books and courses that present samples, examples, and contexts and direct the learner to construe and construct his own language meaning. These textbooks showed a variety of approaches along this spectrum, and I categorized the three most distinct approaches as: direct translation of meaning, mediated inferring of meaning, and inferring of meaning.

*Direct translation of meaning.* Though these texts were all intended for an audience of high school students who had studied English for at least five years, they still for the most part presented new information in English side-by-side with complete Chinese translations. Textbooks 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10 all displayed a tendency to present meaning directly, though in the case of text 2 it did coexist with some attempts toward mediation of meaning.

In most cases, this was a straightforward presentation of vocabulary words, sentence patterns, reading passages or idioms first in English and then, either on the same page or

immediately following, a word-for-word translation in Chinese. In the case of the exam-prep manuals (texts 6, 9 and 10), questions and reading passages were usually presented only in English with some more difficult words translated into Chinese in parenthetical insertions, but after the unit was presented, a sentence-by-sentence breakdown and full translation of the items into Chinese followed.

From the prevalence of this theme (it only failed to occur in the two texts authored by Westerners), it may be safe to assume that this direct presentation of meaning is considered to be the norm in Chinese foreign language teaching materials. This is suggestive as possible evidence to back up Liu's (2005) assertion that in China, textbooks are regarded as a fundamental source of knowledge and authority. Students may well expect a foreign language textbook to give an immediate translation into their native tongue and may be frustrated if it does not appear.

***Mediated inferring of meaning.*** While most texts provided a direct translation of the meaning of English content, some of them provided either exercises or commentary that provided instructional scaffolding for students' attempts to infer meaning on their own. Though text 2 did provide word-for-word translations of each reading passage, it presented as the first activity in each chapter an audio version of the passage and a single question to answer before intensive reading was initiated. Lesson 6, for example, instructs the students to “Listen to the tape and then answer the question below,” followed by the question “How did Mr. Taylor try to stop the thieves?” (Alexander, 1997, p. 34). This prompt, if used in the classroom, allows the students an opportunity to listen and decode the meaning of the spoken story *before* reading and dissecting it. The Chinese translation of the transcript is then available on the next page, so it's questionable how much inferring is required of the students or whether the integrity of the listening exercise and preliminary question are preserved in practice.

Textbook 4, on the other hand, handles the mediation of meaning with a little more challenge and distance for the students. All of the reading passages are presented English-only, with the new words and grammar structures used in the passage presented as a series of exercises afterward. If the student does run into trouble negotiating meaning, the book provides a scaffold in the form of extensive glossaries and appendices that translate and explain some, but not all, of the text in Chinese. This added step provides a chance for students to first infer meaning from their own knowledge of previously encountered words and grammar patterns or from the surrounding context, resorting to the slightly inconvenient reference materials when their own internal resources have been exhausted. Because no Chinese words appear in the text until these appendices begin, it was likely that this structure was an intentional choice on the part of the curriculum designers, which was intended to push students toward a strategy of inferring meaning from context and from their previous learning. This format seems to be a rather consistent choice throughout text 4, but an interesting interaction occurs later, via the interference of entirely separate texts. This interaction will be addressed during the discussion of the theme called “methodological sabotage.”

***Inferring of meaning.*** Two of the texts offer opportunities for students to infer meaning entirely on their own, or to search for it through the use of external resources. Text 4 does this by partially mediating the material; while some content is translated and explained in appendices, some of the material remains English-only, and students are challenged to rely on either their own knowledge or on outside dictionaries and texts to discover meaning.

Text 8, on the other hand, relies solely on the student's own ability to infer meaning and presumably promotes this approach intentionally by not providing any Chinese translation of the lesson material. This text is used in multiple contexts and many countries; however, this edition



features a Chinese-language introduction on how to use the book and Chinese translations of the title and publisher on the cover. Whether the choice to omit any Chinese scaffolding in the text is intentional and related to methodology or whether it is a logistical choice dictated by publishing costs and constraints, it is safe to say that this text alone provides a learning experience most similar to those in immersion situations or ESL classrooms that promote a CLT approach.

**Theme 2: Language authority.** In Chinese culture, textbooks and printed materials are generally viewed as repositories of information and sources of authority. This tendency contrasts with the Western push toward a more constructivist conception of knowledge and understanding, and is illustrated in the themes identified and categorized here as “language authority.” On one hand, some of the texts show a trend toward language instruction as a “gateway” or invitation to personal use and command of the language. On the other hand, some elements of texts reinforce the concept of the textbooks as the repository of “correct” language and as the arbiter of how the English language should be constructed and used.

***Gateway to personal use and command.*** Texts 2, 4 and 8, notably the three texts published in partnership with a Western publisher and authored by native English speakers, are the three that offer exercises and structures that invite students to take some of the authority for language use upon themselves in using it to create and communicate novel content.

Each lesson in text 2 contains an exercise on letter writing. Using the theme of the chapter, the exercise prompts students to compose a letter to an imaginary acquaintance, providing at times several scaffolding phrases and questions and an approximate word limit to guide the writing. The exercises increase in complexity as the lessons progress, giving the student a greater and greater capacity to use and command the language on her own. Lesson 2,

for example, has the student “write six phrases which could be used to begin letters to friends,” (Alexander, 1997, p. 20) while by lesson 52 the exercise instructs, “Your house was damaged during a recent thunderstorm. Write a letter of about 100 words to a friend telling him what happened” (Alexander, 1997, p. 238).

Text 4 provides similar exercises that require students to create their own content, not only through writing but through speaking, group discussion and multimedia projects as well. One of the exercises assigned in unit 1 of the textbook is titled “Project: Producing a TV Show” and instructs the students to work in groups to write, star in, and produce a “TV” show to the class on a selected topic related to animals, the background information for two of which is provided as a short reading passage in the text (Aldred & Kent, 2003, p. 18). No rubric or list of requirements is listed for this assignment.

In a similar style to that of text 4, text 8 presents a variety of exercises with no authoritative answers and very minimal guidelines provided. These open-ended language activities are presented in forms as diverse as surveys of fellow students, composition topics dealing with friends and personal life, group discussion questions and role-play scenarios. The lack of any sort of answer key within the book gives a sense that the “correctness” of the language use is determined not by a pre-determined authority figure but by the success of the communicative interaction, whether reflected by the evaluation of a teacher or the comprehension of peers and group members. In a presentation like this, the textbook seems almost transparent in terms of language authority, and the responsibility for determining correctness is deflected onto students, teachers and communicative partners.

***Textbook as arbiter of correct use.*** The texts that present themselves as ultimate authorities and arbiters of correct use do so by presenting themselves as lists of authoritative

information, sources of rules and presumably exhaustive usage examples, sources of correct answers, and sources of “possible answers” to open-ended questions in other texts.

Text 1, basically a dictionary but popularly used by students to both accompany classroom texts and serve as a study aid for high-stakes exams, is the typical authoritative list of information and facts and seems innocuous enough as a reference tool. However, there are unstated implications in its format that make its use as a source of infallible information a bit troublesome. The text seems to use predominantly British spellings and give examples of British usage. Some of the idioms presented as usage examples of words are very colloquial or limited in scope, for example “Many things in our lives go by contraries” and “He crushed the bloom with regardless tread.” If a user searches for the word “center” using the standard American spelling, the text redirects to “centre” with no explanation of the reason for or prevalence of the alternative spelling (Wu, 2011, p. 70). While there is nothing wrong with presenting a collection of British English, there is no indication in the text that this is what is happening or any sort of attempt to identify other varieties of World Englishes whose spellings and usages are correct in their own contexts. By this omission, the text imbues a sense of correctness into the British variants it teaches and gives students no sense of the existence of other varieties.

Several of the texts also serve as sources of rules and usage examples. Texts 3, 5, 6, and 7, notably the texts mainly used for test preparation and “decoding” of classroom texts, accompany readings and exercises with copious information on usage rules, meanings of vocabulary words, and examples of ways the words and grammar points can be used. These presentations again give a sense of total authority through omission. They do not acknowledge that correct uses of language exist outside of the stated rules and examples, and convey a sense that they provide an exhaustive explanation of correct English usage.

Many of these texts, including 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10, style themselves as sources of correct answers, both for exercises in other textbooks and also for questions pulled from previous national exams. By presenting a list of correct answers following every item a student could possibly encounter in his study of English, they convey again a sense of exhaustiveness and also the prescriptivist linguistic position that only certain usages are correct.

As if complete lists of correct answers unsolicited by the authors of other texts weren't troubling enough from a Western educator's point of view, two of the texts, 5 and 7, provide “possible answers” to open-ended items from other texts. Textbook 4, for example, asked students in an introductory discussion task, “Do you use one of your senses more than the others? Give an example” (Aldred & Kent, 2003, p. 1). Text 5, which is marketed as a “decoder” for text 4 but sold independently, gives students a sample answer to the question:

We often use one or two of the five senses more than the others. For example, in the dark, the sense of hearing and the sense of touch become more sensitive because we can't see anything. When we listen to our favorite music, we may close our eyes and just listen with our ears. When we read a very interesting book, we may lose ourselves in it, and hardly hear anything around us. When we eat something, we not only taste or smell it, but look at it as well. (Xiong, 2007, p.46)

This tendency for textbooks to present themselves implicitly as the absolute experts on correct knowledge and repositories of truth is doubtless a product of Chinese tradition and culture. While it's easy to call this “troublesome” from a certain viewpoint, it is important to note that within a different cultural context this may be not merely innocuous but desirable.

Finally, textbooks that perpetuate unspoken beliefs about their own status as the ultimate source of linguistic wisdom are subject to a correspondingly high standard of perfection. While

it is expected for any printed book to contain typos and minor errors, it is ironic and disappointing for books that purport to teach students “correct answers” for high-stakes tests to contain errors and inconsistencies themselves. The current study, which was not even a total review of the complete texts, encountered several usages not just of regional variation but of confusingly incorrect and inconsistent English spelling, wording and punctuation.

**Theme 3: Visual and content-based “monotony breakers.”** One theme that recurred across texts was the material exterior to the main linguistic content of the text that served an auxiliary role to arouse and hold attention or to break the monotony of study. This included visual material in the form of illustrations, photos, and creative uses of typography, but also included verbal information unrelated to the main body content of the textbook. These materials came in two variations: integral to the text content and supplementary to it.

*Integral to text.* Texts 2, 4 and 8, again, the “Westernized” texts, tended to present monotony breakers in concert with the content of the main text. This was often done with color photos and illustrations (texts 4 and 8) that directly represented people or things depicted in the dialog. It also included a more whimsical and evocative approach to graphic design in concert with the text content; for example, a reading passage designed as a journal entry was presented on a colored background that looked like paper in a spiral-bound notebook, with travel photos behind.

The visual elements in text 2, on the other hand, were minimal, presenting only one small cartoon illustration at the beginning of each lesson. However, the cartoon depicted the events of the reading passage and served to either grab attention or make the content more accessible by invoking visual imagery. This minimal imagery format could be related to printing costs, which are much lower for black-and-white texts.

The usage of visual imagery and typography to catch attention or break monotony in a textbook may be cultural, or may be a convention of typically wealthier Western countries. These three texts were all published in partnership with British publishers. However, their character and purpose also seemed to differ from the content of similar materials in other texts in which visual imagery was used as a supplementary “break” from the content of the language text rather than as an enhancement to it.

***Supplementary to text.*** Text 3 used visual imagery as decorative elements, but the content of the images themselves wasn't usually related to the English material of the lesson. According to Clark and Mayer (2011), this use of “decorative graphics” doesn't aid in comprehension of educational media. Occasionally, illustrations in Text 3 loosely depicted content, such as a prince and princess standing across the moat from a castle captioned “How can we get there?” For the most part, however, the illustrations of people, shapes and animals served as frames for grammar patterns and printed Chinese hints that decorated the borders. This text's use of imagery was a border case between the two classifications given here, but overall the monotony breakers seemed to be more for visual interest than for depicting content or making it more memorable.

The material used as monotony-breakers in texts 6, 9, and 10 was very different than that found in traditional Western textbooks. These three texts are also the three in the selection that are directly intended as exam-preparation texts, and they shared a unique approach to supplemental material. In all three cases, the main body of the book was text-only, but a small strip at the bottom of most or many pages displayed information that ranged from incidental to completely non sequitur. Text 6 used phrases, idioms, jokes and even quotes from English movies (along with word-for-word Chinese translations) as items of interest at the foot of pages.

Small illustrations were occasionally included in these “footnote” items of interest. There were also occasional stories and narratives that seemed to be completely Chinese in origin.

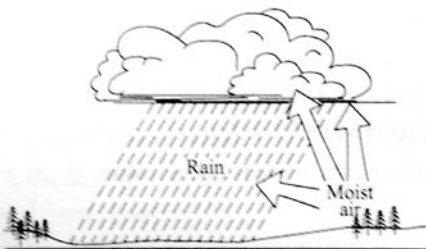
One day I was at home listening to music when suddenly I felt a pain in my neck. As I tried to turn my head, I heard my neck crack. I got the fright of my life. I was so scared that I could feel my legs trembling. “What’s the matter with me?” I thought to myself. Just then, I felt myself slapped by someone. I opened my eyes and saw my teacher standing over me with an angry look on his face. I realized then that I had been dreaming. I didn’t mind getting caught dozing off in class. I was happy what happened was just a dream. (Qu, 2012, p. 73)

This sort of material, while apparently unrelated to any of the test questions the book focused on, seems to be a small attempt at providing supplementary reading and, at the same time, reveals an interesting aspect of the educational experience in China.

Texts 9 and 10 offer an even more unique look at the life of the average student cramming for national exams. Almost all of their page-bottom materials were math and science questions, presented in English. Clues to the answers would have been nowhere to be found within the current text but it seems that a student's familiarity with that content was assumed and their inclusion in the English practice text was some sort of study break by virtue of studying something else for a moment. Additionally, the questions in text 10 look to be identical to those in text 9. One of the questions from text 9 is included here as Figure 1.

越测越开心

The diagram below shows a material being cycled between the living and nonliving environments.



Which material is being cycled?  
 (1) Carbon dioxide. (2) Nitrogen. (3) Oxygen. (4) Water.

答案: (4)

Figure 1: Illustration from Jiang, 2009b, p.15

**Theme 4: Focus on British usage.** As mentioned earlier, there is nothing inherently wrong with a focus on British English in an EFL curriculum. It is widely accepted by linguists in recent years that a descriptivist view of language, that is, one that focuses on language as it is realistically used rather than on an arbitrary set of standards of how it “should be,” is more appropriate in studying the world’s languages. Within this paradigm, British English is a perfectly valid variation of the English language and is neither superior nor inferior to any other. However, in context of the current study, a predominant focus on British English in the majority of textbooks studied and the failure to acknowledge any alternate correct forms of usage is troubling, especially since the texts of the present study that *didn't* exclusively focus on British usage were the ones that included large amounts of material from the national exams, the mastery of which is ostensibly one of the most pressing goals for students of the other texts.

Texts 1, 2, 3, 5, and 7 present British vocabulary and usage conventions almost exclusively in their lessons and explanations, giving no notes on regional variations acceptable in any other dialects of English or World Englishes. They often teach grammar patterns using modal verbs like “musn’t” and “shouldn’t” in constructions that are rarely heard outside of the



British Isles or Commonwealth nations. Text 4 is a bit more neutral, teaching British conventions but including specific dialog about the differences between British and American English (Aldred & Kent, 2003, p. 25). Text 8, while produced by a British publisher, remains neutral to regional influences or particularly colloquial phrasings and, overall, gives off a very international image of the English language. Text 8 is also the text least likely to be used in a public Chinese school, according to the Chinese tutor I consulted in the selection of materials.

The texts that do present international variants of English, on the other hand, are texts 6, 9 and 10, the test preparation books, and many of the samples they give from previous exams, especially reading comprehension items, are written in non-British dialects, largely in American English. At times the editors of the books themselves confuse the competing rules of different systems, for example, placing a final period outside of quotation marks (the British convention) on one line of text, and then inside the quotation marks (the American convention) on the very next (Jiang, 2009b, p. 22). Jiang (2009b) also includes a test item written entirely in American English, pulled directly from an authentic White House press release from January 28, 2010 (p. 54). This could be concerning to educators who have relied on Chinese texts and spent hours teaching “correct” spelling and grammar conventions to prepare their students for high-stakes exams, the content of which then turns out to be written in an entirely different variety of the language.

**Theme 5: Focus on intensive reading.** A final characteristic that seems to predominate in textbooks from one tradition but not the other in the “East vs. West” paradigm split is the focus on intensive reading that we see in the texts produced exclusively by Chinese authors and publishers. Texts 3, 5, 6, 7, 9, and 10 all promote, to one extent or another, the intense, detail-

by-detail approach to reading passages that the more meaning-inferring texts seem to purposely avoid.

Zhao and Zheng (2006), Chinese researchers themselves, noted the predominance of intensive reading in terms of time spent in class at major universities even though this was contrary to the aims of the most recent national syllabus and intents of contemporary textbook developers. These findings seem to support their claim, showing a popular pattern of word-by-word, sentence-by-sentence scrutiny that stands in opposition to reading approaches that encourage extensive reading, fluency, and inferring meaning from context.

Even the texts that didn't rely on detail-oriented examinations of text were “corrected” by others that did. Text 4, specifically, probably because of its popularity, spurred the production of two separate texts (texts 5 and 7) by separate authors and publishers. These texts turned text 4's largely English-only passages and invitations for learners to expand into hours of more work in intense scrutiny and an emphasis on accuracy over fluency.

**Theme 6: Methodological sabotage.** This meta-volume interplay and methodological sparring was one of the more surprising findings of the study. The original selection criteria for the texts was, “which texts are high school students in the typical case environment selected here most likely to buy and use?” The bookstore employee recommended texts 4, 5 and 7 as being among the top sellers and I was unaware when I purchased them that the latter two were “decoding guides” for the first.

As mentioned in previous sections, much of the content of texts 5 and 7 was direct translation of reading passages and lists of correct answers for exercises in text 4. Open-ended items were also supplied with “possible answers,” and there were no accompanying prompts for students to use these as guidelines only or to come up with answers of their own.

Regardless of the intent of the publishers of these decoding books (it could be assumed that the intent is spurred by nothing more complex than the laws of supply and demand), it cannot be denied that their entire format, content and existence constitute a sort of methodological sabotage of text 4. Intentional choices on the part of the designers and authors, such as a tendency toward mediating students' ability to infer meaning and a pointed effort at creating gateways for students to use language personally and independently, are rendered useless when students are simultaneously working from a book that gives them side-by-side direct translations and “possible answers” to open-ended questions. The fact that these books are among the hot sellers at the only nation-wide bookstore chain in China demonstrates that not a small number of students are having their carefully designed academic approach to learning English sabotaged by external ideas about what the nature of their learning should be.

### **Response to Research Question**

The research question set out was: What are the predominant philosophies and methodologies underlying existing English curricula used in a typical area of Mainland China?

The use of grounded theory to identify and analyze themes emerging from the data itself produced six major themes, out of which were identified two definite trends and a schism between a majority approach from a traditional Chinese understanding (the majority or dominant paradigm) and an approach originating from what could be either identified as “Western” or maybe more accurately modern academic viewpoints (the minority paradigm).

The dominant paradigm values such methodologies in its text objects as: a direct translation of meaning between foreign and native language, an assertion of correct and standard use of language as defined by authoritative textbooks, and a minimal and information-based form of monotony-breaking. The minority paradigm, on the other hand, aims for more learner-

centered and open-ended approaches to communicating meaning, a reliance on learners finding their own sources of authority in outside sources or communicative partners, and a use of visual and enrichment material that is integral and enriching to the content of the text.

Additionally, we find these two paradigms coexisting, but also find a tendency of the dominant paradigm to “sabotage” the methodological aims of the minority paradigm through publishing its own counterparts to popular minority-paradigm textbooks, nullifying their attempts at open-ended exercises and questions without clear-cut answers supplied.

This forms an answer to the research question that can be phrased with a few qualifiers. The predominant philosophies and methodologies underlying English curricula in China are those espoused by a dominant paradigm that prizes success on national high-stakes exams and a preservation of the entrenched textual sources of expertise as primary goals of education. However, the minority paradigm that comes from a more learner-centered philosophy and employs corresponding methodologies does exert a presence in the system, even forming the basis of one of the more widely used basic texts in public schools. This paradigm, however, is also sabotaged by competitors from the dominant paradigm and driven by social and traditional expectations of students, educators, parents, and textbook authors.

Of course this answer is incomplete, limited in scope, and cannot begin to capture the entire complex reality that faces learners and teachers across a huge and diverse nation. However, this attempt to highlight at least some of the common, if not predominant, issues in English language education as revealed through its instruments of instruction does hopefully provide a clear articulation of one viewpoint of the situation and suggest some possible avenues for future work.

## **Conclusion**

The answers to the research question open up countless more doors than they definitively close. There is much more to be researched about the paradigms presented here as the dominant and minority views of ideology and methodology underlying textbook and curriculum design.

In relation to the main themes discovered in the existing literature, the current study adds a few questions and propositions of its own. The bulk of scholarship done to explore a more communicative approach to language teaching in China cites influences such as exam pressure, changes in national policy, and teacher beliefs and attitudes, in addition to that of textbooks as cultural artifacts. This study seems to confirm the role that exam pressure still plays in shaping educational attitudes and provides some possible reasons why national policy and popular attitudes are slow to catch up to one another. If there really are competing paradigms at work at the very foundations of curriculum design, and particularly if one is actively sabotaging the other, this may explain why change seems so easy in terms of policy and so difficult in practice.

### **Possibilities for Future Research**

One of the best ways to confirm or expand upon these findings in future studies would be through research designs that overcome the limitations of the small sample size and qualitative nature of this study. Studies that use a larger scale in the selection of materials and can examine texts used most frequently across China would be helpful in determining how generalizable the present findings are and how prevalent the paradigms identified may be.

The proposition that this study makes about competing paradigms may be the boldest of the interpretations here and probably stands in greatest need of being verified through further research. If other analyses search for these paradigms in textbooks and curricula and can find evidence that they are at play, that will set the stage for progress in development work.

Development of future textbooks and curricula that can take these potential sources of conflict into account and explore ways to either overcome or work within the confines of competing paradigms would be ideal, as would explorations into ways that other classroom factors can help or facilitate the types of changes that these future texts would need to succeed in the classroom environment.

Most of all, with the recent announcements about upcoming changes in both the age at which English instruction begins in China and the relative weight of the English portion of the national exam as compared to other subjects, these next few years will be critical in determining the future success of English language education in China. More work on all aspects of this issue will serve to enlighten our understanding of the problems at hand and encourage innovation in both research and development to overcome them.

## References

- Achren, L. (2007). *Whose development? A cultural analysis of an AusAID English language project in the Lao People's Democratic Republic* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis). Victoria University, Melbourne. Retrieved from <http://wallaby.vu.edu.au/adt-VVUT/uploads/approved/adt-VVUT20070917.125308/public/02whole.pdf>
- Aldred, D., & Kent, J. C. (2003). *Advance with English 3*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Alexander, L. G. (1997). *New concept English 3*. Beijing: Waiyu Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu Chubanshe, Pearson/Longman.
- Anderson, J. (1993). Is a communicative approach practical for teaching English in China? Pros and cons. *System*, 21(4), 471–480.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Burnaby, B., & Sun, Y. (1989). Chinese teachers' views of Western language teaching: Context informs paradigms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23(2), 219–238.
- Chen, Q., & Klenowski, V. (2009). Assessment and curriculum reform in China: the college English test and tertiary English as a foreign language education. Proceedings of the 2008 *AARE International Education Conference*, The Australian Association for Research in Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.
- Cheng, L., & Wang, H. (2004). Understanding professional challenges faced by Chinese teachers of English. *TESL-EJ*, 7(4), 1–14.

- Cheng, X., & Zhu, H. (2014). What are the commonly-used English language textbooks used in mainland China's elementary/high schools? Retrieved from <http://www.quora.com/What-are-the-commonly-used-English-language-textbooks-used-in-mainland-Chinas-elementary-high-schools>
- Clark, R. C., & Mayer, R. E. (2011). *E-learning and the science of instruction: Proven guidelines for consumers and designers of multimedia learning*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3–21.
- Deng, C., & Carless, D. R. (2010). Examination preparation or effective teaching: Conflicting priorities in the implementation of a pedagogic innovation. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 7(4), 285–302.
- Fang, Q., & Xu, L. (2005). A brief history of non-state-owned book businesses in China. *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 21(4), 56–64.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. London: Weidenfield and Nicholson.
- Han, H. (2008). *A study of Chinese college English teachers in China – Their beliefs and conceptual change*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Queen's University, Kingston, ON.
- Han, S. (2013). Gaokao reform and international higher education. *University World News*, (299).
- Henrichsen, L. (2007). English language teaching in China: An update on the state of the art. *TESL Reporter*, 40(2), 1.



- Hu, G. (2002). Potential cultural resistance to pedagogical imports: The case of communicative language teaching in China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 15(2), 93–105.
- Hu, G. (2005). Contextual influences on instructional practices: A Chinese case for an ecological approach to ELT. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(4), 635–660.
- Hu, Y. (2007). China's foreign language policy on primary English education: What's behind it? *Language Policy*, 6(3), 359–376.
- Hua, K. (2005). *Super English grammar*. Beijing: Foreign Language Press.
- Hui, L. (1997). New bottles, old wine: Communicative language teaching in China. *English Teaching Forum*, 35(4), 38–41.
- Jiang, S. (2009a). *English cloze*. Yanji, Jilin, China: Yanbian Educational Press.
- Jiang, S. (2009b). *English reading comprehension*. Yanji, Jilin, China: Yanbian Educational Press.
- Johnson, K. E. (2006). The sociocultural turn and its challenges for second language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 235–257.
- Li, M. (2007). Foreign language education in primary schools in the People's Republic of China. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 8(2), 148–160.
- Li, M. (2011). Shaping socialist ideology through language education policy for primary schools in the PRC. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 12(2), 185–204.
- Li, R. (2007). *When West Meets East: Communicative Language Teaching in China* (Master's thesis). Brigham Young University.

- Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 71.
- Liu, Y. (2005). The construction of pro-science and technology discourse in Chinese language textbooks. *Language and Education*, 19(4), 304–321.
- Luo, C. (2013, November 20). Beijing to remove English classes from early grades at elementary schools. *South China Morning Post*. Hong Kong.
- Majors, A. (2010). Communicative language teaching in East Asian contexts: A new perspective. Unpublished manuscript.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc.  
Retrieved from <http://psycnet.apa.org/psycinfo/1990-97369-000>
- Penner, J. (1995). Change and conflict: Introduction of the communicative approach in China. *TESL Canada Journal*, 12(2), 01.
- Qu, Y. (2007). *Five years' gaokao, three years' simulations: High school English - required course 2*. Beijing: Education Science Publishing House, Capital Normal University Press.
- Qu, Y. (2012). *Five years' gaokao, three years' simulations: Gaokao English, Jiangsu Province edition*. Beijing: Education Science Publishing House, Capital Normal University Press.
- Rao, Z. (1996). Reconciling communicative approaches to the teaching of English with traditional Chinese methods. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 458–471.
- Rao, Z. (2002a). Bridging the gap between teaching and learning styles in East Asian contexts. *TESOL Journal*, 11(2), 5–11.

- Rao, Z. (2002b). Chinese students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classroom. *System*, 30(1), 85–105.
- Richards, J. C., & Sandy, C. (2011). *Passages 4*. Beijing: Waiyu Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu Chubanshe, Cambridge University Press.
- Sato, K., & Kleinsasser, R. C. (1999). Communicative language teaching (CLT): Practical understandings. *Modern Language Journal*, 83(4), 494–517.
- Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, 22(2), 63–75.
- Sun, G., & Cheng, L. (2009). From context to curriculum: A case study of communicative language teaching in China. *TESL Canada Journal*, 19(2), 67.
- Taguchi, N., Naganuma, N., & Data, B. (2006). Transition from learning English to learning in English: Students' perceived adjustment difficulties in an English-medium university in Japan. *Asian EFL Journal*, 8(4).
- Wang, Q. (2007). The national curriculum changes and their effects on English language teaching in the People's Republic of China. *International Handbook of English language Teaching* (pp. 87–105). New York: Springer.
- Wang, R.J. (2008), *The theoretical and practical study of communicative approach in southern Taiwan junior high schools: Based on professors', teachers', and students' perspectives*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, National Pingtung Institute of Commerce, Pingtung, Taiwan

- Wette, R., & Barkhuizen, G. (2009). Teaching the book and educating the person: Challenges for university English language teachers in China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 29(2), 195–212.
- Wu, M. (2011). *English vocabulary*. Shanghai: Donghua University Press.
- Xiong, H. (2007). *Decoding the complete textbook: High school English required course 3*. Beijing: China Youth Press.
- Xiong, T., & Qian, Y. (2012). Ideologies of English in a Chinese high school EFL textbook: a critical discourse analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 32(1), 75–92.
- Zhang, X. (2009). *A great leap forward: EFL curriculum*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Ballarat, Ballarat, Australia. Retrieved from <http://mpa.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30542/>
- Zhao, Y., & Zheng, S. (2006). A theoretical analysis of several Western textbook evaluation systems and their implications for college English textbook evaluations in China. *Foreign Language Education*, 39(5), 374-378.

Curriculum as Discourse:  
A Critical Discourse Analysis of English Textbooks in China

Anneke Garcia

Brigham Young University

### Abstract

Much of the existing literature in TESOL and EFL seeks to understand the challenges of implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches in East Asia and China in particular. The current study uses critical discourse analysis methodology to approach questions raised in the literature about why there seem to be such persistent obstacles in these efforts. Using textual analysis of sample passages from three textbooks currently used in Mainland China, the author seeks to examine power relationships between existing dominant paradigms and potential minority voices. The analysis corroborates findings of similar CDA studies and suggests that entrenched cultural messages about English as a tool of social elitism, the preeminence of the national exam, and the lack of autonomy in language education may be hampering efforts to reform English education.

*Keywords:* China; EFL textbooks; critical discourse analysis; cultural ideologies; TESOL

## **Curriculum as Discourse: A Critical Discourse Analysis of English Textbooks in China**

Questions on improving English as a Foreign Language (EFL) education in East Asian contexts have inspired years of inquiry and are ongoing. Many of these studies, at least in the Anglophone literature, focus on the question of why Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches to EFL education haven't been more successful in East Asia though they've been so widely practiced and promoted in ESL contexts in the West (Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Han, 2008; Hu, 2002; Hu, 2005; Johnson, 2006; Littlewood, 1999; Penner, 1995; Rao, 1996; Rao, 2002; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Sun & Cheng, 2009; Taguchi, Naganuma, & Data, 2006; Wang, 2008).

The answers to the questions that occur in these lines of inquiry may lie in a complex set of interacting factors, and may also be enlightened by a greater understanding of underlying cultural and societal factors (Garcia, 2014). The aim of the current study is to inform the larger research efforts in CTL implementation in East Asian contexts by looking specifically at one factor in the larger educational environment: textbooks. Focusing specifically on widely-used EFL textbooks in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the aim is to examine both explicit and incidental messages that these textbooks may communicate about the purpose of learning English as a Foreign Language. Hopefully, a foray into such a fundamental question can serve as a helpful addition to the larger body of research into educational innovation and reform.

### **Review of the Literature**

The role that textbooks play as elements of the educational environment is related to the other complex factors in that same environment, many of which existing research has begun to explore. Among existing studies about difficulties with CLT acceptance and obstacles to pedagogical change in East Asian contexts in general, some researchers have addressed factors

that have to do with attitudes and perceptions of teachers, students and others in educational environments. This existing research on affective factors like attitude and perception, rather than more traditional measures of external, objective benchmarks, sets the stage for a critical discourse analysis because of its relationship to what is communicated implicitly by discourse content. An understanding of attitudes and perceptions of people in educational environments enriches the context for an analysis of discourse because the people in the environment are the ones who are receiving and interpreting the messages that the discourse sends. These attitudes, preconceptions and cultural assumptions may provide an important contextual viewpoint from which to analyze implicit communication and relationships of power in educational materials.

### **Examination of Beliefs and Attitudes of English Teachers**

A common research format in the recent literature is the small-scale, qualitative exploration of attitudes and beliefs of individuals, particularly teachers, in the midst of recent reform efforts. Four of the studies consulted in the current endeavor examined specifically the beliefs and attitudes of teachers in regard to pedagogical reform (Cheng & Wang, 2004; Han, 2008; Hui, 1997; Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009). Teachers consulted in these studies reported feeling trapped by external constraints, most notably by pressures of the national exam that their students would be required to take (Cheng & Wang, 2004; Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009). Additionally, teachers feel constrained by their students' test scores, their own English proficiency, and their disciplinary abilities (Cheng & Wang, 2004; Hui, 1997).

**Competing demands and competing philosophies.** Additionally, some of these studies suggest that it is not an ignorance of or outright rejection of “foreign” or “Western” or “non-traditional” methods that underlies problems in pedagogical change, but rather the complex interplay of these approaches and internal realities that can cause strife.



While some research has proposed that cultural differences between Asia and the West could be to blame for the failure of CLT to thrive, Han (2008) reported that some ideas about cultural incompatibility are misunderstandings and over-generalizations. She explained:

Studies attributed the difficult adoption and implementation of communicative approaches in language teaching in China to the Confucian educational tradition, which, they claimed, was incompatible with or even opposite to Western ideas of language teaching ... The conclusions of those studies highlighted the cultural and traditional characteristics of Chinese education, but ignored the openness of Chinese education to the different or even seemingly incompatible ideas and practices of Western education. The highlighting of cultural differences resulted in an illusionary cultural wall. (Han, 2008, p. 236)

Han further suggested that this “wall” between West and East may in fact be more akin to a permeable barrier. Teachers themselves report internal beliefs that push them to attempt new innovations in their teaching, but they meet pushback from other agents in the school environment within their own Chinese culture, particularly the students themselves, “many of whom they said wanted only ‘to pass the exam through some techniques, by cramming before the exam or even cheating. Learning English is only a means to an end—the degree’ ” (Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009, p. 205).

It could well be that “cultural” and “traditional” factors so easily discussed are far more complex than our research has thus far allowed us to understand, that plenty of Chinese educators and learners are willing and eager to make changes, and that a more ecological approach, as Hu (2005) suggested, may be more appropriate in identifying the competing and at times symbiotic forces at work in the Chinese educational system.

Because many of these complicating factors that have been identified so far in the research literature involve the attitudes and preconceptions of human agents in educational environments and center around cultural and philosophical forces, a more profound understanding of the situation requires further research into these same human, agentive, and cultural factors. While this broad effort may take many forms, the aim of the current study is to begin by examining the cultural factors that communicate to the people in educational environments by employing methods of analysis that permit a deeper look at the assumptions being made and messages being conveyed at the cultural level.

### **Discourse and Learners' Identities**

When textbooks act as discourse, learners are usually those who are on the receiving end of the messages they transmit. The question of what messages textbooks may be sending about how and why students should study English, therefore, is related to the messages learners are receiving. While there isn't much in the literature yet about what textbooks are implicitly communicating, there is some work detailing how learners understand their role in the educational environment.

Gu (2010) is one researcher who has suggested that discourse affects the construction of identity within L2 English learners. In her study of four college-level Chinese students of English, two of whom were English majors and two of whom were not, she found a diverse and complex process of identity construction in which the students acted as agents in constructing their identities in response to cultural discourse.

This raises questions that can be explored by the study of discourse and implicit communication about values and power relationships. There is a suggestion that learners' identities may be influenced by discourse factors in the classroom and in the larger cultural

atmosphere in China (Gu, 2010); if true, critical discourse analysis is a tool with which deeper examination of underlying sociocultural factors can begin. If Gu's findings are indicative of a common phenomenon in second-language learners, a deeper understanding of what messages are being conveyed through written discourse could prove extremely helpful in setting the stage for future steps toward resolution of conceived cultural and pedagogical incompatibilities.

### **Textbooks as Discourse**

In another study of mine, a study of ten typical English-language learning textbooks in China (Garcia, 2014), the initial findings suggested themes that were communicated both overtly and inadvertently by these commonly-used texts, themes that included: communication of meaning, language authority, visual and content-based “monotony breakers,” focus on British usage, focus on intensive reading, and methodological sabotage. These themes were present in a very consistent pattern across different texts – those produced in cooperation with Western (exclusively British) publishers and authored by Westerners demonstrated a tendency toward attitudes typical of a present but minority paradigm. They tended to focus on more learner-centered and open-ended approaches to communicating meaning, a reliance on learners finding their own sources of authority in outside sources or communicative partners, and a use of visual and enrichment material that is integral and enriching to the content of the text.

The majority of commonly-used textbooks, on the other hand, were produced by Chinese authors and publishers and demonstrated a tendency toward the majority paradigm, which values such methodologies in its text objects as: a direct translation of meaning between foreign and native language, an assertion of correct and standard use of language as defined by authoritative textbooks, and a minimal and information-based form of monotony-breaking.

The pervasiveness and consistency of this paradigm split first discussed in Garcia (2014) set the trajectory for the current study, which seeks to delve further into the discourse conveyed by some of the textbooks from the same sample (Aldred & Kent, 2003; Alexander, 1997; Qu, 2012; Xiong, 2007).

### **Research Question**

Some of the research literature has articulated a need to examine more subtle cultural factors and communicated assumptions in EFL environments. There is additional evidence of the powerful role that discourse may play in learner identities and subsequent success of EFL methods. Therefore, the present research question has been articulated as: What are the unspoken, implicit messages about the purpose and importance of English learning as communicated by the existing discourse in popular Chinese textbooks?

### **Methodology**

One of the possible methods for exploration into cultural values and assumptions is a critical discourse analysis—an approach to the study of linguistic and textual discourse that views language in the light of social and power relationships communicated therein (Bloor & Bloor, 2007; Fairclough, 2001, 2003).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a multidisciplinary approach that focuses on discourse as the unit of analysis. In this specific sense, the word *discourse* refers to “symbolic human interaction in its many forms, whether directly through spoken or written language or via gesture, pictures, diagrams, films or music” (Bloor & Bloor, 2007, p. 2). In this sense, textbooks are a form of discourse very pervasive in the educational environment though not often treated as artifacts of cultural communication, at least in the existing EFL literature.

Compared to other prevalent methodologies often employed in the social sciences, CDA adopts a less objective stance on the part of the researcher.

CDA sees itself not as a dispassionate and objective social science, but as engaged and committed; a form of intervention in social practice and social relationships. What is distinctive about CDA compared with other approaches to research is that without compromising its social scientific objectivity and rigor, it openly and explicitly positions itself on the side of dominated and oppressed groups and against dominating groups. (Fairclough, Mulderrig, & Wodak, 2011, p. 358)

In this vein, the current study seeks to explore the discourse of some existing textbooks to expose any potential evidence of domination, oppression or coercion from the dominant paradigm about the purpose of learning English as a foreign language.

While CDA is, by definition, “a problem-oriented interdisciplinary research programme, subsuming a variety of approaches, each with different theoretical models, research methods and agendas” (Wodak, 2011, pg. 38), a basic explanation of how to conduct a CDA is as follows: first, begin with a research question that stems from a real social problem. Then, “methodology is the process during which, informed through theory, this topic is further refined so as to construct the objects of research (pinpointing specific foci and research questions)” (Wodak, 2011, pg. 40). Methods of data collection and analysis vary and can draw from various disciplines, as long as they involve some form of close textual or multimodal analysis. In the current study, the method of textual analysis will be based on that described by McKee (2003) in which “we attempt to understand the likely interpretations of texts made by people who consume them.” This is accomplished by considering the content of the text (in this case, excerpts from Chinese textbooks) in the larger context of information consulted on the cultural and

demographic environment in which people consuming the text live (in this case, the environment of EFL learners in China as understood through the lens of the existing literature).

### **Previous Examples of Chinese Textbook CDA in the Literature**

Two existing studies were found in the review of the literature that use the CDA approach in specific critiques of textbooks in China (Liu, 2005; Xiong & Qian, 2012). Liu (2005) underlines the need for CDA investigations of textbooks as objects of cultural discourse by highlighting the specifically Chinese reliance on them as sources of knowledge and arbiters of moral “rightness.”

It is axiomatic in studies of contemporary Chinese language education that curriculum form and content has been driven by textbook selection. This is due, in part, to the difficulty of achieving consistent teacher quality and systems communication across geographic and regional diversity. It is also due to the Chinese cultural tradition where textbooks are regarded as the major source of knowledge and authority (Liu, 2005, p. 305).

In his study, Liu examined Chinese language texts developed for primary students and highlighted the bias inherent in the discourse that minimizes human (and particularly the government of the “New China's”) responsibility for environmental problems and maximizes the trust and confidence credited to a vague, benevolent, “science and technology” while omitting any sense of negativity associated with the outcomes of science. This, he argued, promotes a sense of social and moral “rightness” on behalf of science and rational thought and absolves any sense of guilt or responsibility for the negative outcomes of rapid economic development.

Xiong and Qian (2012) similarly analyzed a textbook for underlying messages about “rightness” and a whitewashing of historical conflict. In their study of a high school English text

co-published by British and Chinese publishers, they explained that the dominant ideology—that pushed and accepted by inner-circle countries of the Anglophone world—is legitimized and other competing ideologies neutralized by omission and by subtle linguistic styling. They claimed that English in China is politicized to serve the political and economic agenda of the State and that standardized language exams serve to reinforce native-speaker norms and also serve a profit motive for special-interest groups. Because Chinese textbooks present English within the narrow confines of the dominant ideology, that is, English as spoken in the inner circle countries being “correct” English, the need to present a more inclusive understanding of World Englishes is marginalized and competing ideologies suppressed.

These two explorations of textbooks within the CDA framework serve as examples for the current study. The “dominant ideologies” identified in the two studies were, respectively, the idea that scientific thought is superior and science and technology are benevolent tools of mankind, and the idea that “correct” and “proper” English is that spoken by native speakers of the Anglophone inner circle and that differing characteristics of other World Englishes are incorrect. In a similar vein, the aim of the stated research question of this study is to identify the purpose and importance of English learning by highlighting the dominant ideologies promoted by the examined texts.

### **Choice of Passages for Inclusion in Current Study**

While previous studies have focused on either one specific passage and its concomitant theme (Xiong & Qian, 2012) or selections from various texts (Liu, 2005), the current study expands on this model through a choice of extracts from three separate texts to highlight examples of various themes that arose from the initial grounded theory analysis I conducted.

Out of the six themes that arose in Garcia's (2014) initial grounded theory analysis of Chinese textbooks, (communication of meaning, language authority, visual and content-based "monotony breakers," focus on British usage, focus on intensive reading and methodological sabotage), there were three themes that seemed to be embodied by specific text passages. One spoke to the theme of a focus on British usage, one to an interesting quality of one of the monotony breakers, and one to the idea of methodological sabotage. The results of analyzing these three passages are detailed below.

### **A Critical Discourse Analysis of Selected Passages**

CDA was developed as an interdisciplinary approach to problems in the humanities and social sciences, particularly those concerned with issues of social hierarchy, power, and social norms, and is thus ideally suited for use in education (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2001; Fairclough, 2003). Following Liu's (2005) suggestion that this approach be applied to textbooks in a Chinese context due to their particularly prestigious status as object of cultural importance and sources of accurate knowledge, I wanted to, at least in a limited context, look at some samples from the current texts through a CDA lens and see how such an analysis can inform the search for answers to wider questions in the EFL field.

The first sample comes from a textbook authored by Alexander (1997) and published jointly by a British and a Chinese publisher. I wanted to examine the text's promotion of Anglocentrism as opposed to contexts more germane to World Englishes, but rather than doing so by analyzing an isolated passage, I created a list of reading topics presented in the book. I then analyzed the topics from the viewpoint of the intended user, a typical Chinese student with little exposure to Western culture.



The second sample comes from an exam-prep text by Qu (2012). While texts like this are not common classroom fare, they are extremely popular commercially, and this specific text was mentioned as one of the 10 best sellers by the manager of a *Xinhua Bookstore*, China's largest national book chain (Garcia, 2014). The passage chosen is a footnote that is provided to illustrate a grammar principle. The content, rather than the form, is examined as a voice of discourse encountered by the average student preparing to take the national exam in English.

The third and final sample is taken from Xiong (2007), with a corresponding passage found in Aldred and Kent (2003). The first text is marketed as a “decoder” of the latter, which is commonly used in high school curriculums. The focus of analysis here is the usage of pronouns in the two texts and what contrasting differences in corresponding passages can tell us.

### **A (Limited) Range of Reading Topics**

One of the most pointed critiques of textbooks produced by Western authors is Xiong and Qian's (2012) analysis of Aldred and Kent's (2003) *Advance With English* (which was also analyzed in the Garcia [2014] study). The dominant ideology upheld by Aldred and Kent's inclusion of some historical information and the omission of other, more recent and salient, history, is that inner-circle English, especially that spoken in Britain, is the “right” and “historically correct” English and that the years of history and lived experience of other native English speakers around the world, who incidentally outnumber British people about 6 to 1, does not factor into the historical development of the language. Additionally, as Xiong and Qian (2012) noted, the passage in Aldred and Kent (2003) presented British English as a language heavily influenced by England's conquerors, but neglected any mention of Britain's own later conquests of other peoples and how that has affected the English language.

Similarly, one of the passages selected in the current study seems to present a decidedly Anglocentric view of the English language.

Rather than a passage of prose text, this passage is a list of summaries of the main reading passages in a text examined in the Garcia (2014) study, Alexander's (1997) *New Concept English 3*. This course teaches vocabulary and grammar structures all drawn from the text of the framing stories of its reading passages, thus creating within the textbook system a self-contained world of English dictated by the people and experiences within the stories. Summaries of the passages in each of the first 11 lessons in the text are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

*Summaries of the First 11 Lessons' Reading Passages (Alexander, 1997)*

1. A puma escapes from the zoo into the English countryside.
2. The vicar of a town tries to repair the church clock.
3. American archaeologists discover statues of goddesses at a site in Greece.
4. White collar workers sacrifice the money they could be making as manual workers for the prestige of a office job.
5. Newspapers require journalists to go to ridiculous extremes to research unimportant facts.
6. A jewelry store is robbed by thieves who smash the display window.
7. A British man accidentally burns his wallet full of a large amount of money in the microwave and a special department at the bank restores his money.
8. A monastery in the Alps keeps St. Bernard dogs to help travelers in the winter.
9. There is a bit of truth in beliefs about cats' "nine lives"—they are well-adapted to survive falls.
10. In 1912, the ship Titanic struck an iceberg and sank on its trip from England to the US.
11. A traveler wasn't believed by a customs officer in an airport when he said he had nothing to declare.

These stories are set in the following locations: five specifically in Britain, one in Greece, one in Switzerland, one in an unnamed modernized Western country, one in New York, one in

the Atlantic Ocean between Britain and New York, and finally one in either Britain or another Commonwealth country (as evidenced by use of the term “green channel”).

Characters include people like vicars (translated into Chinese as the general term for “pastor” or “priest” rather than being identified as the specifically Anglican term that it is), American archaeologists, Western white-collar workers, British people wealthy enough to carry around 3,000 pounds in cash and own a microwave, jewelry store owners, and so on.

While the attempt to teach vocabulary and usage within real-life contexts is very much in line with current ideas of best practice under CLT and constructivist models, the reality presented within the world of the textbook is one that revolves almost wholly around British people and interests.

For a language whose history has been impacted by people in places as diverse as the deserts of North America, the tropical climates of the Indian subcontinent and the bustling trading ports of southern China, any conception of life and usage of that language outside of a very Eurocentric sphere is missing.

Additionally, how would the typical Chinese student, whose parents may earn somewhere around the national monthly average of 571 US dollars, relate to a story of a man who unfortunately lost a wallet containing over 8 times that amount in cash?

The text analyzed is admittedly a bit outdated, the first edition having been published in 1967. It is easy to understand how a less international view of the Anglophone world could be perpetuated within its pages. But the recent edition, published in 1997 and reprinted in 2012, is still selling well in modern Chinese cities (Garcia, 2014) and it's worth reflecting on the image of the English language that's being projected and silently reinforced by its unremarked-upon omission of any concerns outside of those of a very small European nation.

### A Revealing Grammatical Footnote

Another text, Qu's (2012) *Five Years' Gaokao, Three Years' Simulations*, is intended to be a study guide for the *gaokao* rather than a classroom curriculum. The word “*gaokao*,” the nickname for the high-stakes Chinese national exam, is written in the largest characters on the cover of the book. It comes with a practice test and a fold-out, laminated vocabulary sheet. This is evidently a book for exam cramming.

The methodological underpinnings of such a text are probably not as academic as a text produced for classroom curriculum would be. But considering the context that produced this text, its methodologies seem to be consistent with its desired outcomes.

This text was one that, during Garcia's (2014) thematic analysis, was found to display characteristics such as: the use of direct translation of meaning, a depiction of the textbook as the arbiter of correct use, an emphasis on intensive reading and a use of "monotony breakers" that was separate from, but supplementary to, the content of the text. It's from one of these monotony-breakers, a tiny footnote buried deep in pages listing handy phrases for social communication, that I pull the passage to analyze: “If ... were/did/should/were to do, subject + would/might/should/could + do (expresses a conjecture about the future),” the text box begins, and then outlines the pattern for the forthcoming sample sentence: “If you shouldn't pass the college entrance examination, what would you do?” (Qu, 2012, p.145).

The underlying methodologies and themes discovered in this text by Garcia (2014) were all reminiscent of a system in which definite, black-and-white answers and an attention to tiny linguistic detail can spell the difference in a few tiny percentile points that will matriculate one student into a prosperous future and one student out of it. The educational purposes of this text seem to be aligned tightly with the strategies and assumptions of the national exam.

“If I shouldn't pass the college entrance examination,” a hypothetical student wonders to herself in British colloquial English, “what would I do?”

The content of this footnote question illustrates the dominant ideology being upheld by the use of discourse. Keeping in mind the cultural context surrounding a reader of this text, its message seems to reinforce the idea of the exam as the paramount measure of language ability. Furthermore, this text was one that was noted for its portrayal of textbooks as authority, a position that serves to strengthen the implicit message of the passage in which English is learned to pass exams, and passing exams seems to be the only desirable outcome in a student's life.

If one were to look at the content of this passage from a minority paradigm standpoint; say, placing value on other varieties of English as acceptable variations, or prizing a student's communicative ability as an indication of success, then this passage might produce very different hypothetical answers in the mind of the reader and might convey a very different implicit message about the purpose of studying English. Free from the cultural context of the typical Chinese student, viewers from a minority paradigm could answer the question “If you shouldn't pass the college entrance examination, what would you do?” with any number of scenarios. But from the perspective of a student who we know is already surrounded by discourse messages about the importance of passing the national exam (Anderson, 1993; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Deng & Carless, 2010) and who is unlikely to hear any alternative voices in the educational discourse around her (Zhao & Zheng, 2006), a passage such as this one reiterates the dominant discourse assumptions about the purpose of learning English being social and economic advancement.

## A “Correction” of Pronouns

One of the common approaches to CDA is an analysis of lexical choice, and a focus can be the choice of pronouns (Li, 2011; Liu, 2005; Xiong & Qian, 2012). Selection of words as small as pronouns can change the tone of discourse and encourage either independence of thought and viewpoint or solidarity and tacit acceptance. The use of the first-person plural over the first-person singular is a relatively common focus in discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001; Fairclough, 2003).

Pronoun use has been examined in broader contexts in social science literature as well. Gao, Kao, and Ting-Toomey (1998) talk about the very important cultural distinctions that can be drawn from something as small as a plural pronoun. In collectivistic cultures like China, they say, “people stress fitting in with and belonging to the in-group, and they focus on a “we” identity” (Gao et al., 1998, p. 3).

According to Littlewood (1999), however, this difference between individualist and collectivist cultures does not nullify the aims of EFL education in encouraging autonomy. Designing learning activities to elicit autonomous use of language, even within collectivist cultures, is an important goal of CLT approaches to teaching.

If we define autonomy in educational terms as involving students' capacity to *use* their learning independently of teachers, then autonomy would appear to be an incontrovertible goal for learners everywhere, since it is obvious that no students, anywhere, will have their teachers to accompany them throughout life. Thus, if we are teaching language for communication, it follows from this that the goal is to develop a capacity to communicate *autonomously* (Littlewood, 1999, p.73). [Emphasis in original.]

With this context in mind, what is the difference between encouraging a “we” usage of language in an English textbook versus an “I” usage?

A passage from one of our texts displays just such a distinction. Aldred and Kent's (2003) textbook gives a question prompt in one of its exercises and instructs students to discuss their answers with a partner. “Do you use one of your senses more than the others? Give an example” (Aldred & Kent, 2003, p.1).

A corresponding but separately-sold text, which I previously (Garcia, 2014) identified as a “methodological saboteur” of the Aldred and Kent text, supplies students with a sample answer they could use to respond to the question:

We often use one or two of the five senses more than the others. For example, in the dark, the sense of hearing and the sense of touch become more sensitive because we can't see anything. When we listen to our favorite music, we may close our eyes and just listen with our ears. When we read a very interesting book, we may lose ourselves in it, and hardly hear anything around us. When we eat something, we not only taste or smell it, but look at it as well. (Xiong, 2007, p.46)

This answer seems straightforward, but attention to pronouns shows a marked shift in the tone of the discourse. The (Western) authors of the first text used the pronoun “you,” which we can assume is used in its second-person singular form because it is directed at the solitary reader. The intention of the question is to draw out personal experience to encourage autonomous language use, and it is assumed, by a Western reader, that the “example” asked for is intended to be an example from private personal experience.

The saboteur text supplies a perfectly acceptable answer in terms of grammar, coherency and content. However, the pronoun used changes the intention of the exercise entirely. The



first-person plural “we” does not supply the intended personal experience that the question prompt asks for. Rather, it gives an answer from the point of view of the social collective, a “correct” answer. It expresses answers that are general, common experiences and, by doing so, opens up the authorship to anyone who wants to use it. There's no concept of plagiarism to be worried about in the giving of the answer; there's no shame in the wide dissemination of an answer to be memorized and supplied at the appropriate moment. And by changing this one simple pronoun, this text re-appropriates the intentions and aims of the first text and redefines the methodology behind its structure.

If the assumptions of the dominant paradigm here are carried out to their logical conclusions; that “we” think, feel and behave a certain way given a certain situation, what implicit message is sent about the importance of autonomy in language learning? While it is noted that, culturally, Chinese students may prefer and be accustomed to responding to a question prompt in a certain way, according to Littlewood (1999), “this does not necessarily mean that this form of pedagogical interaction should be considered the ‘appropriate pedagogy’ for developing the skills that [students] need to acquire for their future lives” (p.74).

### **Discussion—Response to Research Question**

The research question originally set out was: What are the unspoken, implicit messages about the purpose and importance of English learning as communicated by the existing discourse in popular Chinese textbooks?

By examining the cultural context that would probably influence the intended audience of these textbooks, some possible interpretations can be posited. One possible answer to the research question, found in the first discourse item is: English exists in a realm of people far away who live a very different lifestyle than the average Chinese person. It's a language

associated with wealth, travel, and lifestyles beyond the anything the typical student can realistically expect to experience within his lifetime. This reinforces the findings of Xiong and Qian (2012), which show a trend in the dominant discourse in Chinese textbooks to promote British English, and corroborates their finding of “English hegemony” in the social and educational atmosphere in China. If British English is being promoted as a “correct” form over other varieties of World English, that’s problematic from a linguistic and EFL perspective in the current era of descriptivism. But if additionally, as Xiong and Qian (2012) suggest and this research seems to reiterate, English is playing a role in Chinese society that is tied more to social and economic status and positions of power than to the goal of communicating with speakers of other languages, this causes even more cause for concern in the efforts to promote CLT in Chinese classrooms. Where an author or curriculum developer, particularly from a Western cultural context, may be producing materials with the intent to improve communicative ability and broaden students’ educational horizons, he may be unwittingly contributing to a national discourse of power and wealth whose aims are far removed from those of the typical educator. If this is indeed the case, the existence of these cultural messages needs to be clarified and brought to light as continued efforts for educational reform move forward.

Another possible answer to the research question found in the second discourse item is simply: the purpose of studying English is to pass the national exams. Failure to appropriately memorize and master the content of detail-oriented textbooks bodes ill for your future. Similar to the findings of Liu (2005), this powerful message from the discourse seems to be situated in a position of authoritative power to influence students not only in their current educational contexts but in their future educational and career choices. Just as the texts that Liu (2005) examined failed to acknowledge the existence of dissenting views on the benevolence of

technology and scientific progress, this passage seems to be monopolizing the discussion on the purpose of education. In the absence of voices from any minority paradigms in texts similar to this one, the question arises as to whether students in a Chinese context can fully relate to the stated goals of approaches like CLT which seek to promote fluency and understanding over “right” and “wrong” answers to linguistic scenarios. Exam pressures have been cited by many other voices in the literature as being among the obstacles to effective implementation of CLT methods; this finding seems to shed some light on a deeper understanding of why that might be the case.

A final possible answer to the research question comes from the subtle change in a pronoun from one textbook to another: the purpose of learning English is to supply correct, acceptable answers like all of the other students are expected to do. There is no expectation of personal expression or of mastery of the language as a means of expressing individual opinion or experience. Again, this seems parallel to Xiong and Qian’s (2012) warning against English hegemony and Liu’s (2005) findings of textbooks that legitimize the authority of correct, acceptable answers. This also underscores Littlewood’s (1999) insistence that autonomy as a value in language learning needs to be promoted in ways that cross cultural boundaries.

Of course these answers are incomplete and cannot begin to capture the entire complex reality that faces learners and teachers across a huge and diverse nation. However, this attempt to highlight at least some of the common, if not predominant, issues in English language education as revealed through its instruments of instruction does hopefully provide a clear articulation of one viewpoint of the situation and suggest some possible avenues for future work.

## Conclusion

There is much more to be researched about the paradigms presented here as themes pervading sociocultural discourse in the form of commonly used textbook content. In relation to the main themes discovered in the existing literature, the current study adds a few questions and propositions of its own. Previous scholarship done to explore a more communicative approach to language teaching in China cites influences such as exam pressure, changes in national policy, and teacher beliefs and attitudes, in addition to that of textbooks as cultural artifacts. It also suggests that discourse may be shaping learners' L2 identities and thus playing a role in the teaching and learning process. This study seems to confirm the definite role that exam pressure still plays in shaping educational attitudes, as evidenced in implicit messages found in the second passage, and provides some possible reasons why national policy and popular attitudes are slow to catch up with one another. It also seems to reinforce the complex role that discourse is playing in learner variables as identified by Gu (2010), especially if identifiable themes such as a focus on British English as legitimate to the exclusion of other varieties as seen in the first extract here are at all pervasive in Chinese society at large. It gives a glimpse at the possible enormity of the cultural divide we may be facing when one textbook's approach toward not only pedagogy and curriculum design, but the very locus of responsibility for learning (individual vs. group) is pitted against that of another popular text by a simple shift of pronouns. This cultural divide is not necessarily East vs. West (Littlewood, 1999), but could be the effect of a dominant culture subsuming minority voices.

Future research can follow up on these propositions, and there is particular room in the literature for more work from a CDA perspective. Development work can take off from these explorations of the underlying methodologies that categorize the current state of affairs and see if

there is a successful way to meet the underlying demands or at least find a truce between the competing paradigms.

Most of all, Han's (2008) suggestion of the "cultural wall" being illusory carries through. This may not be a war of East against West but rather a simple case of growing pains as an ancient, proud culture that was politically cut off from the modern world until very recently faces its future and embraces an international, scientific approach to creating its own path forward. Hopefully scholarship and an unwavering commitment to finding the best way will help to untangle a complex and rich situation.

## References

- Aldred, D., & Kent, J. C. (2003). *Advance with English 3*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Alexander, L. G. (1997). *New concept English 3*. Beijing: Waiyu Jiaoxue yu Yanjiu Chubanshe, Pearson/Longman.
- Anderson, J. (1993). Is a communicative approach practical for teaching English in China? Pros and cons. *System*, 21(4), 471–480.
- Bloor, M., & Bloor, T. (2007). *The practice of critical discourse analysis: An introduction*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Burnaby, B., & Sun, Y. (1989). Chinese teachers' views of Western language teaching: Context informs paradigms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23(2), 219–238.
- Cheng, L., & Wang, H. (2004). Understanding professional challenges faced by Chinese teachers of English. *TESL-EJ*, 7(4), 1–14.
- Chouliaraki, L., & Fairclough, N. (1999). *Discourse in late modernity: Rethinking critical discourse analysis*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Deng, C., & Carless, D. R. (2010). Examination preparation or effective teaching: Conflicting priorities in the implementation of a pedagogic innovation. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 7(4), 285–302.
- Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power*. London: Longman.
- Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. New York, NY and London: Routledge.

- Fairclough, N., Mulderrig, J., & Wodak, R. (2011). Critical discourse analysis. In T. A. van Dijk (Ed.), *Discourse Studies: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (pp. 357–378). SAGE Publications, Ltd.
- Gao, G., Kao, K., & Ting-Toomey, S. (1998). *Communicating effectively with the Chinese* (Vol. 5). Sage Publications.
- Garcia, A. (2014). The ideology behind the book: An analysis of typical EFL textbooks used in mainland China. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Gu, M. M. (2010). Identities constructed in difference: English language learners in China. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 42(1), 139–152.
- Han, H. (2008). *A study of Chinese college English teachers in China – Their beliefs and conceptual change*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Queen's University, Kingston, ON.
- Hu, G. (2002). Potential cultural resistance to pedagogical imports: The case of communicative language teaching in China. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 15(2), 93–105.
- Hu, G. (2005). Contextual influences on instructional practices: A Chinese case for an ecological approach to ELT. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(4), 635–660.
- Hui, L. (1997). New bottles, old wine: Communicative language teaching in China. In *English Teaching Forum* (Vol. 35, pp. 38–41).
- Johnson, K. E. (2006). The sociocultural turn and its challenges for second language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 235–257.
- Li, M. (2011). Shaping socialist ideology through language education policy for primary schools in the PRC. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 12(2), 185–204.

- Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 71.
- Liu, Y. (2005). The construction of pro-science and technology discourse in Chinese language textbooks. *Language and Education*, 19(4), 304–321.
- McKee, A. (2003). *Textual analysis: A beginner's guide*. London: Sage.
- Penner, J. (1995). Change and conflict: Introduction of the communicative approach in China. *TESL Canada Journal*, 12(2), 01.
- Qu, Y. (2012). *Five years' gaokao, three years' simulations: Gaokao English, Jiangsu Province edition*. Beijing: Education Science Publishing House, Capital Normal University Press.
- Rao, Z. (1996). Reconciling communicative approaches to the teaching of English with traditional Chinese methods. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 458–471.
- Rao, Z. (2002). Chinese students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classroom. *System*, 30(1), 85–105.
- Sato, K., & Kleinsasser, R. C. (1999). Communicative language teaching (CLT): Practical understandings. *Modern Language Journal*, 83(4), 494–517.
- Sun, G., & Cheng, L. (2009). From context to curriculum: A case study of communicative language teaching in China. *TESL Canada Journal*, 19(2), 67.
- Taguchi, N., Naganuma, N., & Data, B. (2006). Transition from learning English to learning in English: Students' perceived adjustment difficulties in an English-medium university in Japan. *Asian EFL Journal*, 8(4).



- Wang, R. J. (2008), *The Theoretical and Practical Study of Communicative Approach in Southern Taiwan Junior High Schools: Based on Professors', Teachers', and Students' Perspective*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, National Pingtung Institute of Commerce, Pingtung, Taiwan
- Wette, R., & Barkhuizen, G. (2009). Teaching the book and educating the person: Challenges for university English language teachers in China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 29(2), 195–212.
- Wodak, R. (2011). Critical discourse analysis. In Hyland, K. and Paltridge, B. (Ed.) *Continuum companion to discourse analysis* (pp. 38–53). London: Continuum International.
- Xiong, H. (2007). *Decoding the complete textbook: High school English required course 3*. Beijing: China Youth Press.
- Xiong, T., & Qian, Y. (2012). Ideologies of English in a Chinese high school EFL textbook: a critical discourse analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 32(1), 75–92.
- Zhao, Y., & Zheng, S. (2006). A theoretical analysis of several Western textbook evaluation systems and their implications for college English textbook evaluations in China [J]. *Foreign Language Education*, 3, 009.

Examining Alignment Among Curriculum, Assessment,  
and National Standards in Mainland China

Anneke Garcia

Brigham Young University

### Abstract

Alignment between curriculum and assessment is an issue in all educational environments; this study specifically looks at alignment between curriculum, assessment, and standards in the context of English as a Foreign Language education in Mainland China. Using grounded theory methodology, a typical Chinese English-language curriculum was compared to passages from the national college entrance examination (gaokao) and both were compared to existing national curriculum standards to get a sense for which areas are showing alignment or misalignment. The analysis finds that some factors are aligning well, with room for improvement, such as the development of all four language skills. However, others, including the encouragement of cooperative versus competitive approaches to learning as well as the promotion of British English over other World Englishes, appear to be misaligned.

*Keywords:* China, EFL, textbooks, assessment, national standards

## **Examining Alignment Among Curriculum, Assessment, and National Standards in Mainland China**

One of the fundamental principles in educational assessment is to test what you teach. This concept, known as alignment, is a challenge from the smallest-scale classrooms to the largest assessment agencies in the world. Alignment between what is taught and what is assessed faces a variety of challenges, and our understanding of educational environments as ecosystems with multiple, interacting factors (Nystrand, Gamoran, & Carbonaro, 2001) has only complicated the quest to test what one teaches without teaching to the test.

In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) literature dealing with Asia, and largely with Mainland China, these questions of assessment and alignment are often met with resignation as researchers face the realities of trying to implement educational change and reform in environments where high-stakes tests put an enormous amount of pressure on the educational system (Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Deng & Carless, 2010; G. Hu, 2005; Rao, 2002; Wang, 2007; Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009). How to address questions of alignment when assessments are centralized and high-stakes in nature is a leviathan task. The goal of this study is to examine existing assessments and existing curriculums and compare them to stated educational standards. Hopefully, this can be helpful in making headway toward conquering this complex situation.

### **Review of the Literature**

The intent of this study is to compare factors in the current educational environment for alignment, specifically the three factors of textbook curriculums, high-stakes assessments, and stated national educational standards for EFL. (These national standards are defined as the national syllabuses published by China's Ministry of Education [MOE]). In the following

section, I discuss how I will situate the question of alignment between curriculums and assessments in the relevant literature.

### **National Education Policy and Assessment Changes**

The research literature frequently addresses the topic of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) implementation in Chinese contexts. To date, this effort has included the examination of the national education policy set out by China's Ministry of Education (MOE) and evaluations of changes made to this policy in recent years to determine how well CLT principles are being integrated. Some studies have examined the changes that have been made to the national curriculum, both at the primary and secondary levels, and others have looked at recent changes to assessment and their impact.

**Changes to the national syllabuses.** The 1990s and early years of the 21st century were landmark years in terms of national education policy and China. A series of reforms to the national syllabuses for English teaching led to a greater focus, at least from a policy viewpoint, on communicative abilities, and reforms to the primary education syllabus in particular led to a nation-wide mandate that English education begin as early as the third year of primary school. These changes have been followed closely by researchers and evaluated to a certain extent, though the English-language literature is by no means comprehensive in covering the issue.

**Curriculum changes at the primary level.** Y. Hu (2007) described specifically the changes in the mandate for primary-level English education in 2001 and concluded that, while well intentioned, the reforms have been far from successful. One of the most difficult problems, also noted by Deng and Carless (2010), has been the disparity in both resources and teacher qualifications across regions and income levels. While private, experimental, and well-subsidized schools in economically advanced areas seem to be progressing well in preparing

primary children for more advanced English learning when they reach middle school, other schools have been doing such an inadequate job that many middle school teachers feel they have to “re-teach” the most basic material to get the students up to speed (Y. Hu, 2007). There appear to also be problems caused by the prospect of high-stakes testing in the students' future that causes some schools, especially those where teachers don't enjoy the same training and resources as those in the more economically advantaged areas, to revert to lecture-style, memorization-based methods of teaching that neither the students nor the teachers enjoy (Deng & Carless, 2010).

Li's (2011) innovative criticism of the national syllabus for primary-level English education comes from an entirely different perspective. Using the approach known as Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Li analyzed the text of the MOE's official curriculum documents for clues about what cultural paradigms are being promoted and what power relationships are being reinforced through the use (or omission) of linguistic discourse. Li found that in spite of official lip service to the development of communicative ability, the decisions on curriculum are ineffective because: they are top-down and lack proper needs analysis or input from educators, teachers are not plentiful enough to meet demand, class sizes remain prohibitively large, and students' time for studying English is often “lent” to Chinese or Math—both of which are important subjects on national exams. In addition, Li's CDA suggested that the reforms called for in the national syllabuses are based on the “needs” of the Chinese government and especially the economy as a whole, not on individual student well-being and whole-person education. This, she suggested, is contrary to the purposes that underlie CLT and student-centered approaches to learning.

***Curriculum changes at the secondary level.*** Two studies consulted here addressed curriculum change at the secondary level. Wang (2007) addressed both primary and secondary curriculums, while Zhang (2009), wrote a small-scale case study as part of a dissertation that took a look specifically at how current reform has played out in secondary schools in second-tier Liaoning Province.

Wang's (2007) findings are similar to those reported by other researchers who looked at reform in primary and tertiary education. She found that the new 21st century curriculum focuses more on whole-person learning, gives schools flexibility in timing levels and content, and establishes performance-based assessment. She pointed out that decentralization in 2002 allowed regional development of textbooks, which could help improve education for students in disadvantaged areas. Some CLT principles, she stated, have been adapted by Chinese teachers and are more accessible now than ever before.

However, her findings also echoed the concerns of Deng and Carless (2010) that washback from assessments (the influence that assessment can have on teaching) is more complicated than mere reformation of syllabuses and assessments.

For many years teachers in classrooms have been quite ignorant of the national syllabus. What they are concerned about is what appears in textbooks and in examination papers. As a result, teachers rely heavily on the textbook writers to translate the aims, contents and suggested methodology from the syllabus into the textbook. This also results from the way the syllabus is designed, as what is required is usually too general for teachers in the classrooms to follow. Therefore, textbooks have played a dictating role in English language teaching. (Wang, 2007, p. 100)

Wang also reported persistent obstacles, even in the light of the optimism engendered by the syllabus changes. She reports that poor quality English education in primary school still impacts secondary education, evaluation remains heavily tilted toward written exams and that variation in teacher qualifications makes uniform change difficult.

Zhang's (2009) dissertation observed secondary English teachers in a few selected high schools in mid-tier Liaoning Province. She examined the post-reform situation in these schools and found that there are still many unmet expectations. Seven years after textbook production was nominally decentralized, she reported that teachers are expressing hope that more modern and relevant textbooks will be developed. Teachers report a desire for more variation in curriculum by region, which should theoretically already be possible. Finally, the teachers in the case study said they want reform in assessment to reflect recent changes in textbooks, which is more evidence that reform has been happening on paper and in directives but has not yet translated into a change in practice, at least in this region of China.

**Changes in assessment.** Recent years have brought several waves of change in the way assessment is handled in China, though there is also a strong current in the literature suggesting that high-stakes testing remains a prevalent force in the Chinese educational environment (Chen & Klenowski, 2009; Deng & Carless, 2010; G. Hu, 2005; Rao, 2002; Wang, 2007; Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009). Recent news that more change is on the way (Han, 2013; Rui, 2014) brings the issue even more to the forefront.

*Assessment changes at the tertiary level.* Chen and Klenowski (2009) reviewed changes to assessment at the tertiary level following national English teaching reforms that began in 2001. They concentrated on the College English Test (CET), the banded examination system administered to non-English majors, which is the most widely-administered tertiary English



exam in China. Until recent years the test was open to anyone, including those who wanted to take it as a certification for business and personal reasons, but it has since been restricted to only non-English major college students. This tightening up of resources has led to more time and quality for correcting exams (Henrichsen, 2007).

Chen and Klenowski (2009) found that improvements to the CET have been successful and noted positive findings such as an increase in non-multiple choice questions, more focus on listening, and the use of authentic listening materials. This looks hopeful for proponents of more communicative learning outcomes, and casual observations suggest that students' individual language abilities may be benefiting (Henrichsen, 2007). However, researchers note that washback in the classroom is still a huge factor in China's highly competitive education and professional markets. Deng and Carless (2010) warned that changes in assessment are not fully understood by teachers, school administrators and parents, who are still pressured by their perceptions of grammar and vocabulary-heavy exams and a thriving test-preparation industry that promulgates outdated beliefs.

***Imminent changes to assessment at the secondary level.*** New information from the MOE in late 2013 may change the playing field for English language education in China as the future of assessment has entered a state of flux. The first announcement in late 2013 came from the Beijing Municipal Commission of Education, which outlined a new plan to reduce the score weight of English on the national college entrance exam, known as the *gaokao*. While English and Chinese as subjects were each previously weighted at 150 points toward the exam's total score, with this new proposal English will drop to a value of 100 points while Chinese will carry a new weight of 180 points (Rui, 2014). Additionally, the new proposed reforms include a stipulation that students can take the English-language portion of the exam multiple times and

keep the highest score, which is a revolutionary move for a high-stakes test that has traditionally been a one-time, make-or-break event in a student's educational career. Other provinces and municipalities (many of China's provinces administer their version of the *gaokao* independently) have talked about removing the listening portion of the exam or phasing out the English-language portion all together (Rui, 2014).

This could mean a lot for educators, as well as for authors and producers of educational materials and media. There is a debate about what this will mean for the future of English language education, with some writers concerned that de-emphasizing English education bodes ill for Chinese students' ability to communicate and engage in world culture and business, while others feel that reducing test pressure may be a benefit to students (Rui, 2014). The specifics of the changes in test weight seem to underscore Li's (2011) concern that English language education is being de-emphasized and instructional time being "lent" to subjects like Chinese and Math. An additional concern voiced by Han (2013) is that reduced emphasis on the national exam will mean less time for English in public schools and will only increase the divide in linguistic opportunities between poorer students whose only education comes from public schools and wealthier ones whose parents already support a huge and lucrative private industry of "cram" schools and English training centers.

### **Textbooks and Existing English Curriculums**

With all of this change in the realms of educational standards and assessment, the question of how well current curriculums are aligning with these other two elements in an important one.

Zhao and Zheng (2006) pointed out that, "generally speaking, textbooks are the main content of classroom teaching and should match foreign language learning standards in source

material and study methods” (p. 375). Their study, a survey of the most recent generation of textbooks at the time, concluded that though the most common textbooks were still using traditional teaching models and focusing mainly on reading ability, they were integrating the four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) more fully than in the past. They proposed that going forward it would be important for textbooks to integrate both constructivist and behaviorist theories, as well as information processing and SLA research and theory and communicative language activities.

Various other writers have touched upon the idea of re-evaluating textbooks, often with the intent to promote a certain idea or methodology that textbooks should better espouse, such as Qiong’s (2004) argument that textbooks should promote “China English” as a valid form of English rather than conveying the idea that students need to master either American or British dialects at the expense of other valid World English varieties. However, the literature does need to take a greater look at how textbooks fit into the picture, especially how they may be interacting with other elements in the educational environment to either help or hamper educational reform goals.

### **Research Questions**

Since previous efforts in the literature have explored how CLT principles are reflected in national education standards and how those standards are changing, and other studies have addressed how exams may affect education reform efforts and how well textbooks are accomplishing goals of aligning with good pedagogy, the current study seeks to evaluate how well all three of these elements are aligning with each other.

The research question to be addressed in this article is, “How well do the stated aims and inherent methodologies of curriculum, assessment, and national standards in Chinese EFL contexts align with one another?”

### **Methodology**

Underlying the chosen methods and approaches of the current article is a set of assumptions about the value of reflecting on themes and data using the methods I propose. In the hermeneutic phenomenological paradigm explained by Van Manen (1997), he described the creation of *themes*, specifying that these themes are our attempts at simplifying the essence of a situation to understand its meaning and is essentially a creative act on the part of the researcher and cannot be broken down or automated or performed by a computer or otherwise assumed to be 100% objective. Within this paradigm, the researcher is understood to be not simply an objective observer but part of the creative process.

With that view borrowed from phenomenology explicitly in mind, the current study uses grounded theory methodology to codify archival data and identify themes that emerge from that codification. Grounded theory allows for concepts and themes to emerge from the data itself, rather than imposing the researcher's preconceived hypothesis onto the data, and is thus appropriate for a study of this type (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Specifically, Glaser's (1965) approach to grounded theory, called “Constant Comparative Analysis (CCA),” involves the constant conscious comparison of emerging themes to each other and back to the data. This approach is applied in the pattern set forward by Rich (2012). A simplified description of Rich's process is as follows: First, the researcher uses a line-by-line action word concept to code the data. Second, he memoes on emerging themes. Next, he compares codes to each other and back to the data (similar to Glaser's concept of CCA). Next,

he begins categorizing codes, being sure to compare categories back to the original data. An important feature of Rich's approach is constantly comparing conclusions on different levels, for example, data to data, code to code, and data to code.

What this approach looks like when carried out in the current study is a set of data taken from line-by-line notation created by reading through an English curriculum and a set of data from a corresponding (or at least equivalent) assessment. The codes and themes that emerge from this process are compared to one another and to the stated goals of the national curriculum to respond to the research question of how well the aims and methodologies of all three elements align. (I have chosen to compare simple verbatim statements from the national curriculum standards to the themes and codes that emerge from the other two elements, simply because of its brief length and straightforward nature.)

### **Selection of Materials**

As a continuation of a previous line of research (Garcia, 2014), the current study employs a similar strategy in selecting materials to analyze. China is an immense and diverse country with a wide range of educational experiences. No one curriculum could accurately represent every Chinese context. With that in mind, however, a *typical* curriculum can be examined. By choosing the series called *Advance With English* (Chinese title 牛津高中英语, *Oxford High School English*), an 11-volume English course designed for use in Jiangsu Province and used extensively elsewhere (Xiong & Qian, 2012), it was hoped that this typical textbook series would at least represent factors common to *many* Chinese contexts, though it is not generalizable to all. Additionally, one of the volumes from this series has been previously addressed in the English-language research literature: Xiong and Qian (2012) addressed a passage from Student Book 3 in their critical discourse analysis.

To best represent the assessment element in this comparison, it was easy enough to choose passages from the *gaokao*, as it has been widely characterized as not only the most prevalent assessment in China but one whose outcomes have a very real impact on educational decisions (Han, 2013). Complicating an examination of the *gaokao*, however, is the fact that it is no longer a centralized national exam; many provinces now produce and administer their own versions of the test. The test preparation industry, however, stays as close as possible to the *gaokao*'s every move, and actual excerpts from recent tests are available not only abundantly online, but in commercially-produced test preparation texts. Qu's (2014) text, *Five Years' Gaokao, Three Years' Simulations*, reproduces actual test questions and passages from the most recent *gaokao* exams given nationwide. The passages from the 2014 versions of the test are what I examined here as part of the grounded theory analysis.

### **Analysis of the Texts**

The eleven volumes of the *Advance With English* series (Aldred, Duigu, & Fried, 2005; Aldred, Duigu, & Walder, 2006; Aldred, Fried, & Steward, 2005; Aldred & Kent, 2003a; Aldred & Kent, 2003b; Aldred & Walder, 2011; Duigu, Fried, & Steward, 2006; Fried & Aldred, 2005; Kent, 2003a; Kent, 2003b; Kent, 2003c) will be referred to for the remainder of this article simply as Student Book 1, Student Book 2, and so forth, for clarity's sake. These texts are produced by a team of Western authors writing specifically for a Chinese audience. They were analyzed using Rich's (2012) approach to grounded theory, with themes emerging, compared back to the data and to each other, and then the themes being grouped into larger categories. These categorical themes, then, became the unit for comparison with the assessment and standards elements.

The assessment element, represented by the exam passages taken from Qu (2014), was analyzed in a similar manner, with its own themes and groupings of theme categories created. The standards element (Ministry of Education, 2011), will be quoted verbatim in the comparison and alignment portion.

### **Themes in the Curriculum**

The *Advance With English* curriculum displayed a wide range of themes emerging from a large volume of data. From my running commentary on each section of the texts, I made note of certain factors that seemed to occur frequently, not only in terms of the content, structure, and methodology of the textbooks but also in terms of their treatment of larger cultural and linguistic factors. These were compared and consolidated with each other throughout the annotation process, and finally combined into six larger categories that will act as the units of comparison with assessment and national standards. Those six over-arching themes are: variety in language-learning activities, explicit teaching of metacognitive skills, encouraging students to infer meaning from context, simulation of authenticity, encouraging a cooperative orientation, and implicit promotion of British English.

**Variety in language-learning activities.** The books in the *Advance With English* series are very recognizably products of recent trends in EFL and foreign language instruction. In contrast to other popular textbooks used in China that adhere to a more traditional, intensive-reading based curriculum, these books are built around a pattern that encourages the use of all four basic language skills and incorporates more communicative language activities (Brown, 2007; Garcia, 2014; Zhao & Zheng, 2006). The learning activities in the texts span the following categories: speaking and discussion prompts, reading comprehension, metacognitive skills, vocabulary, grammar and usage, listening comprehension, phrases and pragmatics, and writing.

A frequency count of the number of each type of learning activity, averaged across the 11 books, reveals an average text that contains the following number of activities in each category (see Figure 1): speaking and discussion prompts, 20; reading comprehension, 29; metacognitive

### Types of Learning Activities Included in the Textbooks

Learning activities cover all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking)

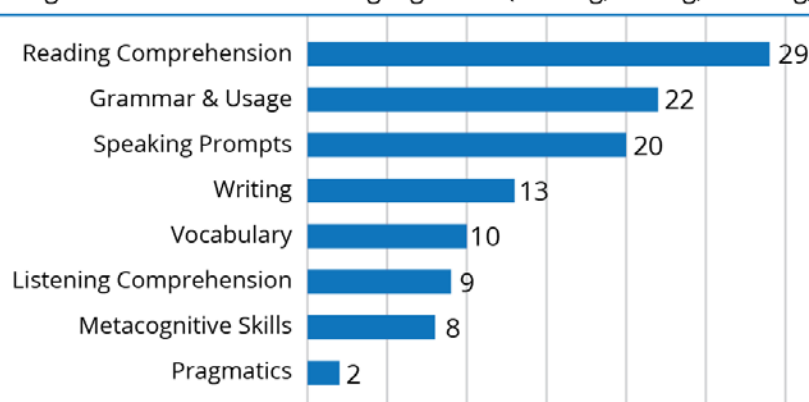


Figure 1. Average frequency of each type of learning activity per book

skills, 8; vocabulary, 10; grammar and usage, 22; listening comprehension, 9; pragmatics, 2; and writing, 13.

This variety of learning activities covers all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking) as well as including explicit instruction on metacognitive skills and even pragmatics, which are the social and non-verbal factors that affect language use. Additionally, and in a value not included here, the books provide activities that encourage creativity and artistic expression, such as encouraging students to create posters or small booklets as a group.

**Explicit teaching of metacognitive skills.** A metacognitive skill is something that students learn about learning itself. As an example, Student Book 3 explains a strategy to students in which they should anticipate the types of information they might expect to hear as a way to improve listening comprehension. “Can you guess what is going to be said next while



listening? If you can do this well you will be able to better understand and remember the things you hear,” (Aldred & Kent, 2003, p. 32). In another example, Student Book 7 helps students understand TV news reports by encouraging them to listen for an explanation of the current situation or problem and some reasons why the situation exists.

**Encouraging students to infer meaning from content.** In several ways, the *Advance With English* books encourage students to infer meaning from either textual or visual context rather than relying on an easily-supplied translation or explanation. According to Garcia’s (2014) study, this is a hallmark of the communicative language teaching paradigm and is uncommon in more traditional Chinese texts. As one example of this, the back matter of each textbook contains Chinese translations and explanations of some phrases, sentences, and passages from each unit, but not all of them. In a previous study (Garcia, 2014), I called this “mediated inferring of meaning,” and it requires an extra step on the part of students, encouraging them to first try to discern the meaning on their own. For passages that have no translation supplied, the students are then left to consult external dictionaries or resources or to try and infer the meaning on their own. This is hopefully closer to what a real-world language learning activity is like.

Vocabulary is also taught exclusively through the “inferring meaning” approach in these texts. Each unit (there are 3-4 units in each student book) includes an activity in which students are instructed to “Find these new words and expressions [in the reading passage]. Then match them with the correct definitions” (Aldred, Fried, & Steward, 2005, p. 4). In contrast to other foreign-language learning materials, new words are never presented in a word bank with side-by-side native language translations. New words *are* included with translation in a glossary as part

of the back matter, but again, this additional step creates a mediated environment rather than a straightforward list of information to be memorized.

Additionally, many of the reading passages and activities throughout the texts are accompanied by illustrations of the content of the passage and clues to its meaning. According to Clark and Mayer (2011), these are the types of visuals that best promote learning. This sort of visual context, again, is reminiscent of what learners would find in a real-world immersion scenario when they could rely on photos and images to help negotiate understanding of an unfamiliar text.

**Simulation of authenticity.** Authenticity is an important part of communicative language teaching approaches (Brown, 2007). Unfortunately, it is also rather difficult to negotiate in terms of intellectual property rights. The *Advance With English* series appears to navigate the issue by simulating authentic situations in its information and graphic design.

An example from a page of Student Book 4 (Kent, 2003c, p. 53) is a sample letter to the editor, which stands out on the page with a background that looks like slightly folded paper with a drop shadow. The corner of an air-mail envelope is visible peeking out from beneath the “letter.” Student Book 1 has you read an “email,” the text of which is printed in a sans-serif font and framed by what looks like a computer window (Kent, 2003a, p. 14).

These simulated authentic sources give the text a different feel than a straightforward block of standard body text would. Whether this approach does anything to capitalize on the benefits of authentic sources as Brown (2007) and other EFL researchers promote, however, is uncertain.

**Encouraging a cooperative orientation.** One of the most prominent characteristics to recur throughout all 11 volumes of this text was the encouragement of a cooperative orientation

toward learning. Repeatedly throughout each section of each student book, the written instructions ask students to “discuss with a partner,” “answer a classmate’s questions,” or “work as a group.” This tendency is also in line with recent CLT principles (Brown, 2007) and with forms of assessment that are less competitive and not norm-referenced.

The frequency of these suggestions to talk with a partner or work in groups may seem to clash with traditional Chinese classroom culture, but some authors like Littlewood (1999) have suggested that it is important to frame questions like this not in terms of East vs. West, but rather in terms of conventional vs. research-based. He suggests that there are ways to teach communicative language skills that are perfectly in harmony with Chinese cultural preferences. That being said, the implementation of approaches like this is definitely still a matter of debate (Garcia, 2014).

**Implicit promotion of British English.** The final theme that emerged from the *Advance With English* data was an implicit promotion of British English to the exclusion of other dialects and varieties of the language.

It’s important to note that this factor shouldn’t be surprising to anyone; the name of the text itself in Chinese is “Oxford High School English.” Oxford University Press China is the producer of the series, and it is understandable that they are written from a British viewpoint. Not all of the authors of the texts, however, are British. While series authors Deborah Aldred, Joanne Claire Kent, and Gary Walder are British, author Kelly Fried is American, Gabrielle Duigu is Australian, and Elizabeth Steward is South African.

The texts themselves appear to be written with an international sensibility intended. While many of the characters who appear in the reading passages and exercises are British, many are also Chinese (in the reading passages across the series, 41 characters are identifiably British,

but 56 are identifiably Chinese). There are also characters appearing from places as diverse as the U.S. and Canada to Ethiopia, Greece, and Brunei. The settings of reading passages are equally diverse, with 42 passages set in Britain, 65 in China, 33 in Commonwealth and Anglophone countries, and 34 in other international locations. There is even explicit instruction in one of the books on the differences in American and British dialects. Student Book 1 features a story about a teenager who calls his football a “soccer ball” and talks about his parents coming back from “vacation.” A page following the story gives a chart of common American words and phrases and their British counterparts. However, in a book series that totals 684 pages of content, this one page is the only one to explicitly address any sort of dialectic variation in spelling, vocabulary, or phrasing among speakers of English. On one page in Student Book 7 it is mentioned that Americans use the words “freeway” and “expressway” rather than “motorway,” and five additional pages throughout the 684 total in the series mention that English has borrowed words from other languages. But acknowledgement of the existence of any other varieties of World English is missing and at times characters identified as being from other countries speak with British vocabulary or phrasing. The American teenager in Student Book 1 tells his friend that his dog “was ill,” a word that would sound strange in an authentic American context.

Finally, the *Advance With English* series supplies a pronunciation glossary in the back of each book in which the pronunciations provided in IPA notation are clearly British pronunciations, with the rhotic R being notated sometimes as optional in parentheses. A word like “dynasty,” for example, is listed with the British pronunciation only and no note of it being pronounced differently by other speakers.

This tendency to promote, by omission, one variety of English over another has been discussed by other researchers. Xiong and Qian (2012) analyzed a passage from *Advance With English Student Book 3* in which the history of the English language is presented and found it failing to address any changes to the English language occurring in the colonial and postcolonial periods of Britain's history, in effect, negating any influence or ownership of the language by anyone outside of the British Isles. They argue that this sort of message in the cultural discourse reinforces ideas of British varieties of English being correct and the illegitimacy of other World Englishes. Other researchers have been arguing similarly in recent years. Qiong (2004) argues that Chinese English should stand alongside other recognized varieties of English and that the idea of only British and American varieties being considered standard is outmoded and unsuited to the current global situation. The recent score devaluation of the English portion of the *gaokao* and concomitant debate over the importance of learning English could be a product of these sorts of cultural understandings of why Chinese students should study English. Whether or not one agrees with these arguments, and there is room for plenty of interpretations in the research literature, the current analysis shows that this textbook series does indeed fall heavily to the side of promoting British English as correct and only acknowledging fleetingly the existence of other systems of spelling, vocabulary, and pronunciation, and that acknowledgement being only of American English.

### **Themes in the Assessment**

Analyzing *gaokao* test items is not as broad-reaching an effort as the analysis of the textbook series; nevertheless there are characteristics of the structure and content of the items that come up repeatedly and create themes of interest. The three themes we will examine here

include: variety of skills assessed, use of authentic sources, and use of non-British forms of English.

**Variety of skills assessed.** The written portion of the English *gaokao* typically consists of four sections made up of 19 smaller content areas (Table 1).

Table 1  
*Sections and Sub-Sections of the Typical Gaokao Exam*

Fill-in-the-blanks	Cloze	Reading comprehension	Task-oriented reading	Written expression
Articles	cloze	understanding details	task-oriented reading	written expression
Pronouns		reading for gist		
adjectives & adverbs		inference and judgment		
semantic meaning discrimination (nouns, prepositions and idioms) verbs and verb phrases		inferring word meaning		
verb tense and voice				
irregular verbs				
modal verbs and the subjunctive mood				
attributive clauses & noun clauses				
compound sentences & adverbial clauses				
special sentence patterns				
scenario-dependent communication				

The majority of the sub-sections are fill-in-the blank and cloze tasks, which are assessments of both vocabulary and grammar and usage knowledge. However, in terms of

length and time allotted, these first two classifications are equally balanced with the last three: reading comprehension, task-oriented reading, and written expression (Qu, 2014).

Most *gaokao* English exams also contain a listening comprehension portion, but those materials are outside the scope of the current analysis and will not be examined here (though an analysis of those would be of great benefit to the literature). This does not mean that listening exercises are inconsequential; in fact, even though the overall score of the English portion of the exam is being reduced to 100 points, the score of the listening portion is rising to 30 points (Zhao, 2013). This makes the weight of the listening exercises greater than they've ever been.

The first two sections consist of items that test knowledge of grammar principles and vocabulary simultaneously. By embedding grammatical questions in full sentences, the student's understanding of the each word in the sentence, as well as usage and pragmatic considerations, are also assessed. These sections provide short sentences and phrases with blanks that are then filled with one of a selection of four multiple-choice answers. There are no short-answer portions on this part of the exam.

The latter half of the exam consists mainly of reading passages and accompanying sets of multiple-choice questions. These assess not only students' understanding of the meaning and content of the passage but also larger issues of inference and judgment.

Finally, the last two sections of the written portion of the exam are devoted to task-oriented reading and writing items. The task-oriented items are typically reading passages followed by tables or charts the students must complete with one-word or short sentence responses of their own. The written expression portion consists of prompts in either English or Chinese, sometimes including pictures or comics, and instructions to write one or more paragraphs in reply, usually with a word count limit specified (Qu, 2014).



While we don't see the range of activities reflected on the *gaokao* that we see taught in a typical curriculum, it is worth noting that the inclusion of a listening portion and short-answer items is assessing more of the four skills than a traditional multiple-choice exam would be able to.

**Use of authentic sources.** One of the areas in which the items on the *gaokao* seem to be coordinating well with current communicative language standards like those promoted by Brown (2007) is in its use of authentic sources.

While an analysis of sources for the fill-in-the-blank and cloze sections of the exam was harder to achieve, the reading portions lent themselves to an easy internet search to determine their possible sources. As part of the memoing process of the grounded theory analysis, I also attempted to search for the original source of as many reading passages as I could find. The results were impressive in terms of the number of authentic Anglophone articles and materials used.

Out of 76 reading passages in the Qu (2014) text, 44, or 58%, were verifiably based on actual Anglophone documents, usually online news articles or publications. Though many of the passages were edited for length and paraphrased presumably to use more common vocabulary words, many of these articles could be found on sites like the BBC, Time Magazine, personal blogs, a *Lonely Planet* book, university websites, and so on. An additional 7 passages, or 9%, were probably based on authentic sources since they referred to specific events whose details were verified in other sources. 20 passages (26%) were unverifiable, and usually consisted of more general information that was difficult to search, and only 5 passages, 7% of the total reading sections, were from verifiably inauthentic sources, most of them authored ESL or EFL books or websites.

This use of authentic sources was also noteworthy because of its inclusion of vocabulary, phrasing, and grammar and punctuation conventions outside of the traditional standard British English.

**Use of non-British forms of English.** The passages included in the reading sections of the *gaokao* included a variety of international sources and settings. Passages were categorized as either British, American, Canadian, Australian, or International when they met one of the following criteria: (1) could be verified as coming from a publication or author from the given country or region, or (2) used vocabulary or spelling and punctuation conventions identifying them as belonging to a certain region. It is obvious that there may, therefore, be some mis-categorization of similar forms of English; a passage written in Australian or Indian English may appear British by its use of certain terms or spelling, while a Canadian passage could appear to be American English. In most cases articles were identified by criterion 1, so this probably doesn't affect a large number of the passages. In cases where no unique features of any English dialect were apparent, or if the source was verified as coming from a non-Anglophone country, the passage was categorized as International.

The results of this categorization are shown in Figure 2.

Half of the passages (38 of 76) came from American sources. British sources were the next most plentiful, composing 21 of the 76 passages. Next was International, of which there were seven passages, and finally Canadian and Australian sources each represented in three passages. Four of the passages came from sources that could not be identified and could have been written by the test creators.

## Sources of Reading Passages Appearing in Gaokao Items

Half of the passages use American English or are from American sources

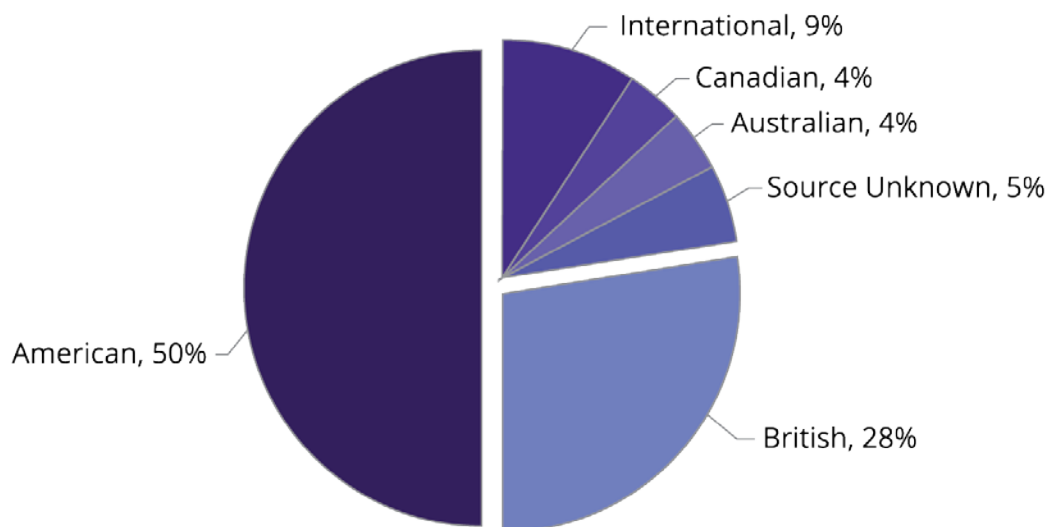


Figure 2: Sources of the Gaokao Passages Examined

Since most of these passages were paraphrased or re-written to use easier vocabulary, often extremely colloquial language was removed. However, many of the passages were, to a native speaker, obviously created in one cultural context or another. One passage from the Zhejiang Province 2014 exam talks about a low-tech interior design trend among those who design buildings for high-tech Internet companies like Twitter and Amazon (Qu, 2014, p.202). Another from the Shandong Province 2014 exam recounts the life of one of the first African slaves in Massachusetts to successfully sue for her freedom (Qu, 2014, p.204). Passages like this, especially since they tend to come from authentic sources, exhibit a great variety of international English discourse and content.

### Themes in the Standards

To speak of national English-language curriculum standards in China is to refer really to only one document, the *Compulsory Education English Curriculum Standards* (MOE, 2011).

This brief document outlines the goals for English education nation wide.

For the purposes of the current study, which is to see how well existing curriculums and existing assessments align with each other and with the national standards, the following excerpt from the document serves as a concise summary of its main goals:

The overall goals of the English language education in compulsory education are: through English study, to have students take the first steps into comprehensive ability to use language, to promote the development of wisdom, and to elevate their overall level of appreciation of the humanities. A comprehensive ability to use language is based on language skills, knowledge of the language, attitudes, study strategies and cultural awareness. Language ability and language knowledge is the basis of comprehensive language ability. Cultural awareness is advantageous for correct geographic language ability and suitable in-use language. Effective study strategies are advantageous for elevating study efficiency and developing self-study habits. An active attitude is advantageous to active self-lead study and continual development. Going through these five facets complement each other, and overall they advance the overall formation and development of a student's comprehensive language ability.

With language skills, language knowledge, correct attitude, study strategies and cultural awareness as the overall goals of English classes, we can see the utility of English study, and also see its value in the humanities, and certainly see how advantageous it is to students' language use development, and also help develop their thinking ability. Thus we see an improvement in their overall appreciation of the humanities. (MOE, 2011, pp. 5-6)

The five key goals as explained here, therefore, are: language skills, knowledge of the language, attitude, study strategies and cultural awareness. Hopefully these five goals compared

with the themes found in the analyses of the curriculum and the assessment can give a broad idea of how well each of the elements are aligning with one another.

### Comparison and Alignment

The themes discovered in each of the three elements (curriculum, assessment, and standards) are summarized in Table 2.

Table 2

*Themes Identified in Grounded Theory Analysis Shown with Thematic Overlap*

National Standards	Curriculum	Assessment
Language skills	Variety in language-learning activities Encouraging students to infer meaning from context	Variety of skills assessed
Knowledge of the language	Variety in language-learning activities	Variety of skills assessed
Attitude	Encouraging a cooperative orientation	
Study strategies	Explicit teaching of metacognitive skills	
Cultural awareness	Simulation of authenticity Implicit promotion of British English	Use of authentic sources Use of non-British forms of English

While a detailed discussion of how each theme in each of the three categories relates to each of the others could be undertaken, for space considerations I will discuss the relationship among the themes in terms of how well the curriculum and the assessment are complying with the five stated goals of the national standards.

#### Language Skills

Developing language skills is obviously a goal of both the curriculum and the existing assessment. “Variety in language-learning activities” and “variety of skills assessed” seem to both map well onto this national goal. But according to the present analysis, the two are

achieving it to different effect. The curriculum is doing well at constantly engaging all four language skills. The assessment has not reached the same level of inclusion. In the current *gaokao* there is no assessment of speaking and the writing section is small compared to the rest of the test, but is arguably closer to the curriculum in terms of assessing a broader skills base than it could be. Issues of practicality are always relevant in high-stakes testing contexts, and the fact that at least some areas of the country currently include a listening portion of the exam and that the weight of that portion is being increased is promising. It will be important going forward, especially amid rumors that some areas may be doing away with the listening portion (Rui, 2014; Zhao, 2013), to remember that an important part of fulfilling the goals of the national standards is finding ways to both teach and assess the four skills that will be meaningful and effective.

One other theme in the curriculum analysis seems to fall under this goal, namely, encouraging students to infer meaning from context. In terms of developing language skill, and especially for continued learning after high school, this is a skill that is recognized by CLT experts as a vital part of developing language skills (Brown, 2007).

### **Knowledge of the Language**

While this goal may seem to have quite a bit of overlap with developing language skill, it seems that it might be understood as referring to what educational psychologists would call *crystallized intelligence*, that is, the existing knowledge of facts and procedures a learner has acquired rather than the ability to learn new linguistic skills. It is often compared to what is tested in an achievement test as contrasted with an aptitude test. In that sense, the themes of “variety in language-learning activities” and “variety of skills assessed” seem to align here as well. The existing emphasis on learning vocabulary and grammar patterns would seem to be

working toward the goal of students having a large reservoir of linguistic knowledge to draw from.

### **Attitude**

The concept of “attitude” is a bit more vague than the previous goals. The Chinese word it translates here is 情感态度 (qínggǎn tàidu), which conveys a sense of emotion, a feeling-attitude. In that sense it could include affective factors, which are an important consideration for teachers and assessors but, unfortunately, a lot trickier to quantify. We can posit that the theme from the curriculum analysis of “encouraging a cooperative orientation” would contribute to encouraging a positive attitude toward English language learning, given that it were effective. The assessment, on the other hand, is rather far from the stance of the curriculum in this factor. The *gaokao* is competitive in its very nature; it is norm-referenced, which means that your score is compared to the scores of others who take the test and your ranking is determined that way. College admission each year is then determined by where the “curve” falls, and there is no benefit to helping other students score better or as well as you.

Whether a positive attitude toward English-language learning can be encouraged by assessment, either the *gaokao* in its current format or some future permutation of it, is a good question for further research to tackle.

### **Study Strategies**

Study strategies, what I’ve called metacognitive skills, are definitely a factor being addressed by the current curriculum. Explicit instruction on how to apply certain grammar principles, how to listen for meaning, or how to read and write more effectively, is scattered throughout the eleven volumes. If what is contained in this text is translating properly into classroom practice, it would be interesting to study further into whether these sorts of instruction

are helpful in fostering better study strategies in students. Additionally, it would be interesting to see whether these habits are effective in improving students' performance in assessments.

### **Cultural Awareness**

One of the newer additions to the MOE standards, the idea of teaching to cultural awareness, definitely seems to come up in both the curriculum and the assessment I've examined here. In two ways, both the text and the test have displayed characteristics that have to do with cultural awareness.

What the text attempts to replicate with its theme of "simulation of authenticity," the test seems to fulfill in its "use of authentic sources." The text created reading passages that look like foreign news reports and blog posts; the test gives students actual foreign news reports and blog posts to read. Another potential avenue for research presents itself here: are the simulations (no doubt constrained by costs and copyright law) as effective in approaching authenticity as the actual authentic materials are? If not, are there ways to incorporate more authentic material in curriculums that wouldn't face the same practicality issues?

The second facet of cultural understanding that the curriculum and the assessment both approach is the idea of foreign culture as a part of language learning. If we broaden the idea of culture to include the cultural power of linguistic discourse, as Xiong and Qian (2012) and Qiong (2004) do, we face the bigger questions about what role World Englishes should play in the teaching of English in non-Anglophone countries. In this respect, our curriculum and our assessment are in conflict with one another. The curriculum demonstrates a tendency to present British English as standard and to downplay and omit other varieties of the language. The assessment that students then face at the end of their high school career, on the other hand, is composed of authentic language samples, over half of which come from non-British contexts.



While the question of “standard” languages is its own linguistic debate, the fact that the curriculum and assessment are out of alignment here may have broader implications for authors and teachers of English language curriculums in years to come.

### **Conclusion**

With recent news of upcoming changes in the format of the national exam, the time seems appropriate to address questions of alignment among the various powerful forces in the educational environment. This review, while not comprehensive and not generalizable to every Chinese context, does bring up some questions about how well CLT-influenced curriculums and standards are interacting with traditional approaches to assessment.

Themes of cooperation versus competition seem to be relevant in the current environment. This review suggests that an existing, widely-used curriculum has the potential to encourage a cooperative approach to English-language learning and an adoption of more communication-oriented tasks and methods. The existing national assessment, on the other hand, at least at the state it was in in 2014, seems to be communicating competitive messages and not fully assessing all of the linguistic skills that the curriculum is designed to teach.

Another potential area of misalignment is in the approach to English as an international language versus the traditional concept of British English being “correct” and “standard” and the possibly unintentional promotion of British English over other varieties. Since the current questions about the purpose of English education in China have very much to do with Chinese students’ roles in the larger international community (Han, 2013; Rui, 2014; Zhao, 2013), this seems an opportune moment to re-assess the way English is presented in cultural and international terms.

### **Avenues for Further Study**

This study is not as wide-ranging as explorations of these questions could be. There is room in the literature for further explorations of alignment among curriculums, assessments, and standards in English-language teaching and learning in China. Quantitative studies might help give a better idea of scope and size of the issues explored here, while further small-scale and qualitative studies could determine whether these findings are unique to a small and limited context or are indicative of a larger trend.

There is a particular need for development work for new curricula and textbooks that would better align with the stated goals of the national curriculum as well as what is being assessed by the national exam. We stand at a particularly prime moment in time to quickly follow up on these and similar ventures as the format of English-language assessment is set to change in years to come. It would be a great opportunity for curriculum developers to join in the effort to improve the methodologies underlying textbooks and educational media and try to assure improvement in future generations of materials as these historic changes in the educational landscape continue to unfold.

## References

- Aldred, D., Duigu, G., & Fried, K. (2005). *Advance with English student book 7*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Aldred, D., Duigu, G., & Walder, G. (2006). *Advance with English student book 9*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Aldred, D., Fried, K., & Steward, E. (2005). *Advance with English student book 8*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Aldred, D., & Kent, J. C. (2003a). *Advance with English student book 3*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Aldred, D., & Kent, J. C. (2003a). *Advance with English student book 5*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Aldred, D., & Walder, G. (2011). *Advance with English student book 11*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles, an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Chen, Q., & Klenowski, V. (2009). Assessment and curriculum reform in China: the college English test and tertiary English as a foreign language education. Proceedings of the 2008 *AARE International Education Conference*, The Australian Association for Research in Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.
- Clark, R. C., & Mayer, R. E. (2011). *E-learning and the science of instruction: Proven guidelines for consumers and designers of multimedia learning*. John Wiley & Sons.

- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. (1990). Grounded theory research: Procedures, canons, and evaluative criteria. *Qualitative Sociology*, 13(1), 3–21.
- Deng, C., & Carless, D. R. (2010). Examination preparation or effective teaching: Conflicting priorities in the implementation of a pedagogic innovation. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 7(4), 285–302.
- Duigu, G., Fried, K., & Steward, E. (2006). *Advance with English student book 10*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Fried, K., & Aldred, D. (2005). *Advance with English student book 6*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Garcia, A. (2014). *The ideology behind the book: An analysis of typical EFL textbooks used in mainland China*. Manuscript submitted for publication.
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. London: Weidenfield and Nicholson.
- Han, S. (2013). Gaokao reform and international higher education. *University World News*, (299).
- Henrichsen, L. (2007). English language teaching in China: An update on the state of the art. *TESL Reporter*, 40(2), 1.
- Hu, G. (2005). Contextual influences on instructional practices: A Chinese case for an ecological approach to ELT. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(4), 635–660.
- Hu, Y. (2007). China's foreign language policy on primary English education: What's behind it? *Language Policy*, 6(3), 359–376.

- Kent, J. C. (2003a). *Advance with English student book 1*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Kent, J. C. (2003b). *Advance with English student book 2*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Kent, J. C. (2003c). *Advance with English student book 4*. Nanjing, China: Oxford University Press (China).
- Li, M. (2011). Shaping socialist ideology through language education policy for primary schools in the PRC. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 12(2), 185–204.
- Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 71.
- Ministry of Education (2011). *Curriculum standards for English*. Beijing: Beijing Normal University Press.
- Nystrand, M., Gamoran, A., & Carbonaro, W. (2001). *On the ecology of classroom instruction. in writing as a learning tool* (pp. 57–81). Springer.
- Qiong, H. X. (2004). Why China English should stand alongside British, American, and the other “world Englishes.” *English Today*, 20(02), 26–33.
- Qu, Y. (2014). *Five years’ gaokao, three years’ simulations: Gaokao English, Jiangsu Province edition*. Beijing: Education Science Publishing House, Capital Normal University Press.
- Rao, Z. (2002). Chinese students’ perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classroom. *System*, 30(1), 85–105.

- Rui, Y. (2014). China's removal of English from gaokao. *International Higher Education*, (75), 12–13.
- Wang, Q. (2007). The national curriculum changes and their effects on English language teaching in the People's Republic of China. *International Handbook of English language Teaching* (pp. 87–105). New York: Springer.
- Wette, R., & Barkhuizen, G. (2009). Teaching the book and educating the person: Challenges for university English language teachers in China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 29(2), 195–212.
- Xiong, T., & Qian, Y. (2012). Ideologies of English in a Chinese high school EFL textbook: a critical discourse analysis. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 32(1), 75–92.
- Zhang, X. (2009). *A great leap forward: EFL curriculum*. (Doctoral dissertation). University of Ballarat, Ballarat, Australia. Retrieved from <http://mpira.ub.uni-muenchen.de/30542/>
- Zhao, S. (2013). English learning and reform of the Gaokao. Retrieved from <http://blogs.nottingham.ac.uk/chinapolicyinstitute/2013/12/22/english-and-reform-of-the-gaokao/>
- Zhao, Y., & Zheng, S. (2006). A theoretical analysis of several Western textbook evaluation systems and their implications for college English textbook evaluations in China [J]. *Foreign Language Education*, 3, 009.

### **Dissertation Themes–Conclusion**

The articles that make up this dissertation address research questions relating to the status of textbooks as elements of the educational environment, how that may be affecting CLT implementation, and how it may be interacting with national assessments and national education standards. Because all three studies used qualitative methods and small sets of data, the conclusions are not generalizable to all Chinese educational contexts. However, they are some of the first qualitative inquiries into textbooks and open up future avenues of research in a similar direction.

The three themes of study proposed in the initial prospectus for this project unfolded in various ways. I will revisit each of those themes briefly, addressing the results of each of the three articles and how they spoke to that theme. The first theme was an examination of textbooks and analysis of their contribution to the educational ecosystem in the Chinese English classroom; the second, an exploration of the obstacles to better English language instruction that are posed by problems stemming from exam pressures as reported in the literature; and the third, identifying a possible dominant paradigm in the underlying ideology of EFL teaching and its possibly adversarial relationship with the minority paradigm.

#### **Textbooks as a Factor in the Classroom Environment**

The initial intent of this project was to examine textbooks as a factor in the classroom environment. Since the methodology involved in the studies included grounded theory, which allows themes to emerge from the data itself rather than being imposed by a pre-conceived hypothesis, the results of the studies diverged a bit from this theme the way it was originally worded.

To speak of textbooks being a factor in a larger environment implies some sort of knowledge of other environmental factors and their interactions. These three articles didn't address these interactions as fully as a study on classroom ecosystems might; however, they did yield a lot of information about the underlying methodologies of textbooks that can be pursued in further study to find out how these methodologies correspond with other factors in the environment like teacher and student beliefs and attitudes as well as the beliefs, attitudes, and motivations of educational administrators, authors and producers of textbooks, and so forth.

Specifically, the findings of article one that suggest a dominant paradigm and a minority paradigm present among a selection of popular textbooks can be pursued in terms of how these paradigms might be manifested in other classroom ecosystem factors. Would a survey or case study about teacher or student beliefs yield similar results that could be classified as belonging to the dominant or minority paradigms? Would those studies produce results in the same approximate ratio as this examination of textbooks did, where the dominant paradigm outnumbered the minority paradigm at a ratio of about 7 to 3? These are all excellent questions for future research to address.

The findings of the second article address this theme tangentially, in the sense that the answers it provided to its research question are factors that may be playing a role in the classroom environment. In response to the question "What are the unspoken, implicit messages about the purpose and importance of English learning as communicated by the existing discourse in popular Chinese textbooks?" I found that some of the messages being communicated included: English is a language of Western people and is associated with a wealthy, foreign lifestyle; the purpose of studying English is to pass the national exam; and, English has "right" and "wrong" answers and the purpose in its study is to learn and conform to those answers. If



these messages are indeed being communicated and, more importantly, being received and believed by teachers, students, and others, this may be having a large effect on how the dynamics of classroom environments are unfolding.

The third article addressed this theme most directly. In comparing an English curriculum both to passages from the national exam and to national curriculum standards, I was able to get at least a preliminary feel for how textbooks may be interacting with other elements of the educational environment. If the conclusions of article three, namely, the proposition that curriculums, assessments and standards may be misaligned in some areas, are accurate, this could be creating discord in the classroom environment. Future research can try to substantiate the claims that there is misalignment and can propose further solutions to the problem. Ideally, materials developers could work to create curriculums and assessments that are more in tune with one another and with the stated national goals.

### **The Relationship of Textbook Curriculums to Exam Pressures**

The third article speaks to this theme in a unique way that previous studies in the literature have not yet addressed. While existing research has looked at exam pressures through surveys and interviews of teachers, students, and administrators (Deng & Carless, 2010), this is the first study I am aware of that directly compares curriculums to the national exam.

While pressure, washback, and conceptions (or misconceptions) of what the national exam means to teachers and students play their own important and powerful role in the educational environment, a fundamental alignment problem would mean something new for developers and practitioners. Especially in a time of change in the structure of the national exam (Rui, 2014), it would be of utmost importance for future work to address the question of whether a better alignment can be achieved. While it would be game-changing to see changes occur in

the way national exams are structured, that is something that is probably unlikely to be influenced by a few academic papers by a non-influential scholar. Reform on the textbook side of the equation seems a bit more likely, and the question of whether there is a better way to design a curriculum to meet needs of students, tests, and governmental standards is an excellent one in need of future work.

### **Competing Paradigms**

The final theme proposed in the initial prospectus of this dissertation was an exploration of possible competing paradigms being communicated by textbooks as objects of cultural discourse.

While the second article found evidence that a dominant paradigm stressing the importance of summative exams and the authority of printed books in dictating usage and meaning was being promoted by textbooks, it was really the first article that most clearly and concisely articulated what these competing paradigms really are.

According to the results of the grounded theory analysis in the first article, a dominant paradigm was promoted in seven of the ten textbooks analyzed. This paradigm included promotion of direct translation of meaning between foreign and native language, an assertion of correct and standard use of language as defined by authoritative textbooks, and a minimal and information-based form of monotony-breaking. The minority paradigm, on the other hand, which was found in the three texts in the study that were authored by Westerners, aims for more learner-centered and open-ended approaches to communicating meaning, a reliance on learners finding their own sources of authority in outside sources or communicative partners, and a use of visual and enrichment material that is integral and enriching to the content of the text.

The first article also suggested that these paradigms may be directly competing with each other to win over assumptions about the purpose of studying English as a Foreign Language. If this assertion can be verified by future study, that may go a long way toward clarifying the murky issue of why CLT approaches have had such a hard time taking hold in China.

### **Avenues for Future Study**

The timing of these studies is vital, and time is of the essence in further work as changes in assessment loom on the horizon. Specifically, working to create greater alignment between curriculums and assessments is important as the format and weight of the English portion of the *gaokao* is slated to change beginning as soon as 2016 (Han, 2013; Rui, 2014).

I would like to extend a call to other researchers to verify the conclusions that I have presented in my three articles, possibly by searching for evidence of the same paradigms in different elements of the classroom environment, and to materials developers and curriculum designers to tackle the issue of how to create better textbooks and curriculums to match the unique challenges we see in the Chinese context. In the ongoing efforts of many teachers and researchers to improve the English learning experience for Chinese students, I am optimistic that work along these lines can play an important role.

## References

- Achren, L. (2007). *Whose development? A cultural analysis of an AusAID English language project in the Lao People's Democratic Republic* (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis). Victoria University, Melbourne. Retrieved from <http://wallaby.vu.edu.au/adt-VVUT/uploads/approved/adt-VVUT20070917.125308/public/02whole.pdf>.
- Anderson, J. (1993). Is a communicative approach practical for teaching English in China? Pros and cons. *System*, 21(4), 471–480.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). *Teaching by principles, an interactive approach to language pedagogy*. White Plains, NY: Pearson Education.
- Burnaby, B., & Sun, Y. (1989). Chinese teachers' views of Western language teaching: Context informs paradigms. *TESOL Quarterly*, 23(2), 219–238.
- Celce-Murcia, M., Dörnyei, Z., & Thurrell, S. (1995). Communicative competence: A pedagogically motivated model with content specifications. *Issues in Applied Linguistics*, 6(2), 5–35.
- Chen, Q., & Klenowski, V. (2009). Assessment and curriculum reform in China: the college English test and tertiary English as a foreign language education. Proceedings of the 2008 *AARE International Education Conference*, The Australian Association for Research in Education, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.
- Deng, C., & Carless, D. R. (2010). Examination preparation or effective teaching: Conflicting priorities in the implementation of a pedagogic innovation. *Language Assessment Quarterly*, 7(4), 285–302.

- Garcia, A. (2013). The ideology behind the book: An analysis of typical textbooks used in mainland China. Unpublished manuscript.
- Han, H. (2008). *A study of Chinese college English teachers in China – Their beliefs and conceptual change*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Queen's University, Kingston, ON.
- Han, S. (2013). Gaokao reform and international higher education. *University World News*, (299).
- Hu, G. (2005). Contextual influences on instructional practices: A Chinese case for an ecological approach to ELT. *TESOL Quarterly*, 39(4), 635–660.
- Hu, Y. (2007). China's foreign language policy on primary English education: What's behind it? *Language Policy*, 6(3), 359–376.
- Johnson, K. E. (2006). The sociocultural turn and its challenges for second language teacher education. *TESOL Quarterly*, 40(1), 235–257.
- Li, R. (2007). *When West meets East: Communicative language teaching in China* (Master's thesis). Brigham Young University.
- Littlewood, W. (1999). Defining and developing autonomy in East Asian contexts. *Applied Linguistics*, 20(1), 71.
- Liu, Y. (2005). The construction of pro-science and technology discourse in Chinese language textbooks. *Language and Education*, 19(4), 304–321.
- Penner, J. (1995). Change and conflict: Introduction of the communicative approach in China. *TESL Canada Journal*, 12(2), 01.

- Rao, Z. (1996). Reconciling communicative approaches to the teaching of English with traditional Chinese methods. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 458–471.
- Rao, Z. (2002). Chinese students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classroom. *System*, 30(1), 85–105.
- Rui, Y. (2014). China's removal of English from gaokao. *International Higher Education*, (75), 12–13.
- Sauvignon, S. J. (1991). Communicative language teaching (CLT): Practical understandings. *Modern Language Journal*, 83(4), 494–517.
- Sato, K., & Kleinsasser, R. C. (1999). Communicative language teaching (CLT): Practical understandings. *Modern Language Journal*, 83(4), 494–517.
- Sun, G., & Cheng, L. (2009). From context to curriculum: A case study of communicative language teaching in China. *TESL Canada Journal*, 19(2), 67.
- Sun, C., & Henrichsen, L. (2011). Major university English tests in China: Their importance, nature, and development. *TESL Reporter*, 44(1-2), 1–24.
- Taguchi, N., Naganuma, N., & Data, B. (2006). Transition from learning English to learning in English: Students' perceived adjustment difficulties in an English-medium university in Japan. *Asian EFL Journal*, 8(4).
- Tudor, I. (2003). Learning to live with complexity: Towards an ecological perspective on language teaching. *System*, 31(1), 1–12.
- Wang, Q. (2007). The national curriculum changes and their effects on English language teaching in the People's Republic of China. *International Handbook of English language Teaching* (pp. 87–105). New York: Springer.

- Wang, R. J. (2008), *The Theoretical and Practical Study of Communicative Approach in Southern Taiwan Junior High Schools: Based on Professors', Teachers', and Students' Perspective*, Unpublished Master's Thesis, National Pingtung Institute of Commerce, Pingtung, Taiwan
- Wette, R., & Barkhuizen, G. (2009). Teaching the book and educating the person: Challenges for university English language teachers in China. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 29(2), 195–212.