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Using the learners-as-ethnographers approach to enhance intercultural learning among American college students learning Chinese as a foreign language

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

USING THE LEARNERS-AS-ETHNOGRAPHERS APPROACH
TO ENHANCE INTERCULTURAL LEARNING AMONG
AMERICAN COLLEGE STUDENTS LEARNING
CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

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College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Teacher Education
Program of Educational Studies

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This Dissertation by: Minhui Lu

Entitled: Using the Learners-as-ethnographers Approach to Enhance Intercultural Learning Among American College Students Learning Chinese as a Foreign Language

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Education in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in School of Teacher Education, Program of Educational Studies

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ABSTRACT

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This study explored how the learners-as-ethnographers (LAE) approach facilitated intercultural learning among American students learning Chinese as a foreign language. Two research questions addressed the effectiveness of the LAE approach and students' learning experiences in a non-immersion context. I designed six ethnographic tasks for the 15 university students who registered for the Elementary Chinese class in 2010. The students were required to complete four of the ethnographic tasks, write an essay for each, and report their explorations of the linguistic and/or cultural phenomena in the U.S. and a Chinese-speaking community. At the end of the semester, I conducted two focus groups and interviewed 11 of the students.

A total of 56 students' essays and two interview transcriptions underwent thematic analyses. Results show that the ethnographic tasks created learning opportunities for students to recognize and evaluate cultural stereotypes, impacts of contextual or situational factors on cultural artifacts/practices/perspectives, culture-specific connotations or misunderstanding, and potential bias in the intercultural exploration. Moreover, the intercultural learning assignment added an important dimension to the foreign language course, motivating learners to notice, contemplate, and inquire into the taken-for-granted linguistic and cultural phenomena in their native community. Students

became aware that culture was situational and contextual. Gradually, their intercultural communicative competence developed. These findings confirm the benefits of the LAE approach reported in the previous studies.

Analyses of students' reflections upon their explorations yield five themes concerning (1) design of the intercultural learning assignment and ethnographic tasks; (2) accessibility to native speakers and validity of the interview information; (3) selection and use of the information from the Internet; (4) influence of having study abroad experiences; and (5) cultural representations. The five themes reveal the complexity of intercultural learning in a non-immersion context, particularly the difficulties of collecting and interpreting information. Discussions on the revealed issues point to directions for future researchers on intercultural education and propose suggestions for classroom practitioners to expand the benefits of the LAE approach.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2007, I came to a western university in the United States as an exchange student from Taiwan. For the following two school years, I was awarded a teaching assistantship in the same school, teaching the Elementary Chinese course. Owing to the experiences of being an international student and an instructor, I had plenty of opportunities to communicate with the local people in the school community and other international students. The experiences of living in a *foreign* country, having regular contact with people from different countries and societies, and being intensively engaged in cross-cultural communications on a daily basis expanded my world views. At the same time, I underwent stages of confusion, resistance, adjustment, and appreciation, and constantly switched my views between the new social environment in which I was positioning myself and the past environment to which I was accustomed. I constantly asked myself: What is American culture? Is there so-called Chinese culture? How do people interpret cultures? Could people learn cultures of other social communities without being there?

During this period of more than two years, I realized that language learning should not be restricted to learning vocabulary, grammar, and other discrete language skills. Factual knowledge, linguistic competence, and communicative competence—which are promoted by the traditional grammar translation approach and communicative language teaching approach, respectively—are not the only attributes to

successful intercultural communications. When I took an ethnography class and read research studies on using the learners-as-ethnographers (LAE) approach in language classrooms (e.g., Carel, 2001; Byram & Feng, 2005; Roberts, Byram, Barro, Jordan, & Street, 2001), I was convinced by those scholars' assertions that language learning requires cultural learning and that LAE is an effective approach to learning culture *and* language. I began to consider integrating the LAE approach into the Elementary Chinese course that I was teaching to enhance the American students' intercultural learning. This chapter reports my exploration of intercultural education, the LAE approach, and how to integrate the LAE in intercultural education.

Language Education and Intercultural Learning

The growing mobility of people as well as the escalating access to the *World Wide Web* has resulted in escalating cross-cultural encounters (Pugh & Hickson, 2003). These abundant cross-cultural contacts and communications point to the importance of intercultural education. Learners need opportunities to develop intercultural awareness or intercultural communicative skills for effective communication with people from different socio-cultural backgrounds and use language in different ways. Research has found that misunderstandings and communication breakdowns among people from different social groups often result from the culture-embedded schema the speakers use to perceive the situations and each other and the meanings they associate with the settings rather than different languages (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992; Gumperz, Jupp, & Roberts, 1979; Littlewood, 2002; Paige, Jorstad, Siaya, Klein, & Colby, 2003).

There have been historical and theoretical shifts in language educational goals from linguistic competence to communicative competence and increasing attention to

intercultural learning. In the 1960s, linguistics and language education were dominated by the sentence-level paradigm led by the theoretical linguist Chomsky. In the 1970s, the functional linguists Halliday and Hasan (1976) challenged the narrowness of Chomsky's model of language and innate mechanism for learning language, while the anthropological linguist Hymes (1972) proposed communicative competence. Hymes and Halliday and their associates (e.g., Halliday & Hasan, 1976; Heath, 1983; Hymes, 1972; Trueba, Guthrie, & Au, 1981; Watson-Gegeo, 1988) argued that language has social and cultural origins and should be analyzed with its context considered. Since then, the predominant school of thought has viewed language educational goals as enhancing learners' communicative competence rather than linguistic competence (for discussion, see Leung, 2005).

Intercultural education entails an affective domain and an ethical purpose for improving intercultural understanding and communication, in addition to the linguistic understanding. The goals include developing "empathy toward a second culture and its people" (Hammerly, 1982, p. 524), "attitudes toward other societies" (Seelye, 1984, p. 9), and willingness to de-center and to relativize one's values, beliefs, and behaviors (Byram, Nichols, & Stevens, 2001). Intercultural education also stretches learners' imaginations and world views. Stern (1992) insists that the foreign language (FL) course syllabus should consider language learners' perspectives on the culture of the social community speaking the target language (TL) because the cultural syllabus can build background and context and bring the speech community to life for foreign language learners. The cross-cultural syllabus helps foreign language learners, to whom the target language community is usually physically remote and the cultures

shaping the language are psychologically distant, to “vicariously experience that reality” (p. 223).

Integrating Intercultural Learning into Foreign Language Curricula

The ties of language and culture and of cultural education and affective domains are fully illustrated in Agar’s (1994) notion of “Languaculture” (p. 60) and Lange and Paige’s (2003) view of culture as the *core* of language education. Language educators have achieved a consensus that communicative competence for foreign language learners should be developed in conjunction with intercultural learning (Byram & Feng, 2005; Byram et al., 2001). Researchers have confirmed that when people learn a second language, they learn not merely a structure for communication, but the socio-cultural norms or procedures for interpretation and forms of reasoning (Trueba et al., 1981; Watson-Gegeo, 1988). In order to maximize understanding in international communication, foreign language education must help learners develop the awareness that culture affects the values, attitudes, and behaviors of people from different sociocultural communities (Gaston, 1992). Kramsch (1993) echoed Gaston, asserting that the purpose of foreign language education is “cultivating international understanding, responsibility, and effective participation in a global age” (p. 258).

Indeed, there has been increasing advocacy for integrating intercultural learning into foreign language curricula. The *National Standards* (1996) issued by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) includes culture as one of the five core contents and unambiguously relates three of the standards to culture. The post 9/11 survey *U.S. Business Needs for Employees with International Expertise* reports that a majority of employers value “an appreciation for cross-cultural differences” and

“a global perspective” (Kedia & Daniel, 2003). More recently, the document *Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World* issued by the Modern Language Association (MLA) in 2007 places considerable emphasis on the role of culture in a transformed approach to language education. It explicitly states that “recent world events have demonstrated, deep cultural knowledge and linguistic competence are equally necessary if one wishes to understand people and their communities” (p. 2).

Current Problems in Intercultural Education

Despite the increasing attention to intercultural education, educators face challenges to decide what aspects of culture should be taught and how (Corbett, 2003; Stern, 1992). In this section, I will discuss difficulties in teaching culture. Then, I will narrow the focus to three particular challenges facing classroom teachers: the lack of attainable instructional objectives, workable pedagogic approaches, and practical material.

Problems in Intercultural Syllabus

Stern (1992) observes five interwoven difficulties in the cultural syllabus: the vast concept of culture, incoherent educational goals, lack of access to required information, incorporation of cultural teaching in a predominately language-oriented pedagogic approach, and integration of the substantial subject material in a mainly skill-oriented program (p. 207). Among the five problems, the vast concept of culture is the basic problem leading to the others. Culture was viewed as a noun, which could be and must be pre-defined to be implemented in teaching (e.g., Brooks, 1964; Chastain, 1976). Such an assumption has limited the educational goals to memorizing fragmental “facts”

and analyzing available information. While *The Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (National Standards in Foreign Language Educational Project, 1999) has given cultural learning a prominent role in American foreign language education in three (out of five) content areas (culture, communication, and comparison), a close examination of the *Standards* reveals that knowledge is prioritized over skills and attitudes and that there is a general vagueness regarding cultural learning processes (Erin, 2008).

Limiting the content of intercultural syllabi to factual knowledge is not only problematic but impractical. As Fischer (1997) points out, the lack of “representative” data and the limited access to information increase the difficulty for foreign language teachers to decide what they should teach, how they should teach, and why they should be teaching cultures. A survey funded by the U.S. Department of Education was conducted among 1,566 high school foreign language teachers. The results show that the major difficulty in adopting the culture syllabus and attaining the *Standards* was the lack of a “conceptual framework into which cultural information can fit that is described in the standards” (Social Science Education Consortium, 1999, p. 5).

Goals of Intercultural Education

The convenient access to information via multimedia and advanced telecommunication technology in this era of information explosion has changed the perspective on culture, altered educational contexts, and directed the challenges in intercultural education to another paradigm. The goals of intercultural education have moved from transacting information and analyzing certain cultural behaviors to equipping students with skills to explore cultures. One decade after Stern’s

observations in 1992, Corbett (2003) defines the educational goals of the intercultural syllabus as goals to overcome the limitations of the prescriptive knowledge in textbooks, to develop skills of exploring cultures, to motivate interest in exploring cultures, and to avoid intercultural misunderstanding.

Indeed, intercultural learning cannot be evaluated by quantity but should be seen as “the *process* of acquiring the culture-specific and culture-general knowledge, skills, and attitude... a dynamic, developmental, and ongoing process which engages the learner cognitively, behaviorally, and affectively” (Paige et al., 2003, p. 177; emphasis added). The current pedagogic approaches to intercultural learning have adjusted to the process-oriented teaching objectives, such as the portfolio approach (e.g., Abrams, 2002; Allen, 2004; Byon, 2007) and the LAE approach (e.g., Byram & Michael, 1998; Schulz, 2007).

Intercultural Communicative Competence

Among the proposed cultural learning objectives, the intercultural communicative competence (ICC) promoted by British scholars may be the most well-known and widely-applied learning objective in the literature of intercultural education (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2001; Byram & Zarate, 1994). Byram and his associates argue that intercultural education should be incorporated into foreign language curriculum and that cultivating ICC should be the ultimate goal of foreign language education. The four components of ICC in their intercultural model of foreign language education are attitude, knowledge, skills, and critical awareness. Intercultural attitude refers to language learners’ curiosity and openness. Intercultural knowledge refers to the understanding about how social groups and social identities function. Intercultural

skills include the skills of comparing, interpreting, and discovering. Intercultural speakers also need critical awareness of their values and others’.

The ICC components have been criticized. Tomic (2000) points out that the concept of competence is problematic because it “implies that there is a measurable amount of ‘knowledge’” (p. 238). Even if cultural learning is measurable, it is difficult, if not impossible, to measure all the ICC components. For instance, the attitudinal shifts and awareness development may require observation for at least four years (Kramsch, 1993; Lafayette & Schulz, 1997). Moreover, the ICC model is based on the observations of foreign language education and research results in Europe, where intercultural contacts are extensive and where study abroad is popular. It is unknown yet whether the model is attainable in non-immersion foreign language programs for the majority of students who do not have opportunities to visit the countries speaking their target languages.

Ethnography as a Pedagogic Approach

Intercultural educationists have proposed that foreign language teachers should teach ethnographic skills to facilitate learning the skills of exploring cultures because ethnography has been a legitimate form of inquiry into culture (Corbett, 2003; Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998; Leung, 2005; Roberts et al., 2001). Byram and Feng (2005) began their comprehensive review on intercultural education with an explicit statement: “Culture teaching is moving toward an ethnographic perspective” (p. 911). In cultural inquiry, ethnographers become able to view the knowledge of other societies with more open minds by involving themselves in recognizing their assumptions about knowledge and its legitimization in their own society. Ethnographers develop the ability to reflect

critically on how their cultural backgrounds and standpoints influence their view of other cultures. Moreover, ethnographers also develop the critical consciousness, viewing ethnography as “a product of particular dominant societies at a particular period” (Roberts et al., 2001, p. 93). According to Leung (2005), ethnographic inquiry processes facilitate development of epistemological relativity, reflexivity, and critical consciousness, all of which increase the ICC.

Strengths of the Learners-as-Ethnographers Approach

Educationists have attempted to incorporate ethnography in language education, foreign language education, and intercultural education. Variations of the learners-as-ethnographers (LAE) approach have been developed (e.g., Barro et al., 1998; Carel, 2001; Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998; Monahan, 2003; Roberts et al., 2001; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996; Su, 2008; Tanaka, 1997). The recognized contributions of the LAE approach to language learning include:

- (1) Learners may have a better understanding of the connection between language and culture and how language is comprehended or produced in the large context of communication;
- (2) Learners may change their attitudes towards their own language and the language of others and unpack their stereotypes about the target culture;
- (3) Learners will have alternative accesses to studying language components other than the traditional instruction of the prescriptive grammar;
- (4) Learners can engage in a variety of different writing such as field notes, reports, stories, etc., realize the power of various kinds of writing to synthesize, generate, and transform knowledge, and position their writer identity as writing is an integral part in ethnography;
- (5) Learners will acquire a way of thinking about and analyzing language and a new mode of inquiry knowledge;

(6) Learners will feel that learning is meaningful and become more motivated to learn; and

(7) Learners can practice life skills such as active listening, communicative strategies, as well as study skills such as collecting data, searching for sources, analyzing and synthesizing ideas, and writing reflection.

The LAE approach, thus, influences foreign language learning in four ways. It provides learners with access to authentic language use in context, raises awareness of the language-culture connection, develops autonomy and exploratory skills, and enhances thinking skills. Students explore not only the social group speaking their target language and its cultural practices, but the native social group in which they are living. The positive effects of LAE initiated my interest in the LAE approach and lead to my decision to use it to engage and enhance my American students' intercultural learning.

Need for Empirical Studies on Implementation

Despite the benefits of the LAE approach, there have been insufficient empirical studies on its implementation in modern foreign language classrooms, and the existing studies have methodological problems. Most of the LAE studies ignored the fact that the worldwide communication systems have offered access and data for foreign language learners to obtain cultural information without staying in the community speaking the target language (Corbett, 2003; Heath & Street, 2008; Lange, 2003). With technology assistance, the LAE projects may not need to adhere to the tradition of "extensive stay[s] in the field and participant observation" (Heath, 1983). Roberts et al.'s (2001) comprehensive examination of LAE projects is based on an interdisciplinary international research project conducted over a period of three years.

Despite the encouraging results of the LAE's effectiveness, these LAE projects were integrated into the undergraduate degree as an independent course and involved a one-year study abroad. Little was known about the effectiveness of the LAE approach applied in regular foreign language curricula which do not require study abroad. Moreover, the LAE cases in Roberts et al.'s research as well as other LAE studies (e.g., Byram & Fleming, 1998; Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998) only reported successful cases of learning in controlled contexts with participants of high homogeneity. Competing cases are needed for understanding the complexity of intercultural learning in naturalistic settings where students might have had different intercultural learning experiences, for example, of long-time residence or participation in a summer program, of being in a community speaking the target language or other languages, and consequently have different perspectives on intercultural learning. Researchers should avoid the danger of selecting theoretical segments from a large data base to prove the researcher's point of view and rather investigate extensive learning experiences (Brown, 1992).

In addition to the limitations, at least three other areas were unexplored in intercultural education and deserve attention. First, portfolios and reflective essay tasks have been suggested for evaluating students' intercultural learning (e.g., Corbett, 2003; Roberts et al., 2001; Schulz, 2007), but their implementations were not fully investigated. Second, researchers tended to explore the implementation of LAE in contexts of English language learning from English-speaking researchers' perspectives (e.g., Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998; Heath, 1983). Investigations of LAE's implementation with learners of foreign languages other than English from the

perspectives of researchers speaking languages other than English can contribute to our developing understanding of the LAE approach as well as intercultural education (Harklau, 2005). Third, students' perspectives on intercultural learning have been underexplored but deserve attention as the inquiry into such may offer constructive suggestions to refine the LAE.

The present study aims to add the missing pieces to the puzzle. I will explore divergent learning cases. I will investigate American students' experiences of and perspectives on intercultural learning through the LAE approach. As an instructor-researcher from a different country, my investigation may offer an alternative perspective to intercultural education which has been dominated by Anglo researchers studying the learning of European languages and cultures.

The Present Study

The present study explores the integration of the learners-as-ethnographers (LAE) approach in a Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) curriculum in a non-immersion intercultural learning context. It assumes that the challenges facing instructors using an intercultural syllabus result from the absence of attainable learning objectives, a workable pedagogic approach, and legitimate teaching material. It also assumes that these challenges can be overcome by adopting the LAE approach in which students will be guided to complete ethnographic tasks and develop an intercultural learning portfolio. This study endeavors to bridge the gaps in the research on diverse learning experiences of the LAE approach and students' perspectives on intercultural learning by examining how LAE facilitates (or does not facilitate) intercultural

awareness and engages (or does not engage) intercultural learning. Research questions include:

- Q1 How does the learners-as-ethnographers (LAE) approach facilitate intercultural learning among American college students learning Chinese as a foreign language?
- Q2 How do the learners perceive their learning experiences through the LAE approach?

Learners' development of intercultural awareness and understanding is operationally defined as the students' completion of the intercultural learning portfolio and demonstration of their awareness and understanding of native culture (American culture) and target culture (Chinese/Taiwanese culture) in their ethnographic task essays written in English. The LAE effectiveness is evaluated by students' achievement of the target learning objectives which is indicated in students' completed tasks and students' reflections on the benefits of the LAE in the follow-up interviews.

I utilized a qualitative research design, drawing upon the epistemological stances of constructivism and interpretivism. Research methods included a pedagogic intervention, participant observation, and focus group interview. I designed a one-semester-long portfolio project containing six ethnographic tasks for a class of CFL learners to explore the six aspects of intercultural learning. After completing the portfolio, I conducted two focus group interviews for students to reflect upon and talk about their learning experiences (Burch & Seggie, 2008). Students' intercultural learning portfolios and the transcriptions of the two interviews underwent thematic analysis.

The results of analysis offer practical information to foreign language classroom teachers who might be thinking about adopting the LAE approach for intercultural

education and who might integrate it into their syllabus. For these practitioners, understanding learners' perceptions and experiences of the LAE approach is critical. The results of the effectiveness and engagement of the ethnographic tasks and intercultural learning portfolio may provide material writers and classroom teachers with useful references in designing and/or implementing instructional activities. Furthermore, the investigation results of the LAE approach as a non-traditional, student-centered, skill-based approach bring fresh thoughts to the currently dominant teacher-centered, knowledge-based pedagogy, and, therefore, contribute to the ongoing educational reforms. Learners' narrations of intercultural learning offer information about how the CFL learners in the U.S. interpret Chinese culture and better our understanding of the socio-psychological process of cultural studies.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the existing literature on teaching culture and researching intercultural education to provide readers with background information on intercultural education and also to foreground the research design of this study. In the first section, I will discuss different perspectives on culture and the goals of intercultural education. Then, I will discuss the contents and techniques of intercultural educational syllabi, particularly the LAE approach. I will briefly introduce the history of using ethnographic inquiry in researching cultures, the rise of using ethnography in teaching cultures, and the LAE approach and its variations. The third section will discuss the integration of portfolios with the LAE approach and its application to intercultural learning in foreign language classrooms.

Definitions of Culture

Defining culture is essential to applying the cultural syllabus in foreign language classrooms because the definition shapes every aspect of intercultural education—from deciding learning objectives and educational goals to choosing the contents and techniques of teaching. Culture has been defined in terms of both outcome and process and as either a noun (e.g., Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993) or a verb (e.g., Heath & Street, 2008; Loveday, 1981).

Culture as a Noun

The culture-as-a-noun view includes the “capital C” and “little c” definitions. The former limits Culture to the *elite* products and properties—literature, music, art, and philosophy, whereas the latter views culture as “incorporating *products* such as literature, art, and artifacts, *ideas* such as beliefs, values and institutions, and *behaviors* such as customs, habits, dress, foods and leisure” (Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993, pp. 6-7, emphasis added). Still, another perspective sees culture as *knowledge*: “culture is what the individual needs to know to be a functional member of the community” (Saville-Troike, 1989, p. 7). Culture is a “multi-leveled group memory,” which is shared by individuals “in different parts with different groups to which we belong; agglomeration of common knowledge, perceptions, values, and traditions” (Bowers, 1992, p. 32).

Culture as a Verb

In contrast with the culture-as-a-noun view based on the assumption that culture is bounded and static, the culture-as-a-verb view is concerned with the dynamic and changing features of culture, which “involves the implicit norms and conventions of a society, its methods of ‘going about doing things’, its historically transmitted but also *adaptive and creative* ethos” (Loveday, 1981, p. 34, emphasis added). Risager’s (1998) quote accurately explains why the culture-as-a-verb perspective is a useful working definition to investigate intercultural education in the 21st century:

The interwoven character of cultures as a common condition for the whole world: *cultures penetrate each other in changing combinations* by virtue of extensive migration and tourism, worldwide communication systems for mass and private communication, economic interdependence and the globalization of the production of goods. (p. 248, emphasis added)

More recently, the ethnographers Heath and Street's (2008) view of culture as "unbounded, kaleidoscopic, and dynamic" (p. 7) best captures the spirits of cultures (plural form) as a verb in this age of information explosion and mobility escalation.

Interpretivist perspective on culture. In line with the culture-as-a-verb perspective, the postmodern perspective on culture emphasizes the selectivity, subjectivity, and authorship of those who describe cultures. Cultures are "webs of significance" (Geertz, 1973, p. 5) or "meanings partially shared and manipulated by those who knew them" (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 209). Culture is the frame of reference and also the source of reference which constrains and helps individuals make sense of the world. Carbaugh (2007) uses the metaphors "hubs and radiant of meaning" (p. 174) for the semantic content of culture in the ongoing process of interpretation. The interactional radiant or semantic hubs are constantly formulated when people observe cultural phenomenon and make explication of the meta-cultural commentary on the cultural meanings about relationships, personhood, action, emotion, etc.

The changing conceptions of culture has led to a consensus that culture is not primordial, coherent, or fixed in time and space, but rather, a dynamic, continuously emerging set of struggles among people trying to identify who they are in relation to others (Clifford, 1986; Eisenhart, 2001). Because of such dynamic and rational features, it is difficult to set a boundary for culture while avoiding strengthening the other-self division and creating social hierarchies (Abu-Lughod, 1991). Thus, some scholars recommend to focus on individuals and abandon culture (e.g., Abu-Lughod, 1991; for discussion, see Eisenhart, 2001, pp. 214-215).

Cultural Studies

Despite the scholarly tendency of seeing culture as a verb rather than a noun, the patterned behaviors in the human society and their intersubjective meanings are still critical to understand human experiences. In cultural studies, culture is seen as the “patterns of organization, those characteristic forms of human energy which can be discovered as revealing themselves... within or underlying all social practices,” and the purpose of the analysis of culture is “to grasp how the interactions between all these practices and patterns are lived and experienced as a whole, in any particular period” (Hall, 1980, p. 60). Following this line, cultural studies focus on the homogeneity of a group of people, though the groups change and overlap, and ethnography is a powerful branch of research methodology.

The interpretivist perspective on culture (Carbaugh, 2007; Clifford, 1986; Eisenhart, 2001) is suited for my research on the effectiveness of the LAE approach to foreign language learners’ cross-cultural awareness and understanding and perceptions of their intercultural learning experiences. Culture is loosely defined to serve research purposes, so there will be space for students to define, make sense of, and learn about what Chinese and American cultures are. I keep in mind the changing and dynamic features of cultures when I design the ethnographic tasks. The student participants will be encouraged to interpret the cultural phenomenon they observe, instead of being crammed with pre-selected information about so-called “Chinese culture” or “American culture.” The learners-as-ethnographers under the LAE approach are expected to investigate and interpret the patterned behaviors of Americans and Chinese speakers as well as the structured reasons for their behaviors.

Intercultural Education

The term *intercultural* is often used interchangeably with *cross-cultural* (e.g., Byram & Feng, 2005; Corbett, 2003; Lange & Paige, 2003; Schulz, 2007) which refers to “the meeting of two cultures or two languages across the political boundaries of nation-states” (Kramsch, 1998, p. 81). *Intercultural* denotes the successful achievement of understanding more than the act of crossing back and forth between two cultures (Austin, 1998). In line with the research studies on intercultural education in foreign language educational contexts (e.g., Kramsch, 1998), the present study refers *intercultural learning* to learning both the native culture and target culture, which were bounded by the learners’ dominant language (i.e., English) and their target language (i.e., Chinese). I adopt the conventional collocations in the literature such as “cross-cultural awareness” (Abrams, 2002; Byon, 2007; Su, 2008), “cross-cultural pragmatics” (Austin, 1998), “cross-cultural experience” (Ingulsrud, Kai, Kadowaki, Kurobane, & Shiobara, 2010), “intercultural competence” (Byram & Feng, 2005; Byram et al., 2001; Carel, 2001; Fischer, 1997), “intercultural communication” (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992; Tomic, 2000), and “intercultural perspective” (Barro et al., 1998; Byram & Cain, 1998; Byram & Fleming, 1998).

This section discusses two veins of intercultural educational syllabus in parallel with the shifting definitions of culture: (1) product-oriented cultural syllabus in which culture is perceived as a noun and the teaching content is pre-determined factual knowledge and (2) intercultural syllabus in which culture is perceived as a verb, and the learning objectives go beyond the factual knowledge to include exploratory skills, open-minded attitude towards cultures, and critical thinking ability.

Product-oriented Cultural Syllabus

Following the culture-as-a-noun perspective, scholars have proposed topics for learning the target cultures (Brooks, 1964; Chastain, 1976; Hammerly, 1982; Nostrand, 1978; Stern, 1992). These proposals attempt to reduce the vast concept of culture by providing seemingly manageable items, for example, Brooks' (1964) 60 items including children literature, pets, disciplines, or Stern's (1992) categorization of six aspects of culture teaching including geographic knowledge of the target culture, history, people and way of life, society in general, institutions, as well as arts, music, literature and other major achievements. To teach the factual knowledge, educators have developed teaching techniques or approaches such as the cultural capsule (Taylor & Sorenson, 1961), culture assimilator (Fiedler, Mitchell, & Triandis, 1971), and literature/humanities approach (Marckwardt, 1981).

The fact-oriented syllabus is problematic, conceptually and practically. It tends to focus on surface-level behaviors and neglect the underlying value orientation, variability of behaviors in any cultural community, participation of the individual in the creation of culture, and interaction of language and culture in the construction of meaning (Moore, 1991). The fact-oriented syllabus also ignores that the artifacts, practices, and perspectives of people from the same country may vary along a spectrum of differences because any person can participate in multiple cultures which may overlap with each other (Heath & Street, 2008). In practice, it is impossible to set criteria for selecting representative cultural information. Even if there are selection criteria, the pre-selected cultural information for instructional situations may be manipulated by course book writers or teachers in the first place (Fischer, 1997) and

then be selected and accessed to different degrees by learners depending on their lived experiences, access to sources, language proficiency levels, and other individual differences. Furthermore, not many foreign language teachers have intercultural competence or the capability to provide the requisite knowledge to their students, and the risk of putting the exploratory job on teachers is too high for education (Schulz, 2007). Last but not least, the fact-oriented syllabus may risk strengthening cultural stereotypes due to its ignorance of the unbounded, kaleidoscopic, and dynamic elements of culture as an ongoing social construct (Kramersch, 1993).

Process-oriented Cultural Syllabus

In line with the theoretical shift from the culture-as-a-noun product-oriented view to the perspectives on culture as a verb, oriented to changing interactive processes, the cultural educational syllabus has a tendency of moving from a focus on cultural facts to include multiple facets of culture and intercultural dialogues (Saphonova, 1996; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002). This tendency can be seen from the national guidelines of foreign language education in the U.S. and UK. Despite the differences in their details, the goals of foreign language education in the *American National Standards*¹ and *English National Curriculum*² can be categorized in terms of five process-oriented aspects: developing communicative skills, increasing meta-linguistic knowledge, developing learning skills, developing positive attitudes towards speakers of the target languages and understanding of their ways of life, and developing an understanding of

¹ See the National Standards in Foreign Language Education Projects (1999). *Standards for foreign language learning in the 21st century*. Yonkers, NY: Author.

² The categorization is based on Byram and Fleming (1998, pp. 3-4). The FL educational goals were announced by the English National Curriculum. See DES (Department of Education and Science, and the Welsh Office). 1990. *Modern Foreign Languages for ages 11 to 16: proposals of the Secretary of State for Education and Science and the Secretary of State for Wales*. London: HMSO.

students' own ways of life. These five aspects cover the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of the intercultural syllabus.

Intercultural communicative competence. Byram and his associates (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2001; Byram & Zarate, 1994) advocated for the notion of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). They maintained that the four components of the ICC (knowledge, exploratory skills, open-minded attitudes, and critical awareness) should be integrated into any intercultural education and that cultivating intercultural speakers with ICC should be the ultimate goal of foreign language education.

Intercultural awareness. To transform the four ICC components into specific objectives on which workable syllabi can be designed to meet the need of the foreign language classrooms located in the areas where study abroad is not accessible, Schulz (2007) proposed five fundamental learning objectives. Schulz modestly posited her objectives as “rather limited and realizable for a foreign language program, given the fact that students can seldom draw on direct personal experiences with the culture, such as those that might be gained in immersion study abroad” (p. 16). The following are the five objectives:

1. Students develop and demonstrate awareness that geographic, historical, economic, social/religious, and political factors can have an impact on cultural perspectives, products, and practices, including language use and styles of communication.
2. Students develop and demonstrate awareness that situational variables (e.g., context and role expectations, including power differentials, and social variables such as age, gender, social class, religion, ethnicity, and place of residence) shape communicative interaction (verbal, nonverbal, and paralinguistic) and behavior in important ways.

3. Students recognize stereotypes or generalizations about the home and target cultures and evaluate them in terms of the amount of substantiating evidence.
4. Students develop and demonstrate awareness that each language and culture has culture-conditioned images and culture-specific connotations of some words, phrases, proverbs, idiomatic formulations, gestures, etc.
5. Students develop and demonstrate an awareness of some types of causes (linguistic and nonlinguistic) for cultural misunderstanding between members of different cultures. (Schulz, 2007, p. 17)

Schulz asserted that these objectives do not aim to develop linguistic or discourse competence for ICC but are “restricted to cross-cultural awareness and understanding [which are] fundamental to developing communicative competence” (p. 17). In other words, the objectives should be taken as a springboard to prepare foreign language learners for developing the ICC. These objectives are more appropriate in my study of the first-year CFL students’ intercultural learning, considering their limited experiences of learning Chinese and restricted access to the target language and culture.

Ingulsrud et al.’s (2010) recognition-reflection model seems a suitable framework for Schulz’s (2007) intercultural awareness. Based on Hess’ (1994, 1997) action-reflection-response strategy for intercultural learning, Ingulsrud et al. (2010) developed a recognition-reflection model, a quantitative assessment with portfolio, and an awareness checklist. Their operational definition for intercultural awareness contained two components in students’ intercultural learning texts: recognition of cultural differences and similarities and reflection upon the differences. If the learner can locate “instances where students noticed or ‘recognized’ spaces, items, events, or behaviors that to them were significant,” the recognition component of cross-cultural awareness is achieved. Reflection refers to learners’ ability to relate “what they

observed to something in their own culture, life, or plans for the future” (Ingulsrud et al., 2010, p. 480).

Exploratory skills and critical thinking ability. In addition to intercultural awareness and understanding, equipping students with exploratory skills should be one of the core educational objectives. Rather than teaching factual information, the action-based pedagogic approach aims to create opportunities for students to learn inquiry skills (van Lier, 2007). In inquiring culture, learners “approach a culture not as a given to be acquired from books, but rather, as a topic for exploration” (Stern, 1992, p. 228). The cross-cultural explorers are critical observers, using objective techniques of systematic enquiry to approach the new society.

Critical thinking is emphasized in the process-oriented syllabus, and an interpretive perspective on culture is encouraged. Instead of being crammed with factual information pre-selected by teachers or course book writers, foreign language learners are encouraged to explore cultures, reflect upon and articulate their findings, and create their own relational meanings (Allen, 2004; Grittner, 1996; Kramsch, 1993). The cultural exploratory skills and critical thinking are significant in our age of information explosion, when learners cannot escape from cultural tidbits and stereotypes. The challenge is not the lack of information, but how to select and reflect upon it appropriately (Leung, 2005).

De-stereotyping approach. Intercultural education should emphasize individual variation within each culture, instead of strengthening stereotypes across an entire culture (Bowers, 1992). According to social psychologists, creating stereotypes is a natural human coping mechanism for making sense of social encounters and

defining self-identity (Smith & Mackie, 2000). To strengthen group solidity and confirm self-identity, people tend to generalize characteristics of an entire social group while neglecting within-group diversity and to homogenize others while distinguishing their group from one's own (Abrams, 2002).

The ICC components of critical awareness, open-minded attitude, and exploratory skills play vital roles in avoiding the cultural stereotypes and facilitating intercultural communication. Educators have developed the de-stereotyping approach (e.g., Abrams, 2002; Allen, 2004; Byon, 2007; Wright, 2000). Combining the constructivist model and sociocultural perspectives on learning as active, creative, and socially collaborative processes, the de-stereotyping approach encourages foreign language learners to identify their presumptions about the target culture, adjust their cultural stereotypes in exploring other cultures, reflect upon their own cultures, and compare the findings.

It is true that people develop generalizations naturally from “tacit knowledge, intuition, and personal experience” in “looking for patterns that explain their own experience as well as events in the world around them” (Stake, cited in Merriam, 2009, p. 211). However, intercultural education should aim to diminish the risk of developing naturalistic generalizations into permanent stereotypes. Allen (2004) and Byon (2007) found that stereotypes are often concrete enough for classroom discussion even in the beginning level. The de-stereotype approach leads foreign language learners to undergo the process which “not only enriches learners’ knowledge by studying the culture from different angles, but also improves their skills in comparing and discovering by exploring related sources, and enables them to become open-minded and critical, by

reflecting on their ‘natural’ way of looking at others and perhaps their own” (Byram & Feng, 2005, p. 918). Pedagogic approaches emphasizing exploratory skills and viewing the changing and dynamic features of culture, such as the de-stereotyping approach, facilitate intercultural learning.

The five problems in adopting an intercultural syllabus that Stern (1992) observed seem to be solvable when the focus of cultural teaching is shifted from cramming students with prescriptive and incomplete information to equipping learners with exploratory skills and encouraging them to critically think about the cultural phenomenon. The intercultural syllabus aims to develop learners’ awareness of the ongoing features of culture, provide them with exploratory skills, and familiarize learners with information sources for future exploration.

Learners-as-ethnographers Approach

Byram and Feng (2005) began their comprehensive review on teaching and researching intercultural competence with the claim that culture teaching has moved towards ethnographic and critical perspectives. The authors argue that there is a growing recognition in the field that ethnography is effective in equipping learners with the skills to explore and interpret cultures, including both the culture which shapes learners’ target language and the native culture in which the learners live. In the following sections, I will introduce ethnography as an inquiry method and a teaching approach applied in naturalistic and structured settings. I will illustrate how the applications have enhanced intercultural learning and how the application of the LAE approach can be expanded to foreign language education.

Ethnography. Ethnography is a qualitative research method, which developed in the fields of anthropology and sociology but is increasingly used in educational research. Ethnography features naturalistic, first-hand, sustained observation and participation in a particular social setting with the intention to obtain a deep understanding of the local culture and how people live in and view their social and cultural worlds (Harklau, 2005). Ethnography requires “a new search: familiar phenomena viewed and understood in a new way, and unfamiliar phenomena newly encountered and understood both on their own terms and in familiar terms” (Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998, xii). The result is “thick description” (Geertz, 1973), incorporating both views of the actors in the cultural group and the researcher’s interpretation about human social life. The underlying epistemological premise to ethnography is constructivism in that “people may construct meaning in different ways” (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). Moreover, the ethnographer and the researched social members emerge as partners in the meaning co-construction.

Ethnography as a learning approach. With its long history of use in cultural studies, ethnography is naturally applied to enhance intercultural learning, particularly in enhancing intercultural learning in foreign language classrooms (e.g., Byram & Cain, 1998; Byram & Fleming, 1998; Carel, 2001; Furstenberg, Levet, English, & Maillet, 2001; Roberts et al., 2001; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996; Su, 2008). In the 1990’s, a group of British scholars began to develop the learners-as-ethnographers approach (e.g., Barro et al., 1998; Roberts et al., 2001). The LAE approach adopts the ethnographic perspectives and methods that I introduced earlier. Its purpose is not to turn language learners into professional ethnographers or anthropologists, but *to create opportunities*

for learners to learn how to communicate appropriately with another social group and develop an analytical understanding of their system of meanings (Corbett, 2003).

Different from the traditional research projects inquiring students to gather information in the library, the LAE project requires learners to conduct field work. Learners-as-ethnographers explore target language and culture, using ethnographic techniques such as participant observations and interviews, collecting evidence to support their interpretations from their observations, and representing their findings and reflections. The needed research skills go beyond organizing note cards, generating an outline, and learning bibliographic formats and include taking field notes, collecting and analyzing data, and interpreting findings. Following the epistemological concepts and methodological theories of ethnographic inquiry, the LAE research projects involve learners-as-ethnographers in generating new knowledge and producing new texts. In sum, the LAE approach involves “a new search” (Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998, xii).

In practice, LAE was first adopted in study abroad programs (e.g., Barro et al., 1998; Roberts et al., 2001). Learners-as-ethnographers *live* in the community speaking their target language for a considerable time and collect the language evidence to support their language studies. To overcome the constraints of time and physical settings, the LAE approach has transformed to include the home ethnography project (e.g., Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998). The instructions focus on one specific ethnographic method, for example, ethnographic interviewing in studies by Robinson-Stuart and Nocon (1996) and Su (2008). In both studies, foreign language learners interviewed the native speakers of their target languages in the reachable communities,

following the pre-scribed instructions and interview questions. More recently, LAE expanded beyond the face-to-face interviews with native speakers by using “ethnographic material” (Duff & Mayes, 2001) or computer technologies (e.g., Dodd, 2001; Furstenberg et al., 2001; Woodin, 2001).

Learners-as-ethnographers Approach

Study Abroad Programs

Some language educators maintain that the in-situ experiences are most effective for intercultural learning. The conceptual framework behind LAE study abroad programs illustrates this view (e.g., Roberts et al., 2001). Learners-as-ethnographers have firsthand experiences of sharing knowledge, perceptions, values, and traditions with the native speakers of the target language whose knowledge, perceptions, values, and traditions differ from the learners-as-ethnographers. Most of these programs report a positive impact of LAE on learners’ cross-cultural awareness and interest in “otherness,” in addition to an increase in linguistic and communicative competence and intellectual and personal development (e.g., Barro et al., 1998; Jurasek, 1996; Kauffmann, Martin, & Weaver, 1992; Murphy-Lejeune, 2002; Roberts et al., 2001).

Among these studies, Roberts et al.’s (2001) is probably the most comprehensive. In their research project, the foreign language learners took the ethnography course in their home universities in the first year, studied abroad and conduct an ethnographic study on the target culture in the second year, and wrote their ethnographic study after returning home in the third year. In this three-year LAE program, students learned and used vocabulary related to their ethnographic projects

and improved their writing skills. In trying to obtain the rapport to enter the field, students learned communicative strategies, used them in discourse, and greatly improved oral proficiency. In addition to acquiring language skills, the learners-as-ethnographers learned vital research skills such as observing, interviewing, analyzing, and interpreting, when encountering otherness firsthand. Furthermore, students learned from their mistakes. They built assumptions based on their observations, tried the assumptions in other contexts, and refined the previous assumptions. Students became aware of other interpretations of the same phenomenon, and therefore, their cognitive flexibility developed. Most importantly, the ethnography project moved the foreign language learners' views outwards to other cultures and then back to their own. Thus, they develop a fresh understanding of the strange phenomena and different attitudes toward the taken-for-granted. In other words, the LAE pedagogic approach has a focus not only on language learning or fact discovery but on the cognitive, meta-cognitive, and affective domains of learning. The learner ethnographers are engaged in the active, creative, and social process of constructing knowledge.

Domestic Settings

Traditional ethnography involves residing in the social community being studied or spending a substantial period of time doing the face-to-face participant observation and interviewing the locals (e.g., Heath, 1983). Following this strict definition, LAE can be conducted only in naturalistic settings. However, as Harklau (2005) points out, it is impossible to “develop absolute pronouncements for what ethnography is or should be in studies of second language learning” (p. 189). Likewise, the LAE approach deploys a diverse range of ever-changing methods. Eisenhart (2001) recommends that

the traditional ethnographic methods, such as participant observation and interviewing, must be expanded. She calls for newer ethnographic methods that evolve in accordance with the changing conceptions of culture in the age of globalization. As she observes, ethnographers who try to describe the contemporary human life of high mobility will have “greater reliance on what can be learned in short, intensive visits, increased use of electronic forms of communication, and greater attention to the analysis of significant events” (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 222). Roberts et al. (2001), urge that the LAE approach be generalized by being applied to learners’ immediate environments such as classrooms, as opposed to residence abroad and long-term field work. Duff and Mayes (2001) maintain that foreign language students can learn and perform basic ethnographic skills by exploring ethnographic material in their home areas. Damen (1987) named this extended ethnographic approach as “pragmatic ethnography” because its procedure is to “serve personal and practical purposes and not to provide scientific data and theory” (p. 63).

The pragmatic ethnography in the non-immersion intercultural learning context aims to generate a descriptive corpus of field notes as a contemporaneous record of unfolded events and experiences (Byram & Feng, 2005; Damen, 1987; Harklau, 2005). Indeed, the fact that the majority of the foreign language learners around the world are still learning their target languages in domestic settings makes employing the LAE approach in such settings more feasible than in study abroad programs. For the foreign language learners who cannot afford long-distance travels or obtain accesses to naturalistic settings, Roberts et al. (2001) suggest two options for conducting LAE. One is to adopt other ethnographic skills beyond participant observation in completing

ethnographic projects, for example, ethnographic interviewing (Spradley, 1979), and the other is to use ethnographic material (e.g., Duff & Mayes, 2001).

Adopting ethnographic methods. Following Eisenhart's (2001) suggestions for the modern ethnographers, foreign language learners may stay in their home areas and use ethnographic interviewing skills to do explorations over a series of cross-cultural encounters with native speakers of their target languages. Robinson-Stuart and Nocon's (1996) study is a significant example. The American university students learning Spanish as a foreign language in California were trained to employ ethnographic interview skills to study the lives of Spanish native speakers in the school community. Results show that most students demonstrated a more positive attitude toward the cultural perspective of the Spanish native speakers, increased interest in learning Spanish, and practiced the life skill of active listening. Su (2008) reported similar findings on Taiwanese EFL learners using ethnographic interview skills to conceptualize the lived experiences of English native speakers in the school community.

Using ethnographic material. Researchers have found that through watching and analyzing how people interact in given sociocultural contexts, foreign language learners would be more likely to understand their target languages and cultures (e.g., Lantoff, 2000). The "ethnographic material" in Duff and Mayes' (2001) research provides foreign language learners with direct visual access to the everyday life of the society they research. Duff and Mayes (2001) called the video material they used "ethnographic material" in the sense that it provides the foreign language learners with a direct visual access to the everyday life of the society under exploration. Following their definition, the ethnographic material can be telematic channels such as video-

conferencing (Roberts et al., 2001), emails (e.g., Dodd, 2001; Woodin, 2001), online forums (e.g., Furstenberg et al., 2001), news report broadcasts (e.g., Genova, 2001), or video clips (e.g., Carel, 2001; Duff & Mayes, 2001; Williams, 2001).

The LAE approach in domestic settings does not require foreign language learners to reside in the community of their researched language and culture, as experienced by the learners-as-ethnographers in the study abroad programs. The domestic learners are ethnographers in the sense that they adopt ethnographic methods to collect, compare, and interpret data and/or use ethnographic materials to explore their target language and culture. Intercultural education through the LAE approach of this kind takes intercultural learning as a discovery and exploration of how others make meaning and explain their worlds (Spradley, 1979). Therefore, the inclusion of the domestic settings expands the applicability of the LAE. LAE can be conducted abroad, as well as in domestic comm. unities, in classrooms, and even in virtual reality.

The liberated learners-as-ethnographers approach. Carel (2001) designed and implemented an interactive computer courseware package called *The Virtual Ethnographer* to raise her students' cross-cultural awareness. The foreign language learners were trained to use ethnographic skills to observe and analyze cultural phenomena, do virtual fieldwork, and reflect on their own culture as well as their previous views of the target culture. Furstenberg et al.'s (2001) *The CULTURA Project* allowed French students learning English and American students learning French to work together in their respective language classrooms. Through electronic media, the *World Wide Web* in particular, the foreign language learners observed, compared, and

analyzed parallel materials from their respective cultures with their language/culture exchange partners.

Focusing on the instructional purposes of LAE ethnographic methods instead of adhering to a strict definition of ethnography makes the LAE approach feasible in a wider range of settings. Learners-as-ethnographers do not need to reside in the researched society. The “field work” can be in various forms. The learners-as-ethnographers are allowed to interact with the people of their target culture through participant observations or face-to-face interviews, through interviews via the telecommunication devices such as the *Skype*, emails, video-conferencing, chat rooms, or through watching video clips texts.

Stretching imagination. Forehand (2007) noted that equating “being” to “experiencing” has limited the feasibility of intercultural education and mitigated the potential of imagination in realizing intercultural learning. For domestic ethnographers, imagination is the springboard to the physically remote world of the target culture. She used the metaphor *wall* to illustrate how the presumption that only by being in the target culture can we understand its people and society blocks our perspectives. One of the ways to enter the world behind the wall is to build the *bridge* and make experiential connections. An alternative to crossing the bridge is stretch the imagination and appreciate the arts. When one stretches his or her imagination in appreciating, he or she is experiencing other cultures without crossing the bridge or entering the world behind the wall. The glimpses through the *window* are not only fixed scenes but sceneries constantly changing as the viewer moves. In this way, one’s vision can go far, and his/her perspectives will broaden, even while staying at home.

According to Forehand (2007), culture can be experienced in one's imagination without physically being in the researched community. There is no such accurate representation of Chinese culture, because cultures are interpreted from one's perspective. In contrast to Forehand's culture- as-a-verb perspective, Chen (2009) viewed culture as a noun and sought "accurate" representations of Chinese culture. She found that Chinese cultural representations in the youth literature published in the U.S. were mixed with other Asian cultures and set exclusively in ancient China. Forehand's (2007) emphasis on imagination over physical being accords to Stern's position that the cross-cultural syllabus should allow foreign language learners to "vicariously experience that reality" (p. 223) even though the target language community is physically remote.

Intercultural Learning in Foreign Language Classrooms

Intercultural Learning in Non-immersion Contexts

The extensive use of information from a wider range of sources and stretching imagination seem critical to the domestic LAE approach. The material for intercultural education is neither pre-scribed nor limited in the long-term field notes through face-to-face interactions with the social members of the researched cultural community, as the traditional ethnography required. Instead, the learner ethnographers in the non-immersion intercultural contexts may search on the Internet and/or interact with their language/culture partners to obtain the needed information. The LAE approach, in taking advantage of wider information sources, encouraging domestic ethnographers' imagination and interpretations of the cultural phenomena, and judging the

interpretations by resonance instead of accuracy all together, may overcome the spatial limitation facing most foreign language learners, expand intercultural education beyond the classroom, and increase the LAE practicality (Corbett, 2003). In turn, wider LAE implementations may lead to more investigations and findings for language educationists to compare the effectiveness and implementations of the LAE approaches in study-abroad programs and in domestic settings. The increasing number and variety of such comparisons should add more information about foreign language education, intercultural education, and even research methodology.

In conclusion, the liberated LAE approach in non-immersion settings overcomes the spatial limitations facing most foreign language learners and expands intercultural learning beyond the classroom (Corbett, 2003). However, how learners make sense of cultures through different information sources, how the domestic ethnographers view the target culture, and to what extent and in what way the transformed LAE approach can facilitate intercultural learning are insufficiently explored. These questions deserve more research attention.

Using Portfolios to Support and Evaluate Intercultural Learning

Michelson (1997) defines portfolios as “collections of extended narrative essays that describe learning experiences ... and provide appropriate documentation” (p. 42). Zubizarreta (2009) emphasizes the reflection element. As a summative and formative assessment, the portfolio has the capability of evaluating both learning process and product and can be used as an assessment as well as an instructional instrument for facilitating students’ self-directed learning. Researchers have confirmed the feasibility of using the portfolio as an instructional tool and integrating it into any pedagogic

approach (e.g., Doel, Sawdon, & Morrison, 2002; Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991; Zubizarreta, 2009). Moreover, because the learning portfolio is not constrained by a limited time-frame, it can facilitate exploratory skill development and knowledge acquisition in a more expansive and thorough manner (Corbett, 2003).

Intercultural learning portfolio. The portfolio seems well-suited to the intercultural learning assignment for this study because both involve formative assessment and summative assessment. As Corbett (2003) suggests, an intercultural learning project for foreign language learners should incorporate a mixture of interpretative and ethnographic skills “[which] initially *supports* learners in their acquisition of interpretative and ethnographic skills and then *evaluates* the degree to which they have acquired them” (pp. 201-202, emphasis added). The interpretative skills refer to the skills needed in the “exploration of the possible meanings of texts,” and the ethnographic skills refer to those needed in the “exploration of the discourse communities that produce and consume the texts” (p. 201). In other words, an intercultural learning portfolio should develop students’ abilities to interpret social phenomena and explore the cultural values behind the phenomena. Byon’s (2007) study is a good example of how the intercultural learning portfolio facilitated the development of intercultural communicative competence. He investigated a case of designing, implementing, and evaluating a semester-long cultural portfolio project in a Korean culture class at an American university. Findings from the analysis of students’ pre- and post-project questionnaires, in addition to classroom presentations, show that the portfolio project enabled students to identify their stereotypes of Korean culture and

develop open attitudes toward Korean culture, raised cross-cultural awareness, and increased their interest in studying the Korean language.

In this study, the portfolio approach is integrated into the LAE approach. The intercultural learning portfolio contains structured ethnographic tasks for facilitating the development of intercultural awareness. It is a creative collection of narrative accounts and produced and gathered evidence documented by learners.

Ethnographic tasks. Based on the five fundamental intercultural learning objectives, Schulz (2007) designed five tasks for students. The tasks are suited to the LAE approach in the sense that each task has subtasks guiding students in searching for, interpreting, analyzing, and comparing information, all of which are key components of ethnography (Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998; Harklau, 2005). Task II, for example, has three subtasks leading American learners of German as a foreign language to explore the impact of situational variables on communicative interactions and behaviors:

Task II.1: Describe and comment on a minimum of three examples of observed differences in English language used by younger and older persons, male or female speakers, east coast, southern, black English, or speakers of other varieties of English and “standard” media English.

Task II.2: Using the collection of texts on the course Web site, analyze how native German speakers address each other and classify the interactions according to indicators, such as formal/polite; informal/formal; child language/adult language; male/female; socially more powerful/socially less powerful; appropriate/inappropriate given cultural norms. Provide relevant data to support your categorization.

Task II.3: Describe and comment on a minimum of three behaviors (e.g., greetings, apologies, compliments, manners, etc.) that illustrate similarities and/or differences in contextual expectations in your home culture and in the target culture. (Schulz, 2007, p. 25)

By completing tasks such as these, students can acquire a better understanding of the artifacts, social practices, and perspectives of their own and target cultures. The

portfolio, composed by the ethnographic tasks of such, is an instructional approach for learners to acquire the interpretative and ethnographic skills. The formative process in evident collection, elaboration, reflection, and revision are significant pedagogic objectives in the intercultural learning portfolio for learners-as-ethnographers.

Using the intercultural portfolio to encourage students to gather evidence from multiple sources is particularly important, considering the fact that students today have rich engagements with media technologies and need to develop critical computer literacy skills. Corbett's (2003) assertion that "finding a useful email discussion group and gathering data [...] is as relevant an ethnographic research technique as, say, interviewing a native speaker" (p. 201) not only supports my argument in the previous section for taking advantage of telecommunication technology to transform the LAE approach, but also underscores the significance of integrating technological sources into non-immersion intercultural learning.

Adding a reflection task in the intercultural learning portfolio. In addition to the five tasks suggested by Schulz (2007), I include a reflective essay as the last task of the intercultural learning portfolio. The reflection task requires students to critically reflect upon their ethnographic inquiry, which is a significant characteristic in both portfolio and LAE approaches. The subtasks support the reflection element of the portfolio approach that Michelson (1997) and Zubizarreta (2009) emphasized. The reflective essay also serves my research purpose of gaining a better understanding of students' learning processes, albeit a self-reported account.

Research of Intercultural Learning

In his seminal book, *The Foundations of Social Research*, Michael Crotty (1998) depicted four hierarchical elements of the research process: epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods. Epistemology sets a frame for discussing knowledge and research while theoretical perspective offers the philosophical stance informing the research methodology, contextualizing its process, and grounding its logic and criteria. Methodology refers to “the strategy, plan of action, [and] process of design,” while methods are “the techniques or procedures used to gather and analyze data related to some research questions or hypothesis” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3).

In order to gain a full understanding of the LAE approach’s effectiveness on facilitating CFL learners’ intercultural learning and their experiences, perceptions, and perspectives, I will adopt ethnographic research methods. In the following section, I will discuss the major epistemologies, their corresponding theoretical perspectives, and the concepts of research rigor and trustworthiness. The methodologies and methods for conducting my research will be illustrated in detail in the third chapter.

Constructivism

The weighted epistemology of my dissertation is constructivism. Schwandt (2007) defines constructivism as “the belief that the mind is active in the construction of knowledge” (p. 38). In this epistemological framework, knowledge is “contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Constructionists/constructivists refuse any standards by which truth can be universally known and hold that there are multiple realities (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

Different people may construct meanings in different ways, even in relation to the same phenomenon. Crotty (1998) notes that the constructivist stance is precisely what we find when we move from one culture to another (p. 9).

Interpretivism. Under constructivism, interpretivism provides a theoretical perspective for examining the meaning-making processes. Interpretivism entails an assumption that “reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality, rather, there are multiple realities, or interpretations, of a single event” (Merriam, 2009, p. 8). Interpretivism is often used as a synonym for qualitative inquiry into social processes (Schwandt, 2007). Qualitative research drawing from interpretivism usually has an aim to “achieve an *understanding* of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 14, emphasis in original).

Rigor/Trustworthiness

Qualitative studies have been criticized for their lack of rigor in collection, construction, and analysis of empirical materials that give rise to the study (Crawshaw, Callen, Eppler, & Tusting, 2000). The lack of rigor is mostly related to researchers’ biases and subjectivity (Hamel, 1993; Shields, 2007). For inquiries on experiences which largely depend on personal narratives as empirical data, Shields (2007) cautioned that the parameters imposed by the form of data collection, such as interview, essay writing, diaries, and questionnaires, should be fully taken into consideration in analyzing and interpreting the data. Researchers should provide their audience with detailed descriptions of data collection and provide examples of data.

Trustworthiness in the context of qualitative research can be seen as the “quality of an investigation (and its findings) that made it noteworthy to audiences” (Schwandt, 2007, p.299), in parallel to validity in the context of experimentalist research (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992). In order to increase the trustworthiness of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for naturalistic inquiry: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. More recently, Merriam (2009) included eight strategies to promote rigor and trustworthiness: triangulation, member checks, adequate engagement in data collection, researcher’s position or reflectivity, peer review/examination, audit trail, rich thick description, and maximum variation. The strategies that I would adopt to raise the rigor of this study will be depicted at the end of the methodologies chapter.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGIES

The legitimacy of integrating intercultural learning in the foreign language curriculum and its research gap motivated me to re-examine the learners-as-ethnographers (LAE) approach. This study aims to investigate how the LAE approach enhances CFL (Chinese as a foreign language) learners' intercultural learning. Research questions include (1) How does the LAE approach facilitate intercultural learning among American college students learning Chinese as a foreign language? and (2) How do the learners perceive their experiences of intercultural learning through the LAE approach?

Culture is loosely defined based on the definitions in the existing literature. The more recent perspective on culture as “unbounded, kaleidoscopic, and dynamic” (Heath & Street, 2008, p. 7) is adopted. On the other hand, culture is viewed as a composite of memory of a social group, covering knowledge, artifacts, perspectives, and practices (Bowers, 1992; Saville-Troike, 1989; Tomalin & Stempleski, 1993). Moreover, the individual's perceptions are emphasized, as culture is “meanings partially shared and manipulated by those who knew them” (Eisenhart, 2001, p. 209).

The ethnographic inquiry is integrated into the intercultural learning in the CFL classroom. The learner-centered, teacher-constructed learners-as-ethnographers (LAE) approach is the pedagogical strategy. Students are encouraged to do the “pragmatic ethnography” (Damen, 1987, p. 63) by developing an intercultural learning portfolio

and completing its embedded ethnographic tasks, which are adapted from Schulz' (2007) proposal. The instructional objectives are to enhance the CFL learners' cross-cultural awareness and understanding.

This chapter explains the research methodologies. In the first section, I describe the context of this research and its setting and participants. In the second section, I explain the research design and the methods I used to collect and analyze data. In the third section, I explain the research procedure, data collection, and data analysis. In the last section, I address the additional methodological issues such as the researcher's role and bias and also list the strategies that I use to increase rigor/trustworthiness of my research.

Research Context

Setting

The university (Hereafter, the University) where the LAE approach was applied and researched is located in a relatively small town in the western United States. The population of the town at the time of this writing was 93,543, with 33% reporting Hispanic ethnicity. Among the non-Hispanic origin, 83.7% was white, and only 2.3% was Asian and 0.2%, African American. The University had nearly 10,000 undergraduate students enrolled, with 73% white, 10% Hispanic American, 3% Asian American, and 2% international, among whom, 61 were from Taiwan and 20 from China.

Student participants' self-reported experiences of learning Chinese prior to taking the Elementary Chinese course at the University illustrated the neglect of Chinese teaching and learning in this western state. (For student participants' foreign

language learning experiences, please see Appendix B). The University did not offer Chinese courses until 2006. In the spring semester in 2010, when this study was conducted, there were 11 Chinese courses offered, seven of which were offered consistently during the school year. Under the promotion of my supervisor, Dr. Johnson, and also in response to the slow but steady increase in students' registration for the Chinese courses, a Chinese minor program was offered in 2009 for undergraduate students. Dr. Johnson and I were the only two instructors. I taught the Elementary Chinese course with 17 students, and she taught all the other Chinese courses. In the spring semester in 2010, Dr. Johnson and I attempted to include intercultural learning into the Chinese language courses. The students taking the second-semester Elementary Chinese course were required to develop an intercultural learning portfolio, which included four ethnographic tasks. (For the course syllabus, please see Appendix C).

Participants

Student participants. As this study aims to investigate intercultural learning in a naturalistic setting, I invited the 17 students who were taking the Elementary Chinese course to participate in this study and gave them the consent forms after my research proposal was accepted by the institutional review board. (For the IRB consent form, see Appendix A). Fifteen of the 17 students consented to participate: nine females and six males, from freshmen to seniors, with ages ranging from 18 to 25. All of the student participants identified their ethnicity as Caucasian, although Megan's mother is Japanese, Laura's mother is Philippine, and Terry's, Solomon. Fourteen students had taken Chinese in the previous semester with either me or Dr. Johnson. The only

exception was the junior male Terry, who went to Taiwan for his religious mission in the previous two years and started learning Chinese there. There were another four students who had studied in the Chinese-speaking countries or communities. Steve lived in China for two years. Sean lived in a Chinese-speaking community in Singapore for almost three years. Grace and Sofia attended one-month programs in China the previous summer. The senior female Megan had the longest international cultural contacts. She was born and grew up in Japan and came to the U.S. for college five years before this study. There were two other students who studied abroad when they were high school students: the sophomore male, Wren, in Spain for one year and the senior female, Jessie, in Japan for three weeks. Appendix B depicts student participants' background information.

Instructors. In this study, I was the instructor researcher, implementing the LAE approach, designing the intercultural learning portfolio, guiding students to do ethnographies, and evaluating students' tasks and LAE effectiveness. I am a middle-aged middle-class female who grew up in Taiwan. There I obtained my Bachelor's degree in English Literature and Linguistics and my Master's degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. I took courses on linguistics, second language acquisition, and educational theories and principles. Before coming to the U.S., I taught English in two middle schools and two high schools in Taiwan for more than ten years. By the time I conducted this study, I had spent more than two years in the U.S. and taught Chinese for more than one year in the university where this research was conducted. I had sufficient experiences of crossing national/cultural borders and was engaged in intercultural learning. These experiences motivated me to conduct this

research project and assisted me in recognizing and understanding issues that were discussed in students' essays. I am fully aware that my background, as well as my ideological stance toward foreign language education and intercultural learning, shaped my research design and interactions with participants. Although biases were inevitable, I made every endeavor to minimize their impact on my research.

Dr. Johnson, the other instructor for the Chinese courses, played a critical role in integrating the LAE approach into the curriculum. She was a first-generation Chinese American and had a Ph.D. in Chinese Literature. She had taught Chinese in another western university for five years when she was a graduate teaching assistant and for three years in the University. In addition to teaching the courses of Chinese language and culture, she directed the Chinese Language and Culture Club on campus. (See Appendix D for further description of the two instructors).

Research Design and Methods

I drew upon the concepts and inquiry tools of ethnography in designing my research and representing its findings. The ethnographic concepts and inquiry methods were employed in designing ethnographic tasks for a class of American undergraduate students to explore cultures outside the CFL classroom. Moreover, my representation of research findings followed the traditions of ethnography and case study. To increase research trustworthiness, I employed triangulation (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1983), described the setting and events in detail (Creswell, 1998; Wolcott, 1990), wrote the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973), and disclosed researcher reflectivity (Eisenhart & Howe, 1992).

Table 1 employs Crotty's (1998) foundational design of social research and illustrates the research design of the present study. I have introduced the epistemologies and theoretical perspectives in the previous chapter.

Table 1
Research Design

Epistemology	Theoretical perspective	Data collection methods	Data analysis method
constructivism	interpretivism	participant observation; intervention (students' ethnographic task); focus group interview	thematic analysis

Intervention

Data collection began when I received IRB approval in late February, 2010. The ethnographic tasks were assigned in early March, and students' task essays were collected from March to early May. Before and during the task period, I arranged supportive activities. The post-project focus group interviews were conducted in late April and early May.

Preparation and supportive activities. To ensure accesses to Chinese speakers, before the learners-as-ethnographers started ethnographic research, I helped them find a language exchange partner from Taiwan or China. I arranged one field trip to a Chinese restaurant and an Asian market and encouraged the students to visit the others in the local communities. During the semester we had two class sessions discussing the cultural images in Chinese-speaking films and online information searches and several other spontaneous talks about cultural differences. I also encouraged students to participate in the Chinese cultural activities on campus, such as Lunar New Year

Celebration and other activities organized by the Chinese Cultural and Language Club including Immersion week, Taiji session, etc.

Ethnographic tasks. Students were required to complete at least four ethnographic tasks out of six. I designed the six tasks with an aim to guide students to achieve the following six intercultural learning objectives:

Task 1: Students demonstrate the ability to recognize the stereotypes about the home and target cultures and evaluate the stereotypes in terms of substantiating evidence.

Task 2: Students demonstrate awareness that large contextual variables such as geographic, historical, economic, social/religious, and political factors can have an impact on cultural artifacts, perspectives, and products, including language use and communication styles.

Task 3: Students demonstrate awareness that situational variables (e.g., context and role expectations and social variables such as age, gender, social class, religion, ethnicity, and place of residence) shape communicative interaction and behavior in important ways.

Task 4: Students demonstrate awareness that each language has culture-conditioned images and culture-specific connotations of some words, phrases, proverbs, idiomatic formulations, gestures, symbols, etc.

Task 5: Students demonstrate awareness of cultural misunderstanding between members of different societies due to their different perspectives of social phenomena and values.

Task 6: Students demonstrate awareness of the potential bias in exploring, describing, and interpreting cultures.

Based on these objectives, I designed six tasks for students' intercultural learning portfolio. Although they are based on Schulz's (2007) design, I made adjustments to serve the CFL students' intercultural learning. The tasks are different from Schulz's in four aspects. First, Chinese replaces German as the target language, and China, Taiwan, or other Chinese-speaking communities as the target cultural community. Second, the task order is changed. The task of recognizing and evaluating

stereotype is moved from the third to the first. All the students were required to complete it, based on intercultural educationists' suggestion (Allen, 2004; Byon, 2007). Third, a reflection task was included as the last task for all students. Lastly, the number of required examples for each subtask was reduced to two or three to allow students to have sufficient time in exploring the target task in one semester. (See Appendix E for the intercultural learning portfolio outline and ethnographic tasks). These adjustments can be exemplified through the comparison between Schulz's (2007) task and the task I designed for the present study. Below is Schulz's (2007) task on cultural stereotypes:

Objective III: Students recognize stereotypes or generalizations about the home and target cultures and evaluate them in terms of the amount of substantiating evidence.

Task III.1: Give three examples of stereotypes many Germans hold about Americans and American society. What German cultural perspectives or what evidence may have given rise to these stereotypes?

Task III.2: Give three examples of stereotypes many Americans hold about Germans or Austrians. What American perspectives or what evidence may have given rise to these stereotypes?

Task III.3: Conduct an informal survey among your friends and relatives to explore stereotypes they hold about German-speaking people. Restate their stereotypical pronouncements in more appropriate language. (p. 25)

The following is my revision of Schulz's task III into Task 1 for the present study:

Task 1: Recognize the stereotypes about the Chinese speakers and U.S. people and societal phenomena and evaluate them in terms of substantiating evidence.

1.1. Give three examples of stereotypes many Chinese or Taiwanese hold about U.S. people and societal phenomena. What evidence may have given rise to these stereotypes? To explore such stereotypes, you may interview your language exchange partner, do an informal survey among the international students from China or Taiwan or other Chinese speakers in your community, or collect data from an internet discussion group. Another alternative source is the films involving the intercultural contacts and conflicts (such as Ang Lee's

Pushing Hands or *The Wedding Banquet*). You can discuss the stereotypes underlying the representations.

1.2. Give three examples of stereotypes many Americans hold about Chinese or Taiwanese people and societal phenomena. What American perspectives may have given rise to these stereotypes? Again, you may conduct an informal survey among your American relatives or friends or in an internet discussion group to explore such stereotypes.

1.3. Evaluate these stereotypes. How do you feel about the stereotypes of your people and your societies? Ask your language exchange partner how he/she feels about the stereotypes of the Chinese/Taiwanese peoples/societies.

The student participants were required to complete four of the six tasks and encouraged to complete the other two tasks that they were not assigned and revise their task essays after reading my feedback. All the student participants were required to do the first and the last tasks. The first task, requiring students to identify and evaluate stereotypes, served as a warm-up activity for beginners of intercultural learning (Byon, 2007). The last task required all the students to reflect upon the potential bias. To allow students sufficient time for completing the tasks in one semester, students were assigned to complete two of the remaining four tasks—either the second or the third (contextual or situational variables to intercultural communication) and either the fourth or the fifth (culture-specific connotations or culture-related causes for misunderstanding). The assigning was basically random but took students' demographic backgrounds and learning experiences into account.

I created assessment criteria and rubrics for evaluating students' ethnographic tasks and intercultural learning portfolios by integrating the three essential ethnographic qualities (epistemological relativity, reflexivity, and critical consciousness) in Roberts et al.'s (2001) LAE project, Ingulsrud et al.'s (2010) assessment model of cross-cultural experience, and Schulz's (2007) design of intercultural learning task. The five

assessment criteria include task completion, data variety, source documentation, organization/representation, and reflexivity. The task completion refers to whether students complete the subtasks of each assigned task, which guide students to explore the native and target cultures and then compare both. The degree of completion also indicates the degrees of recognition and reflection (Ingulsrud et al., 2010). Students were required to use multiple sources and multiple modalities, for example, online resources, written texts, native speakers, etc. for the conclusions they made. They were also required to document these information sources. The reports should demonstrate abilities of epistemological relativity, reflexivity, and critical consciousness (Roberts et al., 2001). The task papers should also be well presented and organized. The rubrics and criteria, along with the grading scheme were clearly stated to students. (See Appendix E for the rubrics).

I collected students' portfolios in the 8th, 11th, 13th, and 15th school weeks, evaluated them by the rubrics, and emailed my comments back to students. Students were encouraged to review the three tasks they had completed and my feedback and make modifications. They were required to write a reflective essay on doing ethnographies by the end of the 15th week.

Interviews

In the 15th week, I arranged two focus groups to interview students about their experiences of completing the ethnographic tasks. I grouped the 15 student participants into two groups. Each group has eight or seven students of females and males, majoring in different fields, and having different experiences of learning foreign languages and studying abroad. As homogeneity among group interviewees would

make participants comfortable to express their opinions (Hennick, 2008; Krueger & Casey, 2009), the first group was composed of five students who had completed all the four ethnographic tasks on time, and the second group were six students who had completed two tasks (Hennick, 2008). (See Appendix B for students' background information and Table 3 in Chapter 4 for the tasks that each student was assigned and completed).

Data Collection and Instruments

I created two digital portfolios for storing data, one on my password-protected laptop and the other in an extensive memory disk. Each participant had a file collection, and each file was named by data type and date. Table 2 is a visual presentation of data types.

Table 2
Data Sources, Collection Timeline, Purposes, and Types

Data sources	Time	Purposes
Intercultural learning portfolios of the ethnographic tasks	8 th , 11 th , 13 th , & 15 th weeks	Elicit information regarding how the LAE approach facilitates students' development of cross-cultural awareness and understanding of culture
focus group interview	15 th week	Elicit information regarding how students perceive intercultural learning through the LAE approach

Students' portfolios. The task essays were analyzed for answering the first research question regarding the effectiveness of the LAE approach to development of cross-cultural awareness, attainment of the intercultural learning objectives, and perceptions of intercultural learning through the LAE.

Interview transcriptions. The primary data for answering the second research question were collected through interviews, for what "cannot [be] directly observe[d]"

[e.g.,] feelings, thoughts, and intentions” (Patton, 2002, p. 340). Merriam (2009) noted that interviewing is the best technique for “conducting intensive case studies of a few selected individuals” (p. 88). Following Krueger and Casey’s (2009) guideline, I developed a set of interview questions, aiming to elicit learners’ experiences and perceptions of developing their intercultural learning portfolios. (See Appendix F for interview questions). The first group interview lasted 75 minutes, and the second, 68 minutes. These two group interviews yielded 32 pages of A4, single-line transcriptions.

Data Analysis

The data from interview transcriptions and students’ ethnographic essays underwent repeated thematic analyses. The theme is defined as “any principle recurrent in a number of domains, tacit or explicit, and serving as a relationship among subsystems of culture meaning” (Spradley, 1980, p. 141). To find themes, students’ task essays and the interview transcriptions underwent the stages of the constant comparison described by Glaser and Strauss (1967). First, I organized the qualitative data into two large categories, corresponding to the two research questions regarding the effectiveness of the LAE approach to facilitating students’ attainment of the learning objectives and learners’ perceptions of their intercultural learning experiences through the LAE approach. Second, I read and reread the data many times, annotating the key words in the margins. These annotations were then used as the basis for coding, with major codes colored for easy comparison across subsets of the data. I read through these codes, looking for patterns within and across data types, and identified key linkages among various pieces of data. The linkages became large categories, incorporating codes and sub-codes, and led to the themes. Lastly, I wrote a brief

summary of each theme to capture the essence of what students had said about it along with quotes, which represented a wide range of students' views about the theme.

Additional Methodological Issues

Researcher's Role and Bias

Crawshaw et al. (2000) urge that researchers must identify their *a priori* experiences and monitor the potential bias in regard to how they may shape data collection, analysis, and interpretation. My dual roles in this research as the instructor and researcher—an active participant observer with more emphasis on observation (Creswell, 1998)—had advantages as well as limitations. Being the instructor, I had daily contact with student participants and sufficient information about their developing language proficiency and cross-cultural awareness. However, my interpretations of students' responses to the data collection instruments might be influenced by my impressions of certain students' behaviors in class and general academic performance. Also, students might feel uncomfortable in sharing their experiences and perspectives on certain issues, such as how much effort they make in intercultural learning.

In addition to the limitations inherent to any research, I was aware of the bias due to institutional factors and my personal background. The power relations between my student participants and me were unequal because of the school setting, education level, age, and even national relations between the U.S. and Taiwan. My demographic and educational backgrounds justify my interpretations of the societal phenomena in Taiwan and evaluations of students' interpretations, but at the same time I might be biased. In order to increase the rigor and trustworthiness of my research, I provided my

audience with a researcher profile in addition to adopting the strategies suggested in the previous studies on research ethics and methodologies.

Strategies to Enhance Rigor/ Trustworthiness

The common criteria for evaluating qualitative research trustworthiness are credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 2007). To achieve the first three criteria, I employed the strategies suggested by LeCompte and Goetz (1982), Lincoln and Guba (1985), and Merriam (2009). I provide (1) my assumptions and position behind my research; (2) my reflections upon the relationships with the community to be studied and my participants; (3) the principles I used for selecting participants and the demographic information of their social and educational backgrounds; (4) detailed descriptions of the context in which data were collected; (5) multiple sources of data and methodologies for triangulation as well as detailed descriptions and explanations about them; (6) an extensive audit trail of the data collection and analysis; and (7) my reflections upon the research process and clarifications of my bias at the outset of the study. In addition, this research project underwent (1) long-term observation (three months for data collection and two years of participant observation in the researched setting); (2) extensive engagement, including seeking competing interpretations (Yin, 2008); and (3) member checks by my advisor and committee members to ensure reasonable results.

To achieve the last criterion, transferability, I sought the maximum variation of the analysis units in order to “allow for a greater range of application of the findings” by audience (Merriam, 2009, p. 229). Moreover, I drew upon ethnographic perspectives and skills and provided the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973) with

“sufficient information on the case[s] studied such that readers could establish the degree of similarity between the case[s] studied and the case to which findings might be transferred” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 299).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I described the methodologies I used in designing and conducting this empirical study. The dominant epistemology of constructivism guided the theoretical perspective of interpretivism. The methodology of ethnography along with various methods of collecting and analyzing will lead to a thorough investigation and a detailed illustration of intercultural learning in a foreign language classroom, the LAE approach and its impact on CFL learners’ intercultural learning, and American students’ perspectives on intercultural learning through the LAE.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS FROM ANALYSES OF STUDENTS' TASK ESSAYS

Chapters four and five report the results of analyses of students' task essays and answer the research questions regarding (1) how the learners-as-ethnographers (LAE) approach facilitated intercultural learning among the American college students learning Chinese as a foreign language, and (2) how the learners perceived their experiences of intercultural learning through the LAE approach. The primary data are the essays the student participants wrote for the six ethnographic tasks. I combine the deductive and inductive approaches described by Hennick (2008) to identify the themes from the topic areas—reflected in the pre-decided task objectives and interview questions—as well as the issues raised by participants. The following sections are structured by the order of the ethnographic tasks' objectives. Under each of the objectives, the issues repeated in the students' essays are discussed.

The student participants were required to complete four of the six tasks. Participants were encouraged to complete the other two tasks that they were not assigned and revise their task essays after reading the instructor feedback from me. In total, I collected 56 task essays from 15 students and two transcriptions of interviews with 11 students. Table 3 reports the sources. All the participants' names in this study are pseudonyms I created.

Table 3
Data Sources

Name	Task 1	Task 2	Task 3	Task 4	Task 5	Task 6	Interview
Megan	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	1
Sofia	✓	-	✓✓		✓	✓	1
Grace	✓✓	-	✓✓	-	✓	✓	2
Helen	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	1
Laura	✓	-	✓	-	✓	x	2
Mia	✓	✓	-	x	-	x	2
Katie	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	X
Lily	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	X
Jessie	✓	-	x	-	✓	✓	X
Wren	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	1
Steve	✓	✓	-✓	✓	-	✓	2
Leo	✓	✓	-	x	-	x	X
Brian	✓	-	✓	-	✓	✓	2
Terry	✓	✓	-	✓	-	✓	1
Sean	✓	-	✓	-	X	x	2
<i>N</i>	15	8	7	6	6	11	11

Note: One check (✓) indicates the task completed and handed in, and two checks (✓✓), the revised tasks. Crosses (x) indicate that the assigned tasks were not completed or absence from the interviews. Dashes (-) indicate the unassigned tasks. The numbers in the interview column refer to the focus group that the participant attended. The number of the completed tasks included the revised ones.

Nine of the 15 students handed in four essays for all the tasks that they were assigned. The fact that not all students handed in all the assigned tasks might affect the analyses; however, the incompleteness reflects the feature of naturalistic inquiry and also the challenges facing the classroom practitioners who attempt to apply the LAE approach in foreign language classrooms.

In this chapter, I report the findings from the analyses of students' task essays and answer the first research question concerning the LAE facilitative effectiveness on the CFL learners' intercultural learning in terms of enhancing the intercultural communicative competence. The facilitative effectiveness of the LAE approach to enhancing the ICC is indicated by whether students could recognize the six topics and how they evaluated them: (1) cultural stereotypes, (2) the impact of contextual factors on cultural artifacts, practices, or perspectives, (3) the impact of situational factors on

communications, (4) culture-specific connotations, (5) cross-cultural misunderstanding, and (6) potential bias in intercultural exploration.

In addition to the instructional purpose of grading students' essays and giving feedback, I read the task essays at least twice for the research purpose to find the achievement of the learning objectives and students' perceptions and experiences of intercultural learning. Three aspects of intercultural learning emerged in the analyses of students' essays: (1) American students' perceptions of Chinese culture and perspectives on culture; (2) the students' use and evaluation of the information sources for intercultural learning; and (3) influence of the LAE approach, the ethnographic task requirements in particular, on students' intercultural exploration. I discuss these themes along with the reports on the analyses of students' intercultural learning achievement of each of the six task objectives. The findings contribute to our understanding of intercultural learning and offer pedagogical suggestions for applying the LAE approach in the foreign language classrooms.

Learning Objective 1: Recognize and Evaluate Cultural Stereotypes

Task 1 contains three subtasks which require students to recognize stereotypes of Chinese/Taiwanese and U.S. social groups and/or their cultural practices and evaluate the stereotypes. (See Appendix E for the task requirements). All 15 student participants completed Task 1. Analyses of students' task essays show that the students were able to recognize the stereotypes of both American and Chinese/Taiwanese cultures in diverse contexts such as lifestyles, beliefs, food, appearance, etc. However, not all of the students conducted sufficient investigation or developed in-depth evaluation. Whereas the students who did not have the in-situ experience were more

likely to search for information from multiple sources such as the Internet and interviews with the Chinese speakers, those who had the experience of living in a Chinese-speaking community tended to rely on their in-situ experiences for further investigation. The Chinese cultural representations in some of the essays were limited to China or mixed with other Asian countries. Conversely, some students demonstrated a meta-awareness of the problematic Chinese cultural representations. These findings are related to the two themes regarding students' use of and comments on the information sources and perceived Chinese culture.

Information sources. The past experience of living or traveling in China was a convenient and, unexpectedly, the only information source for some of the students who had such an experience. Below is an excerpt from Sean's essay on Chinese people's stereotypes of American food and appearance. He drew exclusively upon his experience of living in a Chinese community in Singapore for almost three years where he attended a high school with Chinese people:

Chinese people think that Americans like to eat a lot of hamburgers. Chinese hold the stereotype that Americans are bigger and fatter. That Americans are loud and obnoxious. I have gotten all of these stereotypes from the time when I was living in Singapore and first handedly experience the culture differences and the stereotypes that both cultures have for each other.³ (Sean, task essay 1)

Steve also drew upon the past in-situ experience. During the two-year period of living in China and interacting with his Chinese housekeepers' families, Steve "witnessed," in his words, how Chinese people saw Americans as "highly developed, plentiful, wealthy, purchasing items and goods in order to show off that wealth." Grace's report that Americans were perceived as "rich and acting like movie stars"

³ I quoted students' essays without revision, unless their writing was incomprehensible. In those cases, my revision would be put in brackets.

came from the tour guide on her one-month trip in China. None of these three students interviewed their language exchange partners or other Chinese speakers or collected data from any other information sources as the task instruction suggested.

In contrast, the students who had not been to a Chinese-speaking community seemed to be more cautious with their findings and apt to triangulate their information. The main information sources were short articles from the Internet, products appearing in life, and observations of Chinese speakers. Mia's language exchange partner from Taiwan told her that Taiwanese people had a stereotype that American people were good at dressing themselves up. Mia explained this stereotype with her observation of the abundant "commercials, ads, pills for everything we [Americans] want to fix." She further quoted the online article *Confronting Stereotypes of Culture: American Culture* to support her interpretations and concluded that Americans were "obsessed with their appearance."

Perhaps it is the reflexivity promoted by intercultural educationists (e.g., Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2001; Byram & Zarate, 1994) and the reflexivity that ethnography emphasizes (Grbich, 2004) that make the LAE effective even without bringing learners to the in-situ. Laura, who had never been to a Chinese-speaking community, asked three Chinese speakers from Taiwan whether they had pre-assumed American images and whether such stereotypes changed after they came to the U.S. She concluded:

Stereotypes for Americans as far as I can tell from asking other people is that we are the white picket fence stereotype. Healthy, rich, happy, running around and getting things done. As nice as this seems, like other stereotypes, it can't be true. (Laura, task essay 1)

In talking with people from other countries about American images and examining the stereotypes, Laura recovered the image of her social community through

others' views. She had a better understanding of cultural stereotypes, even though she had no experience of leaving the U.S.

American students' stereotypes of Chinese people. Terry related rice to Chinese people because of the frequent sightings of imported rice in supermarkets and pictures of Chinese people working in rice fields and ignored the fact that rice may be imported from Asian countries other than China and the rice farmers can be Japanese, Vietnamese, or people from any other community. Brian's statement, "All Asians are smart, studious, hard working," along with Terry's association of rice to Chinese people, reflects the confusion about Chinese culture and the mixture of Asian countries in the youth literature published in the U.S. to learn about Chinese culture, as Chen (2009) pointed out:

Researchers invariably found erroneous representations of Chinese culture in books for young people. A frequent mistake is the confusion of Chinese culture with cultures from other areas.... These East Asian cultures, being geographically proximate and historically related, seem to be too much trouble for American authors, illustrators, and editors to tell apart. (p. 2)

Not all of the student participants had such confusion. Laura, Megan, and Mia identified the overgeneralization of the so-called Asian culture. For the subtask 1.2 regarding Americans' stereotype of Chinese and Taiwanese people and social phenomena, Laura wrote:

When I asked my American born and raised friends about what they think about when they think of Chinese or Taiwanese people, and for the most part they were huge generalizations about Asians. It seems like most people just lump all Asian countries together. (Laura, task essay 1)

In addition to the awareness of the confusion, Laura pointed out the tendency of focusing on Northern Asian countries while neglecting smaller Asian countries:

I went and asked about specific countries and couldn't come up with much. When I asked about China, Korea, and Japan, I got more than anything else. There is just more influence or knowledge about them. However when I asked about Taiwan, Vietnam, or any other countries, no one really said anything, except to mention the Vietnamese War. Rice paddies and farming was the only thing other than that. (Laura, task essay 1)

The Japanese American, Megan, also demonstrated the meta-awareness of the overgeneralization. After reporting that "Chinese people are good at math," Megan added the note, "Those who made this statement also didn't really have a great distinction between all other Asian cultures." Leo further traced the mistake:

Not only Chinese but all Asians are good at mathematics. This stereotype may come from the combination of the stereotypes that the influx of Japanese engineers that were assimilated into the U.S. during the 90s as well as the stereotype that all Asian (Eastern) countries are similar. (Leo, task essay 1)

The awareness of the overgeneralization demonstrated by Laura, Megan, and Leo in their essays is the goal of the de-stereotype approach for the beginning intercultural explorers (e.g., Abrams, 2002; Allen, 2004; Byon, 2007; Wright, 2000).

Furthermore, some students were able to distinguish various Chinese-speaking communities beyond national boundaries. Katie noticed Chinese immigrants in the U.S. were commonly perceived as having "no place in American culture" and being "permanent aliens" because they were assumed to be "more loyal to China than to the United States." It is interesting that Laura, Megan, Leo, and Katie, who were aware of the overgeneralization of Asian countries and noted the variety of Chinese-speaking communities, did not have the experience of living there. Such awareness was missed in the essays by Steve or Grace, who had been in China.

The awareness of various Chinese-speaking communities might be more related to the accessibility to speakers from different Chinese-speaking communities than to the

experience of being there. Laura quoted her language exchange partners' note that Americans "know very little about Taiwan." Sofia, who had been in China for one month and was regularly interacting with her language exchange partner from Taiwan during the research project, demonstrated the awareness of the difference between Taiwan and China in her note that "Chinese and Taiwanese are really intelligent and good at math."

Evaluation of stereotypes. Wren was the only student who noted the linkage of Chinese culture to ancient China, the other problematic representations of Chinese culture Chen (2009) pointed out. To Wren, culture is an ongoing construct, as indicated in the excerpt of his essay:

Another stereotype is that anything Chinese is "ancient" or "mysterious," and that Chinese culture is basically the same as it has been for a thousand years. The stereotype of the mysterious Chinese has its roots in Orientalism and the Western fascination with Asia in the 1800's.... Many aspects of East Asian and Chinese culture are still perceived as cryptic and strange.... While Chinese culture is one of the oldest continuously existing cultures in the world, this stereotype overlooks the fact that China is still a modern and dynamic culture, one that is rapidly developing and becoming more open to Western companies. (Wren, task essay 1)

Student participants were clear about the influence of the mass media on stereotype formation, dissemination, and influence. Wren attributed the Chinese stereotype of Americans as "intensely political" to the "global media about U.S. elections." Helen reported the stereotype that Americans "do not value family" and attributed it to "American TV shows and movies." She commented that "in reality this is most often not the case." The influence of media was critical to the domestic ethnographers, as Laura pointed out:

The only way we can get information about one another is from the television, or other types of media. Not everyone can travel to the other country so it

makes it harder to avoid the stereotypes. Stereotypes are based on the information you are given, and unless you're interested, not many people are going to get more information on a subject in order to avoid a stereotype. (Laura, task essay 1)

To Laura, traveling to the country of the target culture was the best way to avoid stereotypes. She held that triangulating the information from the media with other sources through more investigation can avoid stereotypes but requires strong motivation.

Not all of the stereotypes were rejected. Students tried to justify some of the identified stereotypes. Terry took his Taiwanese friends' stereotypes that Americans "have tall noses" as "reasonable," considering that "most of the Taiwanese people had rather flat noses." Wren also offered intriguing explanations for the Chinese speakers' stereotypes of Americans. He argued that the stereotype that Americans are "wealthy and live in luxury" resulted from the frequent impression of "the outgoing consumer goods [to the U.S.] and incoming media goods [from the U.S.]." Wren continued, "Americans perceived China as a threat because the possibility of a 'Chinese Century' seems real enough and worrisome enough for some people to make it a media issue." After showing his understanding of such a fear, Wren elevated his discussions on cultural stereotypes to the paradigm of international relationships and historical discourse. He criticized U.S. diplomacy:

This stereotype was particularly harmful, because if enough people believe that there is a threat to their safety, it increases the chance of rash and unneeded action—and this has been demonstrated by the American populace many times during the Cold War, and beyond with the current occupation of Iraq. (Wren, task essay 1)

In contrast to the negative perspectives on the cultural stereotypes that most students held, Laura's conclusion demonstrates a relatively positive attitude. To her, the

cultural stereotypes or overgeneralizations, ridiculous as they are, can be convenient and relaxing topics for pragmatic purposes:

When I mentioned China more people discussed social aspects like communism, and the one child policy. There were also many comedic stereotypes that were mentioned. For example, everyone plays the piano, knows kung-fu, is loud, has a lot of children, works in a nail salon, does laundry, and is great at math usually. I know these seem ridiculous, and they really are, but I think there is a difference between how humor is handled in both places. I can't say much about China or Taiwan, but in America there are more racial jokes and humor. There are so many different ones here it is used as a relaxer, it tends to make situations easier and easier to deal with oddly. (Laura, task essay 1)

Overall, students were able to recognize and evaluate the stereotypes that Chinese-speakers and Americans hold for each other. The students who did not have the in-situ experience seemed more cautious of the risk of strengthening the stereotypes and made more efforts to avoid it by drawing upon information from multiple sources. They were also aware of the limitation of intercultural learning in the domestic contexts.

Learning Objective 2: Recognize and Evaluate Contextual Impacts on Cultural Artifacts, Perspectives, and Practices

Task 2 contains three subtasks requiring students to demonstrate the awareness that large contextual variables such as geographic, historical, economic, and political factors can have an impact on cultural artifacts, perspectives, and practices, including language use and communication styles. Eight students were assigned for Task 2. Analyses of their essays show that the students were able to conjecture cultural phenomena in contexts and associate the phenomena with cultural values. Most students compared cultural contexts in the U.S. with those in China; only Terry paid attention to Taiwan. Only Wren and Megan centered their discussion on language use. The little attention to language use may be related to students' insufficient Chinese

language proficiency, which points to a direction for improving the intercultural learning task design.

Impact of contextual variables. The students were able to recognize and evaluate the impact of contextual variables on cultural artifacts, perspectives, and practices. For instance, Lily wrote about how the differences of population density and government control between the U.S. and China yield different meanings of *house*. She found:

The majority of people in Chinese cities lived in apartment buildings.... Even when there are people who live in houses it is nothing like what Americans think of. For instance people whose families own farms have their own houses. However they are ... usually only one or two rooms for people to sleep in and a communal room for cooking, eating, and spending time as a family.... Some people who are very wealthy might own land in the mountains and build houses there, but land ownership is so tightly controlled by the government that this is extremely rare. (Lily, task essay 2)

This excerpt demonstrated Lily's interpretative skill in exploring the possible meanings of *house* as well as ethnographic skill in exploring the discourse that produces the texts (Corbett, 2003), namely, what a house means to Chinese people who are greatly influenced by government control and population density.

Mia's comparison of the most popular religions and their cultural meanings in China and the U.S. also shows the interpretative skill in exploring the semiotic meanings and ethnographic skill in exploring their religious meanings. She found that the statue of Buddha represents "many good fortunes such as health, wealth, healing, and happiness" to Chinese people because of the "Chinese beliefs in superstitions and spiritual connections with their surroundings." In the U.S., "the cross is very much a symbol of religion and faith," and most Americans would "keep crosses in their homes

to ward off evil and create a sense of protection.” Mia concluded that “these symbols of religion represent a desire for goodness within one’s home in both countries.”

Despite these positive results, few students discussed the impact of the contextual factors on language use, except for Megan and Wren. Megan was interested in different social expectations of parents’ responsibility, marriage arrangement, and gender roles in the U.S. and China. She asserted, “This structured view of family can have a great impact on language use since it sets laws and order in a family.” She hypothesized that “there may be more words that show or imply respect among elders” in Chinese-speaking communities. The example she used to support her hypothesis illustrated her knowledge of Chinese:

The density in family members can attribute to the difference in vocabulary compared to English. In English there are less specific words that indicate where a family member belongs, for example the use of 表姐 specifies on which side of the family this female cousin lie, whereas in English we would simple state that “she is my cousin from my mother’s side. (Megan, task essay 2)

Wren reviewed the cross-cultural contacts between the U.S. and China in the 1930s, focusing on the different reactions to the Treaty of Versailles and influences to the two countries. He described the intellectual movement in China:

The May Fourth Movement is sometimes considered to be synonymous with the New Culture Movement.... The New Culture Movement espoused many radical and anti-Confucian viewpoints including the adoption of democratic values, language reform, women’s liberation, and a culture of science-based orientation to the future. (Wren, task essay 2)

Both Wren’s and Megan’s Chinese language proficiencies were among the highest in the Elementary Chinese class, based on their exam results and class performance. But even these two high achievers did not sufficiently demonstrate the ability to evaluate the contextual influence on language use. Megan’s argument was

more related to the situational variables for Task 3 (regarding role expectations and social variables such as age, gender, social class, etc.) than the larger contextual factors for Task 2. Wren mentioned the language reform but did not give examples of its influence on language use. One of the possible explanations for the few connections between the contextual factors and language use is that the language-context connection requires higher language proficiency than the level that the Elementary Chinese course has achieved.

Information sources. Neither Megan nor Wren had visited any Chinese-speaking communities. To search for information, Wren depended on the Internet. Megan interviewed her roommate, who was born in Taiwan but left for the U.S. with her family when she graduated from the elementary school. In contrast, Steve and Terry had the two-year in-situ experience. Steve went to an international school in China, and Terry went to Taiwan for his religious mission. Terry related Task 2 to his religious background and experiences and addressed religion as the contextual factor shaping language use and communication style. Terry related the lifestyle of the Buddhists in Taiwan to Buddhism perceived by him. He wrote:

I think the religions affect the people of each country dramatically. In Taiwan, everyone is busy and they are always doing things, usually related to getting education or money. I know Buddha is an example of wealthy, well fed man/god. Most of what Taiwanese people want is health, wealth, and money. (Terry, task essay 2)

Like Terry, Steve also drew upon his experiences of living in China, but his essay related the contextual factor, such as population density and average income to lifestyle, and demonstrated higher level of intercultural competence than Terry's. Steve vividly compared the different degrees of population density in the U.S. and China:

China has just under five times the number of people living in one square mile of each other as the United States. Imagine living around five times the number of people you live by at this moment in time. (Steve, task essay 2)

After comparing the living contexts, Steve contrasted the distance from others in the U.S. and the tight bond among people in China to illustrate how the population density degrees influences social lives and relationships by drawing upon what he saw and experienced when he lived in China:

I have found it quite possible to go through an entire day without talking or interacting with virtually anyone [in the U.S.]... [but] Chinese people are incredibly social with almost anyone they meet. While driving around during the day, there are always an abundant number of people playing cards together on the side of the road. This shows the tightly knit bond that the Chinese have for one another and it comes from years of being tightly packed in with everyone else. If you're going to be surrounded by thousands of people every day of your life, it may pay off to start becoming friends with all of them. Not to digress but the social side of China was probably one of my favorite things about the place while living there. Everyone is so friendly to meet one another and hold conversations with everyone they meet. (Steve, task essay 2-1)

The Chinese people in Steve's experience and memory are friendly and enjoy social life. The life in China described by Steve is easy and slow paced. After waking up from his memory of the good old days in China, Steve commented on what he felt about life in the States, using a strong word *miserable*:

In the United States, it is almost nothing like that. People move about their miserable lives and try not to interact with anyone while doing it. (Steve, task essay 2-2)

Analyses of Steve and Terry's essays also reveal that cultural studies may mean nothing unless the investigation is through the contrasts between two social communities: the one with which learners are familiar and the other which is new to the learners. The experiences of visiting the unfamiliar society, paradoxically, lead learners to look at the familiar social phenomena in a new way. The findings support the

efficiency of Schulz's (2007) design of intercultural learning instead of limiting the learners' focus on the social community of the target language.

Perceived Chinese culture. Few students discussed Chinese-speaking communities other than China, despite the clear statement in the task instruction, "Compare the United States and China/Taiwan." Terry, the only student who centered his discussion on Taiwan, was also the only student that had been to Taiwan. This finding echoes the issue in my earlier discussion on Task 1, namely, the influence of students' in-situ experience on intercultural learning and perceived Chinese culture. Students tended to write their essays from experiences. Terry used his in-situ observation as the only information source, similar to what Steve and Grace did for their Task 1.

The neglect of Taiwan may result from the erroneous presumption that the social phenomena in China are sufficient for representing Chinese culture due to the lack of geographical or historical knowledge. The websites on the Internet may provide the students who had not been to Taiwan or other Chinese-speaking communities with rich information, although it may have the wrong assumption about Chinese culture and fail to include the variety of Chinese-speaking communities (Chen, 2009). The finding implies that the LAE approach for domestic ethnographers needs better preparation of students in critical Internet use of appropriate websites.

Learning Objective 3: Recognize and Evaluate Situational Impact on Communication

Task 3 contains four subtasks and requires students to demonstrate awareness that situational variables (e.g., context and role expectations and social variables such as age, gender, social class, religion, ethnicity, and place of residence) shape

communicative interaction and behaviors significantly. Seven students were assigned for Task 3. Their essays show that they were able to recognize the situational variables to language use and communication and offered vivid examples for the linguistic phenomena. Like the students for Task 2, the students for Task 3 limited Chinese cultural representations to the cultural or linguistic phenomena in China. Moreover, the students were more likely to report their old knowledge than do further investigation. It seems that the quality of the information sources, whether from the in-situ experience or from the language exchange partner, plays a key role in students' interpretations of the cultural phenomena. The low engagement in the task may be related to its difficulty level or students' insufficient language skills.

Impact of situational variables. Analyses of the students' essays show that the students were able to recognize the situational variables to language use and communication based on their old knowledge rather than further investigation. The situational factors that students discussed were limited to region, age, or gender; the communicative behaviors were limited to accents, vocabulary, formality, or politeness. Jessie reported, "Suburban youth often mimic and adopt some of the inner-city youths' slang into their own daily language use as a means to try and alienate themselves and rebel against their parents and guardians." Five of the seven students (Jessie, Brian, Grace, Katie, and Laura) noted the age and regional factors to language use. The similar observations and interpretations in the students' essays imply that these college students might have shared these sociolinguistic knowledge and that they might have drawn upon their old knowledge rather than making investigation to complete the task.

Task engagement. The task difficulty level may be related to the task engagement. The difficulty level beyond students' current proficiency might keep students from demonstrating the expected intercultural learning objectives, whereas the tasks lacking challenge might discourage students from doing investigation. Here, the difficulty level is related to students' knowledge of linguistic and cultural phenomena and exploratory skills. On one hand, the situational factors such as age, gender, and region and the linguistic behaviors in the U.S., such as accents and formality might be learned from other courses and were so familiar to the college students that they did not feel the need for investigation. On the other hand, the CFL learners might lack the knowledge of the situations and linguistic behaviors in the Chinese-speaking communities. This asymmetry in the linguistic knowledge and understanding of cultural phenomena may also explain the similar analysis results of the Task 2 essays. The larger contextual factors and the influenced artifacts/perspectives/practices that Task 2 required the students to explore might be challenging enough to motivate students to research for answers, while their insufficient foreign language skills impeded them to offer specific language examples. Furthermore, the factors to the engagement of the LAE may include not only students' motivation, as Laura pointed out in her Task essay 1, or students' experience of visiting the Chinese-speaking communities, as I have discussed for Task 2, but also the task difficulty, which may be reduced by explicit task instructions. For instance, the explicit instructions of exploratory skills in Task 1.1 might contribute to students' elaborative investigation, and consequently, lead to various original findings. (See Appendix E for the task instructions).

Quality of information. Unlike the other students who focused their discussions of the regional factor on the Chinese languages used in China or those who limited Chinese culture to cultural representations in China, Sofia acknowledged the difference in the Chinese languages used in China and Taiwan and also the different linguistic varieties used in different regions in Taiwan:

Mandarin is different across Taiwan and China. According to Sophie, my language exchange partner, there are differences in the accents, word usage and colloquialisms. For example, Chinese will curl their tongues as they speak, more than Taiwan speakers do. Some of the differences in word usage include using 学习 in China and 念书 in Taiwan to mean study. Or using 土豆 in China and 马铃薯 in Taiwan to mean potato. Sophie also told me that there are many different languages besides Mandarin used in both Taiwan and China. In the rural areas, people tend to use more of the regional language than Mandarin. In the large cities such as Taipei, people tend to speak more Mandarin. (Sofia, task essay 3)

Without visiting Taiwan, Sofia obtained the information of the linguistic phenomena in Taiwan and China through her language exchange partner, who came from Taiwan and had studied in the U.S. for a master degree for two years. The differences in accent, word usage and colloquialism between the two Chinese languages used in Taiwan and China has been increasingly discussed in Taiwan in the recent decade since the contacts with Chinese people across the Straits increased. Language knowledge has become a common topic to the educated Taiwanese people.

In addition to the information from her language exchange partner from Taiwan, Sofia drew upon her experience of traveling in China and compared the language behaviors of Chinese people and Americans:

From when I was in China, it seems like the students in the urban areas are not as respectful of their elders as I was expecting.... Most Americans will apologize even if it is not their fault and they know it is not their fault. However, from working with my exchange partner as well as my time in China, I learned that many Chinese people are not quick to apologize. In fact, we were told to be

careful to apologize if we were involved in an accident because we would then be held responsible for the accident even if it was not our fault. (Sofia, task essay 3)

Unlike her accurate accounts of the language phenomena in Taiwan, the excerpt about apologetic behavior showed stereotypical overgeneralizations in many aspects. In making a strong contrast between Americans and Chinese speakers, Sofia lumped the two groups together and concluded that her group (Americans) apologize more and appear more respectful and responsible than others (Chinese speakers). She categorized her language exchange partner from Taiwan in the same group with the Chinese people she met in China, although previously she had displayed in her task essay 1 and the preceding part of her task essay 3 the knowledge that the linguistic behaviors in the two countries were different. Pragmatic as her conclusion appears, it seems travelers' street wisdom rather than an intercultural understanding developed through long-term interactions and relationships with the locals. In the end-of-semester focus group, Sofia told me that her religious group organized a pre-trip seminar to equip the members with some Chinese cultural facts and basic vocabulary for the one-month trip in China. Her statement, "We were told to be careful to apologize," reveals that hearsay without further investigation may lead to stereotypes, which may be strengthened by the "fact-based" cultural instruction or short-term stay without enough interactions with the locals.

It is also worthy to note that Sofia's knowledge of the language phenomena in Taiwan was based on discussions with her language exchange partner, whereas the potentially harmful stereotype of Chinese people was created in the "factual" instruction and strengthened by her experience of traveling in China. The different

degrees of knowledge, attitude, and critical awareness shown in her discussions on the language phenomena in Taiwan and China show that the LAE approach via language exchange partnership can expand the learning space for foreign language learners and their intercultural communicative competence (ICC, refer to Byram et al., 2001; for discussion see Chapter 2). The key factor can be the accessibility to other ethnographers; for example, Sofia's language exchange partner, who came to the U.S. not only for academic study, but also for improving English and learning American culture, was a learner ethnographer herself, judged from her involvement in the language exchange activities with Sofia and Sofia's descriptions about her. In contrast, the short-term experience as a tourist may form or strengthen stereotypes.

Learning Objective 4: Recognize and Evaluate Culture-specific Connotations

Tasks 4.1 and 4.2 required students to demonstrate awareness of the culture-specific connotations in words, phrases, proverbs, idiomatic formulations, gestures, symbols, etc. in both Chinese and English languages. Of eight students assigned to do Task 4, six handed in their essays. Analyses of their essays show that all the students were able to offer semiotic examples of connotation, but not all of the examples were explained beyond the literal meanings to connecting to the cultural meanings. It seems that the experiences of living in the target language community, extensive imagination of the language-culture connections, and critical thinking ability contributed to students' understanding of the culture-specific connotations.

Culture-specific connotations. More cultural interpretations can be found in Wren's and Steve's essays than other students'. They demonstrated awareness of the

situational and historical changes of language use and its connections with cultural practices. For the English example of using *dog* to call someone, Wren wrote:

In much of classical English literature, to call someone a *dog* is a grave insult. Dogs were associated with the lower impulses, rowdy and gang-like behavior, and ravenous thievery. In today's world, however, *dog* is a term of endearment, as in *What's up, dog?* The current cultural connotations about dogs are that they are loyal companions and good friends. I have personally witnessed the confusion of foreign students upon being called a dog, which usually results in their own interpretation based on their personal opinion of dogs. (Wren, task essay 4)

The accounts of what people say and explanations why they say so show that Wren was aware of the functions of language in human relationships and their changes with time. Wren displayed the interpretative skill of exploring the semiotic meaning and ethnographic skill of exploring the discourse which generates the meanings (Corbett, 2003). Moreover, the last sentence which hypothesized how non-English speakers would interpret the colloquial use indicates his awareness of the relationship between cultural values and language use. The same skills of exploring the semiotic meaning in discourses can also be found in Steve's discussions on the changing uses of *gay*, *sick*, *dirty*, and *nigga* in different historical contexts and interpersonal situations. He showed knowledge and understanding of how the cultural meanings of terms are formed and changed from negative to positive (or the other way round), to whom, when, and for what purposes they are used.

Wren and Steve also offered Chinese examples and displayed the interpretative and ethnographic skills in exploring the semiotic meaning in discourses. Despite being the beginner foreign language learner without having visited any Chinese-speaking community, Wren demonstrated impressive knowledge of the language and cultural practices. For his first Chinese connotation example, he wrote:

In comparison to English, Chinese has a practically unlimited potential for puns. 蝠, “bat,” and 福, “good fortune” are homophones, and so the bat is a symbol of good luck. In English, bats are most associated with night (danger, evil), and inspire the fictional characters of Dracula (dangerous and evil) and Batman (dangerous and not evil)—neither of whom signifies a particularly lucky encounter. This kind of symbolism, since it is so rooted in understanding the Chinese language, is bound to cause confusion whenever a foreign student encounters idiomatic expressions.... (Wren, task essay 4)

Wren demonstrated impressive knowledge of the large number of homophones and puns in Chinese which are often used as a resource for wordplay or reference for cultural practices. The Chinese cultural representations include wordplay with homophones, creating symbols of good luck, and giving good luck token as gifts. Likewise, Steve noticed the Chinese wordplay with homophones (*zhong* for *clock* or *ending* and *si* for *four* or *death*) and connected them to the taboos. He gave detailed and intriguing descriptions:

Chinese people have different items and phrases that hold negative connotation in China. Some are not exactly phrases, but certain “things” are considered taboo and not good ideas to do. An example of this is the presentation of a clock as a gift for someone. In Chinese the word *zhong* means *death* but at the same time means *time*. So to present someone with a clock could be taken to mean that you are wishing death on the person to whom the clock is being given.... Another taboo of China is the number four. Where I lived, my friend lived in a house with a number that should have ended with four but instead the developers chose to make his house 3A and the person living next to him was 3B. Once passed those two, the numbering returned to a regular numbering system. This is because the word [for *four*, pronounced as] *si* is almost homophonous to the other word *si* which means *death*. This is why it is very common to see the number four omitted from many Chinese items. (Steve, task essay 4)

The Chinese cultural representations Steve observed include the common social practice of avoiding bad omens by replacing them with the homophones. Note that the Chinese cultural representations in Steve’s and Wren’s essays were not set in the ancient China or mixed with other Asian cultures Chen (2009) criticized. They are still

commonly followed in Taiwan and, to my knowledge, China and communities of Chinese immigrants. Also note that none of the homophones or cultural practices had been mentioned in the Elementary Chinese class. Most importantly, this essay excerpt shows that his illustrative examples derived from his in-situ experiences interacting with the local people.

In-situ experiences. Comparison results of the language examples and their connections to cultural practices in Steve's, Wren's, Helen's, and Terry's essays show that the in-situ experience may have prepared the learners with the necessary knowledge of language and cultural practices, but intercultural learning requires more than knowledge. To make use of the two knowledge repertoires and connect them appropriately, learners need cultural imagination and critical thinking. The crucial difference distinguishing Steve's task essay 4 from Wren's or any other students' was the larger number of Chinese examples he offered. In addition to the two language-related examples quoted above, Steve offered a local slang example (*er bai wu* for *two hundred and fifty* or *idiots*) and two non-verbal-language examples concerning the table manners:

Another bad omen in China is to stab ones chopsticks straight into their food, perpendicular to the table. This is terrible table manners and is considered very rude. This is because chopsticks stuck in food resembles the incense burning that occurs when someone passes away. So vertical chopsticks are greatly looked down upon because Chinese people are very superstitious in their ways. No matter how harmless it seems, one must be careful when traveling to avoid making such mistakes. (Steve, task essay 4)

This excerpt illustrates several cultural norms in Chinese-speaking communities. Chinese speakers use chopsticks to eat rice, burn incense for the dead, showing respect for their ancestors while avoiding death, and associate the chopsticks stuck into the rice

with death, bad luck, and therefore, inappropriateness. In the last sentence, Steve evaluated this taboo as superstition but recognized the importance of acknowledging these cultural practices for successful intercultural communication. He demonstrated both interpretative skill and ethnographic skill and the four intercultural communicative competences: knowledge, skills, attitude, and critical awareness. The experience of living in China for two years may have provided Steve with more opportunities to observe and *experience* the cultural phenomena, as shown by the stereotype examples in his task essay 1 and the examples of the Chinese slang and taboos for Task 4. The taboos and slang familiar to the locals are the least likely to be known to the outsiders or new comers. Steve may have learned about the slang and behavioral norms from frequent interactions with the Chinese speakers, perhaps after making occasional mistakes and learning from the consequences.

For the students who lacked the in-situ experience in a Chinese-speaking community, the obstacle in completing Task 4 due to the lack of in-situ experience and the consequent lack of language information may be overcome by using other information resources, for example, the Internet. That is where Wren and Helen found their Chinese examples. Helen made a cultural connection for the Chinese proverb, “Butcher the donkey after it finished his job on the mill.” She gave an explanation embedded with her imagination of Chinese lifestyle and value and with her lifestyle and value as an American college student who never visited China:

From what I have learned about Chinese culture so far I find this saying would be very pertinent. The Chinese people (most notably the farmers and field workers) work very hard and diligently. They have a lot of respect for hard work and honesty. This saying is depicting someone who would take advantage of their animal (a worker) and use them for work or whatever they needed then quickly toss them to the way side without any regret. A person that would do

this is ungrateful and does not fit well with the ideals and principles of the Chinese lifestyle. (Helen, task essay 4)

This excerpt shows that Helen were able to explore the semiotic meaning of the Chinese proverb and then discuss its meaning in the socio-cultural discourse, even though she had never been to a Chinese-speaking community.

Lack of meta-linguistic knowledge. In addition to the lack of in-situ experiences or the extensive imagination or critical thinking, the lack of meta-linguistic knowledge about connotations also discouraged students from providing cultural interpretations. Helen, Lily, and Megan all felt confused about the task requirement. Helen clearly expressed her confusion and pointed out the difficulty in investigating Chinese connotations:

When I asked him [i.e. her language exchange partner from China] his thoughts or ideas about the topic through an email it was hard for him to understand what I was looking for. I realized how hard it is to communicate with someone from a different culture about such confusing topics most especially when not in person. However I immersed myself deep in research and found a website that had a lot of Chinese sayings. I am not very sure how accurate or popular these phrases are. (Helen, task essay 4)

The task requirement of connotation confused the student participants and their language exchange partners. Megan tried to seek help from her boyfriend from China, only found that “he doesn’t know what is connotation and I have to spend time explaining the word. But I don’t think the examples he gave me are what you want.” Megan wrote four Chinese examples, but only the cultural meanings of different colors can be counted as a culture-specific connotation.

Learning Objective 5: Acknowledge Misunderstandings Caused by Different Cultural Values

Tasks 5.1-5.4 require students to compare Americans' and Chinese speakers' perspectives of an event, artifact, or practice; students need to explain the causes of the different perspectives, link the social phenomena to cultural values, and evaluate the misunderstanding and communication breakdown the different perspectives and values may cause. Seven students were assigned to do Task 5. The results of analyzing the six completed essays show that the students were able to connect the social phenomena to the core values behind the event, artifact, or practice in the U.S. and Chinese-speaking communities. The students acknowledged that different societal groups may have different worldviews as a result of different cultural backgrounds and that the differences may cause misunderstanding or communication breakdown. The sensible phenomenon-value connections made by Sofia, Grace, and Katie indicate that the abilities to integrate information from different sources and make personal interpretations contributed to connecting social phenomena to cultural values. The convenient and overwhelming amount of information on the Internet may prevent students from doing further investigation and making coherent argument or improper phenomenon-value linkages. Unlike the essays for the former tasks, students' essays for Task 5 show that the students viewed Chinese-speaking societies as modern, struggling for westernization.

In-situ experiences. Based on what they had experienced in China for one month in the summer before the Elementary Chinese course, Sofia and Grace discussed the different perspectives of Americans and Chinese speakers on a practice or an event

and offered cultural interpretations. Sofia was in Beijing during the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square Massacre. She was surprised to find that there were no memorial events but suppression. When she invited her Chinese friends to eat out, she was turned down “because they were not allowed to go off campus.” The refusal motivated her to re-examine the values on freedom and human rights to most Americans and Chinese people:

I initially questioned how the students could be forced to stay on campus on the weekend, as I know that in the U.S., students leave campus all of the time, skip class, and are never directed as to what they can and cannot do. In fact, if an American student were forced to stay on campus in the U.S. for a weekend, there would be an uprising as it is against their freedoms and rights.... However, my Chinese friends saw it as a good thing. They never questioned why they had to stay on campus; they politely obeyed and let it be. (Sofia, task essay 5)

Sofia felt that the different attitudes toward the Tiananmen Protest/Massacre resulted from the different “amounts of information that is told” and “political ideas” in the U.S. and China. By political ideas, she meant the values of freedom and rights in democracy versus the dictatorship and obedience required by Communism. She wrote:

As an American, I was raised in a democratic society that is based on people expressing their opinions freely and voting for the rulers of the country. However, in China, it is a communistic society that has the ability to shelter the people from the full truth. Even on the 20th anniversary, the government censored the news that was available.... While most Chinese who were not in Beijing had no idea what had happened, across the U.S. the news was huge. Everyone knew about it. It also is an event in most history books in the U.S. (Sofia, task essay 5)

Then Sofia offered her American viewpoint of the suppression from the Chinese government: “Seeing as the government is considered to be at fault, it is important that they cover up what happened in order to keep their image among the people.” It is clear that the experience of being on the site brought opportunities to interact with the locals, which in turn brought out reflectivity and enabled her to observe the different attitudes

toward the historical event and make the sound linkage of the phenomena and the cultural values.

Another successful task essay is written by Grace, who stayed in Xian for one month. For Task 5, she wrote about the different practices and values of drinking in the U.S. and China. She found that “in China, drinking is not a big issue. It is part of the culture.” She cited a research article, “Chinese populations... have low rates of alcohol abuse,” and explained the reasons for this. She argued that drinking is incorporated in Chinese people’s life:

A big part of Chinese culture is socializing. They do this by having long meals with people or inviting friends and family over to eat. Drinking beer or wine is included in these meals.... About 80% of high school students in China have tried alcohol; however, most have tried it with their parents.... It is commonly part of their games as well as most meals. (Grace, task essay 5)

The success in making an insightful and interesting connection between drinking and ways of living seems to result partly from her plentiful interactions with and observation of the locals in her trip and partly from her personal lifestyle. Dr. Johnson, who was the coordinator and guide of the summer program in Xian, told me that they were invited by a Chinese student who had been an exchange student at University. The American students were treated with a big feast serving limitless hard liquor. In fact, Grace never hid her love for drinking beer. In the focus group when asked about interactions with language exchange partners, Grace said that she learned about Chinese culture when she drank with her language exchange partner. Probably because of the high relevance to her lifestyle, she put a lot in researching the drinking practice. Her essay cited more references than other students’ and her previous essays, and the six references were not only from the online chat room but included serious

articles. She cleverly integrated the statistic numbers and findings from other studies, her language exchange partner's opinion, and news reports to support her proposition, all of which made her phenomenon-value linkage persuasive.

Online information. The overwhelming amount of information along with restricted selectivity, critical thinking, or democratic discussion may reproduce the existing misleading information on the Internet or misunderstanding about the researched social groups. An approach to improve the validity of information sources is to require students to evaluate their information, as Laura did for subtask 5.4. In her essay, Laura demonstrated not only effective integration of the available information but critical thinking ability in reflecting upon her information sources:

The sources come from mainly different forums and “chat” style websites in order to get opinions that are more personal and unbiased to a larger maybe more politically correct view. There were some issues, however, that when it came to analyzing these factors into “causes for cultural misunderstanding,” it seemed that they would translate into stereotypes as it seems. The line between cultural misunderstandings and stereotypes are nearly transparent, however. They are the only conclusions I could come to. (Laura, task essay 5)

This excerpt shows Laura's concerns about the potential overgeneralization in the online information she drew upon. It also suggests that requiring students to critically examine the information they decide to use is one of the feasible approaches to reduce the risk of reproducing stereotypes on the existent information on the Internet or in print.

Perceived Chinese culture. Unlike the Chinese cultural representations in the previous task essays, the Chinese culture represented in the students' essays for Task 5 are modern and westernized in terms of its social members' consumption styles. Laura noticed the increasing popularity of the “western-style food in China” due to the “the assimilation into the western culture for the younger generations.” Grace noted the

Chinese tradition that women drink tea was changing, quoting her language exchange partner, “the culture in China is becoming more westernized.” Jessie viewed westernization as a consequence of the increasing international trades.

Learning Objective 6: Identify the Potential Bias in Intercultural Exploration

Tasks 6.1- 6.5 require students to demonstrate awareness of the potential bias in exploring, describing, and interpreting cultures, and the ongoing change feature of culture. All the 15 participants were required to complete Task 6. Analyses of the 11 completed essays indicate that the students were aware of the potential biases in the intercultural exploration. Most of the students, particularly those who did not have the experience of being in a Chinese-speaking community, completed their tasks by drawing upon the information from the Internet or interviews with the Chinese speakers in the school community. Students were concerned about the bias inherent in the information from the Internet and interviews. In general, students believed that the experience of being in a Chinese-speaking community was critical for exploring its cultural phenomena. Students recognized the significance of their research work to intercultural learning. Only Grace and Sofia modified their tasks, and only Megan explained why she did not make modification.

Students’ Identified Research Bias

Steve was most concerned about the potential bias caused by the researcher’s manipulation of data. Most of the other students related the potential bias to their information sources, including the Internet and Chinese speakers and in particular their language exchange partners.

Researcher's bias. Steve reflected upon the exploratory processes he went through in completing the tasks and admitted: "I [had to] pick and choose what I personally agreed with... to potentially skew my findings to make it easier for me to argue a certain point" (Steve, task essay 6). He recognized the unavoidable selectivity for presenting certain perspectives and concluded, "All in all, a paper relies on its author to present the most accurate and non-biased information in order to paint a precise picture of what exactly is trying to be said." His reflection demonstrated his critical thinking ability and epistemological position about what research is and what a researcher should do.

Information from the Internet. Due to the students' limited Chinese language skills, information from the English websites on the Internet was more useful than the interviews with Chinese speakers. On the other hand, the translated information may be biased to the translators' positions, as Wren noted:

An incredibly limiting external factor in my research is that I cannot read and understand Chinese beyond a very basic level. Since I did a lot of my research online, what I know depends heavily on what was translated and how that was done. Several articles that I read, and some that I quoted, seemed very heavily biased either pro-Republic or pro-Communist, but without being able to access primary-source documents I have been forced to use my personal judgment to assess the English-language versions. (Wren, task essay 6)

Wren's reflection pointed out the dilemma facing the CFL learners, probably also facing the elaborated LAE approach that highly depends on the Internet provision of information. On the one hand, the Internet provided abundant handy information, but on the other hand, the information risked lacking validity.

To the students who cannot access to the social members of the researched group, the Internet is an important information resource to gain knowledge about the

researched group. However, even online information could be unattainable. Wren, Jessie, Lily, and Brian all noted the poor accessibility to Chinese websites with English translations due to the strict censorship in China. Wren continued his reflection upon searching for information about China:

Also, some of the resources that I used are blocked on Mainland China. The Chinese and English language versions of *Wikipedia* are off-and-on blocked by the PRC, with all of the “sensitive” subjects being completely censored. *YouTube* and *The NYTimes* website, both resources I used, are also frequently blocked. (Wren, task essay 6)

When the students turned to the official government websites for the first-hand information about China, they often found that “the statistics from Mainland China are notoriously inaccurate” and “used as a form of propaganda” (Wren, task essay 6). Lily complained about the Chinese government censorship:

Media and computers are so tightly controlled in China that it is harder than it usually is to find someone and even harder to find people who will talk openly with you about things like their government because that is something that is not allowed in China. (Lily, task essay 6)

Interview information. The validity of the information from interviews with Chinese speakers was questioned as well. The students noted that the informants’ ages may influence their perspectives. The following two excerpts show that the students were aware of the need to discuss culture in contexts. Megan noted that most of the people she interviewed were young and might lack the contextual knowledge of the cultural phenomena. On the contrary, Grace was concerned that the old generation may only know the past China, which has been changing dramatically in the most recent decades.

I also must say that all of the students I interviewed are between the ages of 17-26. This age range is very limited and excludes many of those who are more

informed of political and economical conflicts the two countries have had.
(Megan, task essay 6)

My parents know much about China and the culture, after living there many times. However, they are both in their early sixties and I think their age can affect their biases. They see things more old fashioned sometimes, and although they have visited, they have not been to China as recently as I have. They remember more from the times they lived there, which has not been since the 1989. A lot has changed in the last twenty years and so their thoughts and knowledge is more from the past, even though it is very interesting and helpful.
(Grace, task essay 6)

The latter excerpt also shows that Grace was aware of the changing feature of the cultural phenomena. Note that Grace emphasized the significance of recent visits to enhance the information validity.

Another problem with the interviewing native speakers for the needed information is that the Chinese speaker accessible in the school community might not be representative of a regular Chinese person. Ray was Grace and Brian's language exchange partner. About Ray, Grace wrote:

She has an interesting background because she is Chinese, born and raised in China, but has lived in America for the past 6 years or maybe more. She feels very Americanized and sometimes I think she has more of a love for this country now. So her perspective is very different than a Chinese person living in China, or just staying in America for a year or so. (Grace, task essay 6)

Brian made a similar note that Ray may have an "American mindset" (Brian, task essay 6). Here is a dilemma facing the learners-as-ethnographers: the longer the native Chinese speakers have stayed in the U.S., the more communicative with the CFL learners but less representative of a regular Chinese speaker who did not have the intercultural contact experience.

Information from the study abroad experiences. In contrast to the critical examination of the information validity from the Internet or interviews, students

seemed to believe in the validity of the information based on the study abroad experiences. None of the students who completed their tasks by drawing upon their study abroad memories questioned their validity. Even the students who had never been to Chinese-speaking communities seemed to believe that the study abroad experience was a verified resource for cultural learning, as implied in Wren's opening sentence, "doing a project about the opinions, histories, and cultures of people living thousands of miles away is inherently less accurate," (task essay 6) and Brian's statement, "writing the research papers always hold bias, no matter what, because many of the students have not been to China" (task essay 6).

Chinese Cultural Representations

The excerpts quoted above indicate that students noted the difficulties in obtaining trustworthy information concerning Chinese culture from the websites registered in China. A reasonable question is why the students insisted in exploring China instead of changing their focus to other Chinese-speaking communities such as Taiwan and searching information from the comparatively stable websites regarding them. One of the explanations is that the student participants were more interested in China than any other Chinese-speaking community, as indicated by the facts that three of the 15 student participants had visited China (Steve, Sofia, and Grace) but only one to Taiwan (Terry) and that another eight (Wren, Leo, Brian, Helen, Laura, Katie, Lily, and Jessie) attended the summer trip to China the year after this research project but only one to Taiwan (Brian). For the students who chose to explore the cultural phenomena in China, the online information may be unreliable and/or inaccessible.

Chapter Summary

This chapter discusses the effectiveness of the LAE approach to offering students opportunities to develop cross-cultural awareness. Analysis of students' task essays show that in general, the students learned to recognize and evaluate (1) cultural stereotypes, (2) contextual influences on cultural artifacts/practices/perspectives, (3) situational influences on communications, (4) culture-specific connotations, (5) cross-cultural misunderstanding, and (6) potential bias in intercultural exploration. By encouraging interactions with the Chinese speakers in the school community and search for information on the Internet, the LAE approach expanded the learning context beyond the classroom. Students were able to complete the ethnographic tasks without residing in the community of the target language. In this project, only five of the 15 student participants had been to a Chinese-speaking community; nonetheless, all the students were able to complete at least two ethnographic tasks and achieved the intercultural learning objectives to some degrees. Examination of the students' learning processes as well as outcomes yields three important aspects of the LAE approach which deserve more research attention: information sources for intercultural learning, student-perceived Chinese cultural representations, and ethnographic task design.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS FROM ANALYSES OF INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTIONS

This chapter illustrates students' perspectives on intercultural learning, drawing largely upon the analyses of the interview transcriptions. At the end of the semester, I conducted two focus groups to elicit information regarding students' attitudes towards the intercultural learning assignment, evaluations of the ethnographic tasks, inquiry processes, and suggestions for improving the LAE approach. (For the complete interview questions, see Appendix F). The first group consisted of five students, Helen, Megan, Wren, Sofia, and Terry, who handed in four tasks at the time of the interview. The second group included six students. Three of them (Laura, Steve, and Brian) handed in three tasks, and another three (Mia, Sean, and Grace) handed in two tasks. Each group had participants of both genders and of different learning experiences. Three of the students had been in a Chinese-speaking community for at least two years (Steve, Terry, and Sean), two had been there for one month (Sofia and Grace), and six had never been in a Chinese-speaking community (Helen, Megan, Wren, Mia, Laura, and Brian). For the details of students' background, see Appendix B.

The first focus group was held at 1 o'clock on April 21st, 2010, when the Chinese class was cancelled for the World Language Day event on campus. The second focus group was held at 4 o'clock on April 23rd, right after the Chinese class. Both group interviews were conducted in the small meeting room next to my office. I tried to create an atmosphere of an open forum rather than an interview. I emailed the

students the topics before meeting and invited them to join in the cultural discussion. As a hostess and facilitator of the discussion, I prepared traditional Chinese dishes and drinks and encouraged students to enjoy the food and *share* their thoughts. The interviews were audio-taped by a digital recorder. The first group lasted 72 minutes, and the second, 65 minutes.

I listened to the recordings, transcribed them, and had an English native speaker who graduated from the University listen to the recordings and proofread my verbatim transcriptions. I then conducted thematic analyses with the interview transcriptions. I read and re-read the two transcriptions to identify students' descriptions and thoughts about their experiences in completing the ethnographic tasks, how they felt about the exploration, and how they perceived intercultural learning. I highlighted the related parts, the repeated key words and interesting issues, wrote my notes, and saved the annotations in a word file. I read the key words, notes and annotations across essays and transcriptions, confirmed or discarded some of them, made linkages among them, summarized my findings, and wrote explanations for each. From the repeated analyses emerged the following five themes:

- (1) The intercultural learning assignment needs a good design in order to be implemented in the Chinese as a foreign language classroom and to expand the benefits of the LAE approach for intercultural learning to the most;
- (2) The accessibility to Chinese speakers does not always lead to the needed information for completing the ethnographic tasks;
- (3) The use of the Internet to expand the information access for the home ethnographers needs supportive preparations;
- (4) Study abroad experiences might have different influences on intercultural learning, depending on when and how long students studied abroad and the quality of crossing cultural borders; and

(5) Students' perceptions of Chinese cultural representations and perspectives on culture may evolve.

The five themes are interwoven. Therefore, discussions on the theme regarding students' perspectives on the learning assignment unavoidably overlap with discussions on the themes regarding students' collection of information and concerns about its validity. Likewise, students' perspectives on cultural representations relate to the previous four themes. Some of the discussions in this chapter echo the findings in the previous chapter.

Theme 1: Intercultural Learning Assignment

The intercultural learning assignment contained six ethnographic tasks which required students to recognize and evaluate cultural stereotypes, the impact of contextual or situational factors on cultural artifacts/practices/perspectives, culture-specific connotations or misunderstanding, and potential bias in the intercultural exploration. Analyses of the interview transcriptions brought about information regarding students' perspectives on the intercultural learning assignment: how the students felt when given the assignment, which ethnographic task interested them most, which task was most difficult, how the assignment benefited intercultural learning, and how the assignment could be improved. In general, students found that the assignment added a vital and interesting dimension to the language course. Some of the tasks led the students who had been to a Chinese-speaking community to recapture their experiences and contemplate their observations. The tasks that students perceived as most interesting tended to be those that students could relate to their lived experiences, whereas the tasks perceived as most difficult were those for which students had difficulty in finding the information. Students suggested that the intercultural learning

assignment should be integrated into any foreign language classroom, with careful pedagogic preparation and design.

Students' Attitudes toward the Assignment

Students' attitudes towards the intercultural learning assignment changed from negative ("stressed out," "time-consuming," "daunting," "suspicious") to positive ("excited," "interesting") after they started the task. Steve described his attitudinal change: "Since I started it [the task], it was not a big deal. I actually really enjoyed doing the first one" (FG 2: 16)⁴. As they progressed in exploration, students found that the intercultural learning assignment was interesting and conducive to intercultural learning. Grace's attitude changed from "confused" and "stressed out" to "I'm loving it now" when she was doing her third task (FG 2: 6 & 70). Both focus groups agreed that the assignment turned out to be "good for both process and outcome" and felt that they had "learned a lot" (FG 1: 13-18; FG 2: 13-15).

Student-perceived Task Effectiveness to Intercultural Learning

In addition to achieving the six pre-scribed intercultural learning objectives (to recognize and evaluate cultural stereotypes, the impact of contextual or situational factors on cultural artifacts/practices/perspectives, culture-specific connotations or misunderstanding, and potential bias in the intercultural exploration), focus group participants noted at least seven other benefits of the tasks. The assignment facilitated intercultural learning by initiating inquiry and reflection. The assignment added an

⁴ I avoided editing the data extracts as long as they were readable. When modifications were needed, I made the changes evident. Squares were used for the inserted words that made comments complete and comprehensible. References for audit trail were indicated in brackets. For example, (FG 2: 16) means the data were from the 16th turn of speech in the interview transcript of the 2nd focus group. For other transcription marks, please refer to Appendix G.

important dimension to the foreign language classroom, motivated students to learn more about language and culture, and enhanced students' awareness of the culture-language connection. The learning project and the follow-up focus group forum led to learning of language and cultural practices beyond the course books. Some students developed meta-awareness of what effective intercultural learning should be and critically reflected upon their past intercultural learning experiences or cross-cultural encounters. The tasks led the students who had study abroad experiences to recapture their past memories and recall their observations that they might have otherwise ignored or forgotten.

Initiating inquiry and reflection. One of the benefits of the ethnographic tasks to intercultural learning was to motivate inquiry and contemplation. The intercultural learning assignment required students to read articles they would not have read if the tasks had not been assigned. For Task 5 regarding cross-cultural misunderstanding, Grace “went on to a Chinese search engine which [she] never did before” and “started to read the articles there” (FG 2: 70). In effect, students were aware of the guidance to inquiry into and contemplation about the linguistic and cultural phenomena which they might have ignored without the assignment, as indicated by the conversation between Megan and Sofia about revision and the effects of completing the tasks:

Megan: Be honest, [I would revise] none of them. I kind of feel I had done my best for the tasks. I read a few articles; I talked with people; I wrote it down. I don't think I need to revise them. I don't see the need of writing it down if I'm learning. I'm just lazy, I guess.

T: So you have your rationale not to revise them?

Megan: 'Cuz I feel that I'm learning it, and I don't have the necessity to write it down. This is the information that I just learned and is going to continue developing. I don't see the need to revise it, and also the time restriction.

Sofia: But, also like, if you don't need to do the assignment, would you still ask those questions [that the task asked]?

+Megan: I think I will. I actually asked these questions while taking the class. Like, when I heard the teacher's stereotypes. Like, you still have the small stereotypes. I usually talked about that with my roommate. She's interested in cultural learning. We usually talked about stereotypes since we were in the freshman year. We continue talking about it now that I have to do the tasks, but I won't revise them. (FG 1: 163-167)

Expanding learning beyond course books. The exploration, guided by the ethnographic tasks, contributed to students' extensive knowledge about Chinese, particularly slang and culture-specific connotations that were not included in the course books. Both Wren and Megan favored the language-oriented tasks. Megan learned about the common slang "chicu" (吃醋), which literally means "eating vinegar" but is commonly used in Taiwan and China to refer to feeling "jealous because someone else is more favored" (FG 1: 77). Wren elaborated on his task essay about Chinese wordplay with homonyms "福" ("happiness or good luck") and "蝠" ("the animal bat"). To complete the task, he had to read "a lot of scholarly articles online" and "learned a lot" (FG 1: 76). He concluded:

I think my favorite thing about learning Chinese is that the language is completely different from English. That's the most interesting thing to study because there're potential words in Chinese that don't exist in English and vice versa in Chinese. Like one thing I learned about connotations is how Chinese homonyms stand for each other, like the words for 'bat' and for 'good fortune' are pronounced the same, and so bats are good luck. Like, in English, the connotation would be of time, like night, because bats hang out at night. I thought it was really interesting because it's a whole different way of creating connotations. (FG 1: 76)

The task not only led Wren to acquire the form, meaning, and the use of the two Chinese words in social practice, which were not included in the course books, but also expanded his descriptive knowledge about the two languages, more specifically, the "way of creating connotations."

In addition to the extensive learning about Chinese, students learned about cultural practices and language use that were not included in the textbooks by interviewing native speakers, searching information on the Internet, and sharing their inquiries in the focus groups. Sofia noted, “She [her language exchange partner, Liying] helped me with some of the words that we didn’t learn yet. And I learned some cultural practices, like fiancée” (FG 1: 50). In the first focus group, Sofia spent more than one minute describing the Taiwanese wedding practices that she heard from Liying, after lamenting that she might not be able to see Liying because she might get married and move back to Taiwan. Megan continued:

I like the Chinese weddings. That’s another cultural thing I learned this semester. Like, I heard that it does cost a lot for the wedding and usually the girl’s father pays, but then people bring money to the weddings so it kind of evens out. It’s the same way in Japan. But then after the guest brings money, you have to prepare a present to give back to them. So you actually lose money, whereas in China you get extra money. (FG 1: 41)

Megan’s comparisons of the different wedding practices and witty conclusion made the group participants laugh. Apparently, by listening to Sofia and Megan’s sharing, the other students also learned about the cultural practice.

Enhancing students’ awareness of the language-culture connection. Grace explicitly noted the contribution of intercultural learning to language learning. She said, “It’s important to look at the culture when you learn the language because sometimes it will help you to understand why sentence patterns work within the culture” (FG 2: 200). The language-culture connection is particularly evident in the three language-oriented tasks (Tasks 2 and 3, which required students to explore the contextual and situational variables shaping cultural phenomena and language use, and Task 4 on language

connotations), although analyses of students' essays for other tasks show that they have enhanced students' awareness of the language-culture connection as well.

Both Wren and Megan referred to Task 4 on culture-specific connotations as their favorite task. The task engaged Wren in discovering the differences in creating connotations in Chinese and English (FG 1: 76). To complete Task 4, Megan asked her Chinese boyfriend, Young, for information. She "learned a lot from his words" specifically "about language and ideology." She learned that word usage changed with time and noticed "how much development is going on in China." Furthermore, she examined the new Chinese generation's ideologies underlying their language use and compared their language use with the new generation in Japan. She found that "a [similar] development seemed to have happened in Japan, like, maybe 3 generations ago," and drew a conclusion: "In this sense, China is still a developing country" (FG 1: 77). Wren's and Megan's essays for Task 4 and the follow-up reflections show that completing Task 4 enhanced their awareness of the language-culture connection and knowledge of linguistic meanings and forms in cultural contexts.

The following data extract shows that Grace noticed the gender differences in discourse, the changing features of discourse, and language blends in the changing discourse:

T: So you like the gender terms?

Grace: Yeah, even the stuff you talk about, like the "o 不 okay," you know, the little phrases like that. And the things that China uses now but they're more Americanized now. Do older people talk about that? (FG 2: 97-98)

The phrase she referred to, "o 不 okay" (meaning "Is it OK?") was a blend of an English vocabulary (okay) with a Chinese sentence pattern (V + negative particle + V), commonly used among Taiwanese young people. I presented this as an example of

language blending in the class which Grace took three semesters earlier. It was surprising that she still remembered that example. Whether her emphasis on the Americanized Chinese was her ethnocentric projection or not, Grace noted the impact of the historical discourse, such as Americanization, on language use. She also noticed that language use might be associated with age.

Adding another dimension to the foreign language class. The intercultural learning assignment added an additional dimension to the foreign language class and motivated students to investigate the cultural aspects of language. Mia described her first response when given the intercultural learning portfolio assignment:

I was scared at first because I thought that's gonna be a lot of work. But I was excited, too, because I definitely wanted to learn culture, too, as well as language. So I'm glad we *incorporate* that in everything. (FG 2: 15)

The following discussion on how to integrate cultural learning into the regular Chinese classroom shows students' aspiration for a change in regular foreign language classrooms which were usually limited to language skill instruction:

Grace: Like, we can have culture discussion.

Laura: Yeah, like culture study day in class.

Sean: ***

Steve: That can be once in a week.

Grace: (laughed) Knock out a chapter.

Steve: We don't need to do that very often; we can do like half the class every two weeks.

Mia: That would be awesome. (FG 2: 175-181)

Grace's response to the question regarding which essay she would revise indicates her engagement in the intercultural learning assignment:

I like doing them again because I feel my first ones that I turned in are like drafts. And when I go over again, it's like been a certain amount of time, and I can process it again, and read it again, I have so much to add, to clarify. (FG 2: 158)

Grace's engagement in completing her intercultural learning portfolio and her positive comments on the intercultural learning assignment are noteworthy, considering her frequent complaints about the syllabus during the three semesters she learned Chinese with me and in the focus group (FG 2: 6, 179, 210, 214, 233 & 240). Grace had taken the first-semester Elementary Chinese with Dr. Johnson in her first year in college and had failed. She re-took the course with me when she was a sophomore and failed again, owing to her low class attendance and poor completion of homework. In the semester of this research project, however, she showed high interest in the intercultural learning assignment. She completed the four required tasks and revised two of them. In the focus group, she commented, "I like it. I think it is a good addition to language courses. It's kind of adding another dimension" (FG 2: 226). She even suggested that the intercultural learning activity should weigh "at least 10% in the course grade" (FG 2: 228).

Enhancing in-situ experience recalls. The intercultural learning assignment led the students who had the experience of living or traveling in a Chinese-speaking community to recapture their experiences. The in-situ experiences became meaningful, which would have simply become fading memories had no learning tasks been assigned. Sofia favored Task 5 because it "brought up the memory" of her one-month stay in China (FG 1: 70). In the essay, she wrote about what she saw on the anniversary of Tiananmen Square Protest and how she felt. After giving details of her experiences for more than one minute, Sofia concluded:

It is a good cultural task for me, just to remember what happened, and made me to recall what I felt; things at that point I didn't necessarily notice. But when I did the task, all the memory came back and I could see. (FG 1: 70)

All the five students who had been to a Chinese-speaking community (Steve, Sean, Terry, Grace, and Sofia) perceived ethnographic tasks as beneficial to linking their in-situ experiences to the new explorations.

Raising meta-awareness of intercultural learning. The difference of the LAE assignment from other cultural studies assignments led students to critically reflect on their past experiences of learning cultures. Megan described a distressing experience and how it impacted her initial perception of the present intercultural learning assignment:

I took the class on Ethnic Studies last year. After taking that class, I formed bad stereotypes. Before that, I had nothing because I haven't interacted with Mexican Americans. But after learning their culture, I thought, OH MY GOD. And the teacher, too, she's very biased towards, 'cuz, she's Mexican American. She kind of indirectly attacked the white kids. (FG 1: 105)

Megan's reflection triggered Sofia's, who had taken the course with the same teacher. Sophia said:

+Sofia: She's [the instructor] very intimidating when I took that class.
 +Megan: Yeah, that's very intense. And my roommate came to the classroom with me, and she started to hate Mexicans. Both of us had a stereotype for a while.
 T: Because of the teacher?
 Megan: Because of the teacher. It was very sad because the class is supposed to help us to understand the Mexican culture so we won't have stereotypes. (FG 1: 110-113)

The last sentence implies that Megan viewed the enhancement of understanding and debunking stereotypes as the goal of cultural studies. Instructors should not intimidate students or "attack" any cultural group; otherwise they risked creating "sad" stereotypes.

As Megan's and Sofia's reflections suggested that the instructor's attitude might influence students' perceptions on intercultural learning, I asked the second focus group whether they felt that I imposed my culture on them. The students answered:

Mia: No.

Grace: No, I think it's important to look at the culture when you learn the language because sometimes it will help to understand why sentence patterns work within the culture.

Mia: Umm. I like it.

Grace: I think everything in Chinese is related to culture.

Mia: And you're open to culture stuff. You told us this is what you guys do and this is what we do, instead of 'this is bad' and 'that is better than that.' You're really unbiased.

+Laura: Yeah, exactly.

Brian: I feel like you're really analytical about certain things. You'll discover something in our class from our talks or perspective and take a few minutes to talk about that. In that way, you were unlike [*sic.* Dr. Johnson] because you are from that culture. (FG 2: 199-205)

In the discussion, the students explicitly linked cultural learning and language learning and depicted what they thought an instructor should do to facilitate learning. The instructor should be “open” and “analytical.” To Brian, the instructor should be a native speaker of students' target language and should have the experience of living in the community of the target language.

**Student-evaluated Interest
Level and Difficulty
Level of Task**

Analyses of students' reflections on their primary feelings when receiving the assignment show that the tasks which were evaluated positively tended to be related to students' lived experiences. The perceived challenges were related to the limitations of current learning situations—mostly the time and information accessibility constraints—and foreign language learning contexts.

Tasks of relevance. The six ethnographic tasks aiming to raise students' awareness of the six aspects of intercultural learning (stereotypes, contextual and situational impacts on cultural practices, culture-specific connotations, cross-cultural misunderstanding, and reflections on intercultural learning) did not have fixed topics,

but rather, broad directions following the six pedagogic objectives. The open-ended assignment made it easier for students to relate the tasks to their lives, as Wren's comment on the assignment design: "Having an open-ended assignment is good because lots of people write what they want" (FG 1: 211). For example, for Task 2 on the contextual factors to language use, the international studies major, Brian, wrote about the Iraq war, and the music major, Wren, wrote about jazz.

Students also favored the tasks that required interactions with people or those related to their lifestyles. Mia liked Task 1 (stereotype) "'cuz it was fun to talk to people" (FG 2: 72). Similarly, Steve had "a lot of fun hearing what everyone has to say about each culture" (FG 2: 75). Task 1 was Sean's favorite because it reminded him of his interactions with his Chinese friends when he lived in Singapore. When asked to recall how he started his first task, Sean said, "I kind of thought about my experience back to my high school [in the Chinese neighborhood in Singapore], how we made fun of each other [i.e., he and his Chinese friends]" (FG 2: 40). He confessed that he "used to just throw stereotypes all the time with [his] friends" (FG 2: 76). Terry liked Task 2 on contextual factors of language use, drawing upon his religious background knowledge and experience of being a missionary in Taiwan for two years when he "had opportunities to talk about religions with local people" (FG 1: 78).

Grace favored Task 5 because she could relate it to her previous experiences in China as well as her lifestyle. Analyses of her task essays and reflections in the focus group reveal the significance of the one-month trip in her personal growth and her love for interacting with people. Before the focus group started, she told me with excitement about her essay for Task 5, in which she discussed how her favorite pastime, drinking,

could be given different cultural meanings in China and the U.S. and what misunderstandings the differences might cause. She drew upon her experiences of interacting with local people when she was in China, observing when and how they drank and also interviewed her language exchange partner from China to confirm her primary finding. The task engaged her so much that she was willing to do more research and meet the new challenge cheerfully: “I went on to a Chinese search engine, which I never did before. I started to read the articles there. They’re very funny” (FG 2: 70).

Temporal context of learning. For the intercultural learning assignment, most students’ first concerns were whether they had sufficient time to complete it and whether they could access resources for the needed information. Terry vividly described the situation as, “I think everybody’s first reaction was, ‘dang, it’s going to take a lot of time’” (FG 1: 12). Steve felt that “some of the tasks were hard to get in on time” and asked whether anyone handed in his/her task in time (FG 2: 112). Before the participants left the focus group, Steve thanked me for accepting the delayed assignments. His gratitude shows that allowing more time for students was important, particularly for those who attempted to do thorough investigations for the tasks. The fact that only two students were able to hand in their tasks before the due date proves that Steve’s concern was shared by others. The time constraints also troubled Megan and Wren. In the first focus group, Megan and Wren both expressed high motivation in doing more research had they not been limited by time. Megan lamented that she “could’ve done more research” and wished that she “could have more time to do more

research” (FG 1: 193, 197, 203). Wren had the same feeling, “if I could have more time, I could’ve made it [i.e., his task essay] longer” (FG 1: 205).

The temporal context of the assignment in the spring semester instead of fall might have made it more difficult for the senior students. The education major, Grace, needed to prepare for her internship. She complained, “Some people have more time to do a foreign language than other people” (FG 2: 114). The arts major, Megan, was occupied with the graduate exhibition, residence move-out, and job hunting. She recalled, “[In] this semester, I barley hung out with my language exchange partner. I was locked in my studio. It was so hard that we could not make up a time,” while in the previous semester she met her language exchange partner “almost every weekend” (FG 1: 37 & 39).

Helen pointed out another problem of making the last task too close to the end of semester: “I looked over it [my task essay] to see whether there’s some more I can do for it, but it’s end of school year, and I’m like cashed-out” (FG 1: 155). The fact that the learners-as-ethnographers as well as their language exchange partners were increasingly busy at the end of semester was perhaps one of the reasons why few students revised their task essays or completed additional tasks even with extra points for their course grade as a reward.

Context of learning Chinese as a foreign language. Analyses of students’ reflections on their inquiry processes revealed the difficulties of intercultural learning in the foreign language context. When asked, “Among the five criteria in the assessment rubrics, which did you find the most difficult to achieve,” the first response in both groups was “data.” Sofia felt that “finding the material and references is really hard,”

even though she had reported a great deal of helpful information from her language exchange partner (FG 1: 97). The second group participants agreed that the gathering multiple data were the greatest challenge:

Grace: Data variety

+Brian: Yeah

+Steve: Definitely.

Grace: In every paper, you would be like, 'you need *more resources*,' and I was like, 'dang it.'

Mia: (in Chinese) I agree

+Steve: (to the interviewer) Just write 'everybody.' (FG 2: 103-108)

Steve's conclusion that "everybody" was concerned about the variety of data they could obtain shows his perceptions of the constraints of the foreign language learning context where there was little information about Chinese language and cultural phenomena.

When asked which task was most difficult, the majority of the participants in both focus groups referred to the language-oriented tasks. Steve, Mia, Wren, and Helen, mentioned Task 2 (contextual influences on language use), and Brian, Sofia, Laura, and Sean, Task 3 (situational influences on language use). In order to complete the language-oriented tasks, students felt that they needed to "be in the environment" of the Chinese-speaking community, in Brian's words (FG 1: 80). Interviewing native Chinese speakers was the best solution to the limitation of the foreign language learning context. However, students found it difficult to spark interaction in Chinese with their language partners. Grace had an interesting account of her interaction with her language exchange partner: "Ray and I never spoke Chinese to each other, 'cuz she doesn't like to speak Chinese. Sometimes we would go out together, and after a few drinks, I can get her to speak Chinese" (FG 2: 59).

In the end, most of the American students did not collect as much Chinese language information from their language exchange partners as they had expected. The result seems natural, considering most international students had a strong motivation to practice speaking English now that they were in the U.S. Their proficiencies in English were generally higher than most American students' Chinese proficiencies. When asked whether he could access other music majors from China or Taiwan in his college, Wren revealed the asymmetrical language use in his interaction with his language exchange partner:

A lot of time I just helped him with his English. This is his first semester so he didn't speak English that well. He's good enough obviously, but he is not very comfortable. So he wanted to practice English. (FG 1: 56)

Wren's insufficient Chinese, along with his language exchange partner's strong motivation to practice English, resulted in the asymmetrical use of the target languages of the partners. The communication in English was easier for Wren but did not provide him with information about Chinese as much as the English information he had offered to his language exchange partner.

Wren was not the only one who was helpful to the international students but not aggressive enough as a foreign language learner. Megan described her interaction with her Chinese-speaking informants:

Megan: Most of the time we spoke English. And then I'd try to get them to speak Chinese. Then I would ask them questions in Chinese, and they started to laugh and just didn't answer.

T: They laughed at you?

Megan: Yeah, they were like "Oh, 好可愛" (imitating the tone of the Chinese speakers when saying "how cute" in Chinese). And I would be like, Okay. And Ming [Megan's language exchange partner from Taiwan] started to learn Japanese, too. She wanted to practice Japanese. So we never got to reach Chinese still. I had to nag them [the Chinese native speakers] and asked, 'What

is this?' 'What is that?' And they'll finally give me an answer. If I just asked, 'How do I say this?' they wouldn't even answer me. (FG 1: 59-61)

The ineffective interactions between language exchange partners might have resulted from their asymmetrical foreign language skills and different cultural norms of interaction as well. Perhaps because their English proficiency was higher than most American students' Chinese language proficiency, the students from Taiwan or China felt that the American students were "cute" when using basic vocabulary. While saying a learner is "cute" is an encouragement in Taiwan, Megan obviously did not take it that way and might have felt insulted. This possible insult might have stopped her from speaking Chinese with her Chinese-speaking informants.

After Megan shared her frustrating experience of speaking Chinese with the native speakers in the U.S., Terry immediately shared his experience of helping the English learners he met in Taiwan: "When I was in Taiwan, most people would be so excited to see a white person. They thought all white people are English speakers, so they just jump and speak English" (FG 1: 62-64). Terry's spontaneous sharing was intriguing. First, he confirmed Taiwanese students' high motivation to practice speaking English. Second, he described a foreign language context where there were few speakers of the learners' target language, and therefore, the few native speakers became the target for the highly motivated foreign language learners to cling to for practicing their target language.

Assignment Design

Analyses of students' responses to the interview questions regarding the challenges of completing the assignment and revising their task essays reveal students'

perceptions of the assignment design, specifically about the instructions and the requirement of essays and a learning portfolio.

Presentation of the assignment. The issue of presentations involves both the handout of instructions, the amount of required tasks, and its requirement of written essays. The length of the handout (see Appendix E) might have made the learning project appear to involve a heavy workload. Below is Steve’s first response when he received the handout:

I wasn’t really scared about it, but I mean, the whole, five six page packet was all a bit too much. So at first, I was like, ‘oh my god; that’s gonna be so much!’ So maybe next time you can make it shorter. (FG 2: 16.1)

The six-page handout was off-putting, although Steve “really enjoyed doing the first task” once he started it (FG 2: 16.2). Therefore, it might have been the presentation of the assignment, rather than the tasks themselves, which in turn led students to perceive that the assignment would add an extra workload to their already tight schedule. In contrast to his suggestion of decreasing the handout size, Steve liked the step-by-step presentation of each task:

Steve: At the same time, I kind of like how you broke down each task, like task 1.1, 1.2, 1.3. You kind of put a very broad direction in the task so [*sic.* we] can take it where [*sic.* we] want to go, but you also state the steps and what you want. (FG 2: 171)

Steve’s comment confirms my earlier observation that it was the long and detailed *presentation*, not the task instructions that made him view the assignment to be heavy work.

The number of the required tasks also influenced students’ perceptions of the workload of intercultural learning. Grace suggested that each student should be required three tasks at most, rather than four in a semester and that the students should

be given “one sheet [of each task] for each time” and “then another sheet for another task before it’s due.” In this way, the handout would not “look so overwhelming” (FG 2: 173). Again, the perceived workload of the intercultural learning assignment is related to students’ motivation to complete it.

Requirement of writing essays. The exclusive use of essay writing as the presentation form might have added difficulty for some students. The freshman, Sean, said, “I didn’t really know how to organize it. I was unsure about whether to have it as bullet points or more like an essay form” (FG 2: 110). For his first task, Sean wrote one page of three paragraphs under the headings of *American stereotypes* and *Chinese stereotypes*. Below is his first paragraph:

American stereotypes

Chinese people think that Americans like to eat a lot of hamburgers. Chinese hold the stereotype that Americans are bigger and fatter. That Americans are loud and obnoxious. I have gotten all of these stereotypes from the time when I was living in Singapore and first handedly experience the culture differences and the stereotypes that both cultures have for each other. (Sean, task essay 1)

Laura agreed with Sean, “The same here. The fact that it’s an essay killed me” (FG 2: 111). She related this difficulty to her learning style and her major, “I was kind of scared ‘cuz I don’t like to write essays. And because of my arts major, it’s hard to write” (FG 2: 11). Steve was unsatisfied with his essay for Task 2. He thought that for the task he needed “to choose two pieces of data from each country and make a table to compare.” He found that his essay presentation “became like an economic analysis of China versus America” and felt “a little intense” because it was “hard to link it back to the cultural research” (FG 2: 86 & 88). For Sean, Laura, and Steve, how to organize and represent their findings added to the difficulty of the intercultural learning assignment. To achieve the pedagogic goals of encouraging students to complete the

assignment and create opportunities for students to co-construct knowledge, oral presentation using multi-media should be an alternative to written essays.

Process-oriented portfolio. To emphasize the constant change of cultural phenomena, the intercultural learning assignment encouraged students to do continuous exploration and revise their task essays. However, only Grace revised two of her essays, and Sofia, one. The rare revision seems natural, considering that most students perceived the assignment as time-consuming and the allocated eight percent of the semester grade as inadequate for the amount of work required. When asked whether he would revise any essay, Sean honestly admitted, “It depends on what grades it is. If I already get B, I won’t feel need to revise them. But if I get a D or a low C, then I’ll revise all of them” (FG 2: 145).

The insufficient exploration time allowed students to barely finish the task essays, let alone do the revision. Megan and Wren both expressed the desire to do more research *if* they had not been limited by time (FG 1: 193, 197, 203, 205; for exact wording, see excerpts above). When asked which task essay she would have revised, Megan offered an interesting theory:

Megan: To be honest, none of them. I kind of feel I had done my best for the tasks. I read a few articles. I talked with people. I wrote it down. I don’t think I need to revise them. I don’t see the need of writing it down if I’m learning. I’m just lazy, I guess.

T: So you have your rationale not to revise them?

Megan: ‘Cuz I feel that I’m learning it, and I don’t have the necessity to write it down. This is the information that I just learned and is going to continue developing. I don’t see the need to revise it. And also the time restriction. (FG 1: 163-165)

Megan’s explanation should not be taken as an excuse to avoid more work; her excellent task essays had proved her diligence in completing the assignment and

dedication to intercultural learning. Importantly, her explanation sheds light on students' perspectives on learning and suggests directions for improving the intercultural learning assignment. For Megan, the learning process was much more important than the product; since she had gone through the learning processes and completed the tasks, she felt that she did not need to change the investigation products. Her explanation also reveals her perspective on culture, which could be represented in terms of "the information that [she] just learned" and did not need revising because the world, as well as the information about it, was "going to continue developing" anyway. She felt it impossible to capture the constantly changing cultures or successfully update the information that she could obtain, so revision was unnecessary.

Theme 2: Accessibility to Chinese Speakers

The theme of accessibility and validity of the information from native speakers emerged in a majority of students' task essays. This theme repeated in the focus groups and underwent further discussions. Analyses of focus group interview data show that students found little access to native speakers in the school community. The barrier was associated with students' learning situations and the foreign language learning context. Their inability to build relationships with the native speakers might be the main cause for the ineffective communication and elicitation of information. Participants indicated that they felt they might have had difficulty eliciting true thoughts from their informants. The students were also concerned about whether the native speakers they could access represented regular Chinese-speakers.

Limited Accessibility to Language Exchange Partners

To the students who did not have the experience of living or traveling in a Chinese-speaking community, the language exchange partner was a critical resource. In the beginning of the semester prior to this research project, Dr. Johnson and I arranged two gatherings in which the American students taking the Chinese courses and international students from China or Taiwan were paired as language exchange partners and made traditional Chinese dumplings together. The student participants in this study were also encouraged to interview other Chinese native speakers in the school community. However, only four of the 15 student participants (Sofia, Megan, Grace, and Laura) effectively conducted interviews. For students who did not complete their interviews, obstacles could be attributed to the following: residence distance, time constraints, and insufficient Chinese proficiency, as shown in the following discussions of Helen's, Sofia's, and Brian's reflections on their interactions with their language exchange partners.

As I had noted earlier, in general, students felt that the intercultural learning portfolio was time-consuming. Some students lived off-campus and could not access their language exchange partners who lived on campus. Helen reflected on her first response to the assignment:

Oh, crap! I have a lot of credits. At first I didn't have a language exchange partner. Even now that I do, I don't get to see him a lot just because I have so much going this semester. I live in Fort Collins and commute every day. I can't arrange regular time to meet him. So I was worried that I wouldn't be able to do a good job on it. (FG 1: 11)

In Helen's situation, the poor accessibility to informants was a natural consequence of her busy schedule and off-campus residence. She found it impossible

to overcome the physical distance via telecommunication technology, as her response to my question shows:

T: You said your language exchange partner didn't offer help?

Helen: Yeah, it's hard to do emails 'cuz he didn't understand what I was saying. I emailed him. He would ask me what my questions mean and said he needs time to think about them. But he never replied. Then I emailed again. He said, "Well, we need to meet and talk about this." I was like, "Okay." But it was just hard to meet him, to make time to do that. (FG 1: 35-36)

Helen's inability to overcome the physical distance from her language partner by using emails, together with her partner's insistence on meeting, indicates that face-to-face interviews might be more beneficial than contacts through emails when language exchange partners from different cultural linguistic communities did not know each other well enough to complete the ethnographic task together.

In contrast to Helen's distressing interactions with her language exchange partner, Sofia's frequent interactions with her language exchange partner show that the busy schedule and physical distance were not unsolvable obstacles. Sofia's language exchange partner, Liying, had a busy schedule pursuing her master's degree. She moved out of town for an internship during the semester prior to this research project. However, when living on campus, Sofia and Liying had regular meetings on the weekends for one year and a half and built friendships. Therefore, even though both of them had an increasingly tight schedule and lived far away, they could maintain their friendship and have regular contacts through email. The following excerpt indicates how the ability to manage time, patience, and persistence, in addition to the relationship formerly built, helped overcome the constraints of time and distance:

Since my language exchange partner lives in Denver, we do all of our communicating through email. So I would write her an email like a week before it [the task] was due, and it would usually take her up until almost the time it

was due to respond. And then that was when I could actually sit down and write it out, but I had to plan ahead of time. (FG 1: 23)

As I discussed in Chapter 4, Liying's knowledge about Chinese languages and the cultural phenomena in Taiwan was the main information source for Sofia's task essays 1 and 4. In effect, among all the student participants, Sofia had the most frequent contacts with her language exchange partner and was the only one that fully recognized the contribution of the language exchange partnership to intercultural learning.

Brian's reflections on his interaction with his language exchange partner further confirm my argument that the main obstacle of accessing language exchange partners was not the time constraints or physical distance but the lack of relationship with the language exchange partner:

I like Asian culture so much. But at the same time, when I met my language exchange partner, I felt he didn't seem very excited about it. I also went to their house and asked them questions. But I felt they were like, annoyed, like, they were not welcoming me. So I was kind of disappointed. So I just didn't go back there. (FG 2: 168)

Both Brian and his language exchange partner were college students living on campus. Normally, they should have been able to contact each other more frequently than Sofia and Liying. However, Sofia met her language exchange partner regularly and built a friendship with her before she moved out of town, but neither Brian nor Helen met their language exchange partner until two weeks before they began the intercultural learning project. Helen and Brian seemed to lack the skills and persistence necessary for building relationships when the possibility for doing so presented itself.

Preparation for accessing informants. In addition to building relationships early on, Sofia's preparations for accessing informants may have also contributed to her

effective information collection. To increase access to native speakers and immersion in Chinese cultural practices, I arranged a field trip to a Chinese restaurant for a traditional hotpot meal and to an Asian supermarket for grocery shopping on the weekend after Task 1 was announced. Five students (Sofia, Wren, Laura, Leo, and Jessie) joined the trip, along with three Chinese native speakers from Taiwan (Sofia's language exchange partner, Liying, Liying's fiancée, and Laura's language exchange partner, Ming). Both Laura and Sofia considered the trip to be a good opportunity for them to have face-to-face interactions with the native Chinese speakers. During the trip, Laura "talked to everyone in the car on the way" and obtained most of the needed information for Task 1 (FG 2: 39). Sofia recalled:

The first one I did on our trip to Denver. I have already known that I'm going to see Liying and her fiancée. First I did all my research online before I went to see them and knew where my resources would be, and then went to Denver, and got to ask the international students who went there with us the stereotypes, things like that. And then I went home and wrote it up outright after that. (FG 1: 26)

On the trip, Sofia interviewed the three Taiwanese people about their stereotypes of American people. After the trip, Sofia wrote down her findings immediately for Task 1-2, drawing upon the information she had collected from the Chinese speakers on the field trip.

Representativeness of Native Speakers and the Validity of the Information they Supply

Another problem reported in obtaining information from native speakers was that the native speakers who were available for interviews might not provide representative information for the majority of Chinese speakers that lived in their homeland without traveling abroad. Such concerns imply a presumption that leaving

from the homeland might lead to losing cultural heritage and representativeness of the other group members who stay in the homeland. The presumption indicates students' perceived Chinese cultural representations. The Chinese speakers who live overseas for a considerable period of time inevitably become different from the average Chinese speakers who do not. The analysis of Brian's reflection on the disappointing interactions with his language exchange partner (FG 2: 168; see excerpt above) suggests that students may be able to access native speakers, but they may be reluctant to provide information if the American student had not built a relationship with them. Analyses of Megan's interactions with the native speakers indicate another set of problems regarding obtaining information from native speakers, namely, questions regarding native speakers' provision of valid information. At the end of the semester before this research project, Megan became romantically involved with an exchange student from China named Young. When asked whether she brainstormed for Task 1 with her Chinese boyfriend, Megan replied:

Not so much with my boyfriend. One of the major roles is my roommate, my American roommate. She is getting involved into Chinese culture a lot in last few years. So I was getting fresh insights from her. I also have a Taiwanese roommate who grew up in America. But it's hard to get information because she grew up in the States so there's no clear-cut culture that she belongs to. And I contacted my language exchange partners, who usually ignored me. They would say, "Oh, I need time to think about it." But then they wouldn't get back to me. Then at the very end, I would either use the Internet or Young. But it was just too troublesome to try to explain that to him. When I asked him 'what is your stereotype?' He asked me 'what does stereotype mean?' (FG 1: 28)

In Megan's situation, she had sufficient accessibility to more than four informants from different backgrounds: her Anglo U.S. roommate, who had previously studied Chinese culture, her Taiwanese U.S. roommate, her language exchange partners from Taiwan, and her boyfriend from China. Ironically, it was her Anglo roommate, the

only non-native Chinese speaker, who gave Megan the most useful information. The Chinese native speakers did not provide the same amount or quality of information, which Megan interpreted as attributable to shyness and politeness.

Based on my own experience as a Taiwanese graduate student studying in the United States, I would argue that one of the possible explanations for Megan's language exchange partners' "shy" or "polite" responses was that the request for their stereotypes about the U.S. was too aggressive to the international students who had just arrived in the U.S. less than one semester before. The topic regarding stereotypes towards someone's country is sensitive in any cross-cultural encounters; criticizing the hosting country and its people may be considered impolite. Most newcomers to any community would avoid making direct comments on sensitive topics and would be more likely to be polite, in the way that Megan's language exchange partners did when asked about their stereotypes about the U.S.

Sofia's reflection upon her responses when asked about sensitive topics she encountered when traveling in China supports my argument. When Sofia went out for dinner with her roommate and two other Chinese girls, the Chinese students "immediately started asking" the American students what they thought "about the Chinese Communist Party and the status of Taiwan" (FG 1: 136). Sofia recalled:

They [i.e., the Chinese students] would start to say, 'we all think Taiwanese people should all think they are part of China because it's all their culture relevance,' and things like that. We all kind of like let it go. But inside I know it's different. You know, Taiwan is another country. (FG 1: 142)

The American students chose not to express their true thoughts on the sensitive topic of Chinese-Taiwanese relations. To the "sudden" questions "about gays and lesbians" and other "things [the local people] think would be hot topics," Sofia and the

other American students just “tried to blow it off and not talk about that” (FG 1: 142).

Megan’s Chinese-speaking informants may have found themselves in a similar situation and used corresponding avoidance strategies.

Megan did try her best to make her language exchange partners talk. However, her encouragement, “Come on, I’ve heard people criticize your culture. Now it’s your turn to criticize US culture,” (FG 1: 86.2) failed to produce the desired results. The Taiwanese students became more reserved and elusive (“I’ll get back to you,” FG 1: 86.4). It is not surprising that the international students newly arriving in the U.S. dared not “criticize US culture” or share their real “thoughts about US culture” (FG 1: 86.2) but instead, adopted the same hedging strategy adopted by the American students when asked to comment on topics that they thought inappropriate for themselves as foreigners to address, for example, the relationship between China and Taiwan.

Informants’ and researcher’s bias. Megan’s reflections on the interviews with her informants provided important insight into how learners-as-ethnographers interacted with native speakers in the LEA’s country. The following is an excerpt in which Megan recalls interviewing American and Chinese speakers about their stereotypes of each other. The one-minute monologue illustrates the perceived difficulty in obtaining valid, representative, and “honest” information from Chinese speakers located in the U.S. To clearly demonstrate the issues under discussion, I divided the long monologue into four excerpts and represented them to the corresponding issues. In the beginning, Megan compared the information she collected from U.S. people and Chinese speakers:

It’s easier to get U.S. opinions about Chinese people. They [i.e., the Americans] either gave me very shallow opinions they got from the media, or TV shows, or

they had really intense strong opinions. *But* from the opposite [Chinese speakers'] side, it's kind of difficult because until recently US people were so admired and had such a good image. It's hard for them to get rid of their bias because when they learned English in China or in Taiwan, they kind of developed an ideal image of America. Or they kind of being shy to honestly tell you what they really thought about US culture. (FG 1: 86.1)

Megan noticed that the informants may have biases due to the influence of the mass media or formal education. Her American informants' gave her extreme opinions which were either reproduced media representations or were considered by her to be "too intense." In contrast, she perceived her Chinese informants as having been influenced by the English education for too long to make "honest" critiques of the U.S. or to have "bias" towards the U.S. culture or people.

Megan was not only concerned about the quality of the information provided by her informants but also about the potential bias of the LAE researcher. Following the frustrating interactions with her Chinese speaker informants, Megan decided to explain her difficulties in terms of her own interpretations, which she viewed as researcher's bias. She stated:

And then I kind of wanted to put in my stereotypes. My stereotypes were like what Japanese people think about U.S. people or what U.S. people may think of Asian people in general. You know, not separate the Asian cultures, which makes sense; all Europeans are Europeans to me. (FG 1: 86.3)

As a Japanese American, Megan had abundant experiences of crossing cultural borders. She was born in Japan, used Japanese and English as primary languages, left her mother's homeland for her father's, and was learning Chinese as an additional language in a U.S. university. Perhaps because of these experiences, she was aware of how ethnic background and history of residency (having lived in a distinct ethnic neighborhood) shaped one's interpretation of cultural phenomena. She noted the

overgeneralizations that Americans made about Asian peoples, and that Japanese people made about Americans and viewed the overgeneralization as natural.

Representativeness of native speakers. Another issue raised regarding the validity of information obtained from Chinese speakers was their representativeness vis-à-vis *average Chinese speakers*. Megan questioned whether her roommate Fay could represent an average Taiwanese person. In Megan's words, Fay's family was from Taiwan, "but she grew up in America" (FG 1: 34), and therefore, "it's hard to get information [on Chinese culture] because she grew up in the States, so there's no clear cut culture that she *belongs to*" (FG 1: 28). Brian and Grace expressed similar concerns in their task essays. They questioned whether their language exchange partner, Ray, could represent the other Chinese speakers as she left China for America after she graduated from elementary school and became "Americanized" (Brian, task essay 6; Grace, task essay 6). In the focus group, Grace and Brian brought up this issue again (FG 2: 37 & 68). Grace said, "I usually called Ray and brainstormed with her. But it's different because I've been to China more recently than she. She has lived here [in the U.S.] for so long" (FG 2: 37). It is noteworthy that Grace traveled in China for only one month whereas Ray was born and grew up in China till finishing her primary school education. It seems that Grace outweighed her recent experience over Ray's ethnic background and considerably long experience of living in China in terms of the validity of interpreting cultural phenomena.

The issue regarding the native speakers' representativeness can be related to the participants' concept of "nativeness," revealed in a different semantic context. At the end of the focus group, when I asked the participants whether they had anything else to

say before leaving, Sofia brought up the issue of cultural representativeness by comparing learning with a native speaking teacher and a non-native speaker teacher:

I think this has been a really good experience having a native speaking teacher. 'Cuz I had Dr. Johnson last semester. She is a Chinese but she didn't learn the language until later in life and didn't necessarily grow up in that culture. So it's been good to have a professor who has grown up in that culture and known different cultural aspects a LOT. 'Cuz you are able to see things that we wouldn't necessarily see or distinguish. I mean, just the difference in how you interact with us versus, like, a normal US teacher. It's just so different (FG 1: 213)

To Sofia, a native speaker “who has grown up in that culture” would know different cultural aspects, notice things that foreign language learners and non-native speaker teachers would ignore, and interact with students differently from a non-native speaker instructor. In contrast, the non-native speaker teacher, despite his or her ethnicity, may not be able to offer cultural information as much as native speaker teachers because they did not “grow up in that culture” or “learn the language until later in life.”

Following Sofia's comments, Megan concluded, “I think for us beginners it is a good experience to have you [a native speaker teacher] culturally and linguistically” (FG 1: 219). In the other focus group, Brian made a similar comment: “You were unlike her [Dr. Johnson] because you are from that culture” (FG 2: 205). Here, the students ignored the fact that Dr. Johnson grew up with her parents and grandmother who practiced Chinese traditions at home. She was thus categorized as belonging to the same ontological status as other native Chinese speakers who were considered to have “insufficient nativeness” or representativeness. It is important to note that Dr. Johnson not only grew up in a Chinese-speaking household, she also majored in Chinese literature in college and lived in China and Taiwan as an exchange student for almost

two years doing post-doc research. It seems that the students gave greater weight to the *recent* experience of living in the target culture over a person's background or lifetime of experience in terms of an instructor's ability to facilitate intercultural learning.

Theme 3: Validity of information on the Internet

The Internet seemed more accessible than native speakers and was therefore an important information source for almost all the students in this non-immersion intercultural learning program. Analyses of the interview transcriptions show that there were at least two issues regarding using the Internet: the difficulty in selecting valid information from the Internet and integrating it with the information from interviews.

Quality of the Online Information

Students' reflections on using the Internet as a primary information resource show that using the Internet explorations as part of the non-immersion LAE approach had fundamental challenges along with the potentiality for intercultural learning. The Internet offers an overwhelming amount of information, which requires skills in evaluating the quality of information. At the same time, accessibility to the online information about Chinese language and culture was often limited to English websites for these students who were not proficient in Chinese.

Wren's situation discussed below indicates that students' proficiency level is a key concern in conducting Internet intercultural research. Wren faced the challenge of selecting "relevant" information from a small pool for Task 2 in which he discussed how the Treaty of Versailles influenced jazz music in the U.S. and China. He said, "I don't have much information about that in some ways, but in other ways, there's a *lot* of information about that." It was difficult because on one hand, "there's not that much

written about it,” but on the other hand, one “could probably write an entire book about how the Treaty of Versailles influenced jazz music [in China]” (FG 1: 82). Another problem encountered was contradictory information. Helen found that “there wasn’t a lot of information, but then sometimes there was. And sometimes they would contradict each other.” As a consequence, it was “hard to decide which one to believe” (FG 1: 96). When asked which task was most difficult, Mia said Task 2 because she “got a lot of data,” felt “confused,” and ended up “writing a wrong thing anyway” (FG 2: 89). The Internet provided students with an abundance of information that required them to make a sensible selection, which is never easy, even to experienced users. The students’ reflections show that using intercultural explorations as part of the non-immersion LAE approach had these fundamental challenges in addition to the potentiality for intercultural learning.

Determining the authenticity of translated information and its potential bias was another challenge presented by Internet research in the LAE approach. Wren found that doing accurate research on Chinese culture was difficult because he was unable to read Chinese very well. He reported:

It would take me forever to take a Chinese book and read. So when I read information [written in English or translated into English], I don’t know how accurate it is, how biased it is. Because I only have English resources and I don’t have other resources to compare it. And then I can’t look at the primary source. (FG 1: 100)

Later, Wren compared his exploration experience in completing the intercultural learning assignment with what he had experienced in other courses. He said:

To me, how accurate the sources were is always the question. I’ve written some scholarly papers on history where there are some accesses to primary resources. In that situation, it’s easier to make a conclusion because it’s kind of having a backup. (FG 1: 157)

To Wren, referring to primary resources written in Chinese could help decrease the potential bias of the translated information but at the same time was impractical due to his insufficient Chinese language proficiency. When asked which task he would revise and why, Wren referred to Task 2 and re-emphasized the importance of one's language ability in accomplishing an excellent intercultural learning assignment:

But I think to really do it [i.e., Task 2], I think I'll need probably better Chinese language ability, or even be in Taiwan or China, to be able to talk with people about what I'm going to research. That'll be a real research project. (FG 1: 183)

Wren considered the fieldwork of interviewing the local people in their language as the only approach to conducting cultural studies. Even though Wren's Chinese proficiency was comparatively higher than most of his classmates, the belief that only research conducted in the informants' language counted a "real research project" added a challenge to conduct intercultural research in a basic level of target language.

Integrating the Information from the Internet and Interviews

Sofia and Grace were the only two student participants who revised their task essays. The revision indicates their engagement in the intercultural learning assignment. Therefore, their inquiry processes warranted further analysis. The results show that their inquiry processes were different from those of the other three student participants who had the experience of living in a Chinese-speaking community (Steve, Terry, and Sean). Grace and Sofia did not simply recall their memories in writing without doing further investigation. Instead, both Grace and Sofia interviewed their language exchange partners in addition to, and as a way to corroborate, searches on the Internet. Before meeting her language exchange partner for her first task, Sofia searched the

Internet to have a basic idea about the task and what she could and should ask her language exchange partner (FG 1: 26; see excerpt above).

Grace's reflections reveal more information about the inquiry processes. When asked how she initiated the investigation for Task 1, she recalled:

I called Ray [Grace's language exchange partner] and talked about it and called my parents [who used to live in China for awhile] and talked about it because I didn't know the topic so much, and started to write it, and just knocked it out. And then when you sent feedback to me, I would take way longer. And most of the revisions I sent you back are like twice longer. (FG 2: 20)

For the first task, Grace interviewed the native speaker and used her "background knowledge," to which she referred the immersion experiences of her own and of her parents' (FG 2: 53). She "didn't really look on the Internet" (FG 2: 37). However, for her third task essay on the drinking practices, which she was dedicated to, she utilized the information through interactions with the local people when she traveled in China, from her interviews with her language exchange partner in the U.S., and from several websites on the Internet (Grace, task essay 5). In the focus group, after Steve claimed that the "people who actually lived over there" had the "advantage" because they could simply draw upon their immersion experiences in their task essays ("just put it straight", FG 2: 51), Grace said, "I'm doing my third paper, which I'm on halfway now. It's way harder than the first two because I have to do research on the Internet instead of using background knowledge" (FG 2: 52). The integration of multiple information resources resulted in more citations covering a wider variety of information types in her essay for Task 5 than in her essays for Tasks 1 and 3 or the essays written by Steve, Sean, or Terry, all of whom had a longer immersion experience than she did. The comparison implies that a short-term study abroad experience may

engage students to intercultural learning after they return. They might continue to explore multiple information sources, integrate the information, adjust their findings, and work out a high quality of investigation.

Theme 4: Study Abroad Experiences

Echoing the findings of students' perspectives on the study abroad experience in their task essays, analyses of the interview transcriptions show that a majority of students, whether they had been in a Chinese-speaking community or not, believed in the benefit of study abroad for intercultural learning. Nevertheless, the students who had joined the summer study-abroad trip in China did not feel more confident with the language-oriented tasks than those who had not been. Only the students who had *lived* in a Chinese-speaking community for at least two years and *interacted frequently* with the locals did not feel difficult with the language-oriented tasks. The intercultural learning assignment pushed them to revisit past memories, which then became an asset for completing the tasks. On the other hand, the students tended to over-rely on their past experiences without doing further investigation.

The students who had the experience of living in a Chinese-speaking community for at least two years felt confident with the assignment, as indicated by Sean's description of his attitudinal change when receiving the assignment:

I didn't really know what to expect. So I was a little nervous. Then I thought of my experience of living in Singapore. As the neighborhood is mostly Chinese, I got a lot of experience. So I feel more excited. (FG 2: 12)

Steve made a similar assertion:

We're at a greater advantage; like, people who actually lived over there. Because I can just recall everything I ever saw in China, and I just put it straight in my paper. (FG 2: 51)

Indeed, even the students who had never been to a Chinese-speaking community believed that the experience of being in a Chinese-speaking community contributed to intercultural learning. Brian considered having the immersion experience essential for completing the language-oriented tasks. When asked which task was most difficult, Brian answered:

The linguistics one, because, I mean, you guys (looking at Steve and Grace) have the advantage of being to China so you have the experience. But I think it is disadvantage [to us] because we [i.e., the people who did not the experience of being in China] can [only] do online research. But for linguistics, you really have to hear it, [and then] you know it. You really have to be in that environment. You can research it, but you're not going to really clearly understand it if you haven't really been in that environment to hear it hands-on. (FG 2: 80)

Brian regarded Task 3 on the situational factors influencing language use as most difficult because it required language information that he thought could only be obtained by being immersed in the target language community. Brian's remarks on his disadvantaged situation indicate the scarce linguistic exposure to Chinese in the context of learning Chinese as a foreign language and the limitation of a non-immersion language program. It also reveals a foreign language learner's perspectives on the LAE approach. For Brian, the learners who had not been to the community of the target language could only rely on the Internet for information, which, in his mind was not sufficient for adequately completing language-oriented tasks.

Brian further established his position against using the Internet as an appropriate information resource:

T: Speaking of the access, the environment, can you not get the information from online?

Brian: You can get information from online, but you can't get the

+Grace: It's hard to get the Chinese perceptions of America and U.S. unless you

can talk to the actual people. That's why I shouldn't go on the search engine. (FG 2: 82-84)

Although Brian did not finish his sentence due to Grace's interruption, his use of *but* indicates that he was most likely going to de-value the online information. After Grace's argument against Internet searches, Brian re-emphasized the value of immersion, "I think in that sense, it wouldn't always be 100% correct or clear data; because you haven't really been in that environment, you can't really judge it" (FG 2: 85). For him, the immersion experience was the only reference point from which to judge the accuracy of Internet information. Similar to Brian, Laura had never been to a Chinese-speaking country and believed that the immersion experience was the legitimate point of reference for judging the validity of Internet information. She said, "I search online too. But it's kind of hard to decide which sites and information are true, 'cuz I haven't been there" (FG 2: 56).

Although student participants tended to believe in the advantage of having the immersion experience for completing the language-oriented tasks, the immersion experience did not guarantee that the students who had been to a Chinese-speaking community would obtain the needed information. Tasks 2 and 3 were also difficult for those who had been to a Chinese-speaking country. Sofia found it difficult to explore "different dialects across China" or "many different languages in Taiwan" for Task 3 in the non-immersion context. She admitted that the majority of the information she wrote came from her language exchange partner, because "actually finding the material and references is really hard" (FG 1: 97). Her study abroad experience did not facilitate her second task as much as Brian, Laura, or Steve believed it would, perhaps because of the fact that her one-month stay in China was too short for a learner who had not received

formal Chinese instructions prior to the trip. The lack of threshold language skills may have prevented the beginner from paying attention to the language input while she was “in the environment.”

Indeed, foreign language researchers have found that exposures to language were not enough for language learning. Only *comprehensive input* would facilitate language acquisition (Krashen, 1986). Among the five students who had been in a Chinese-speaking community, Steve and Terry lived in China or Taiwan and seemed to have been able to notice and learn from their linguistic surroundings when they were there. While most students viewed Task 2 or Task 3 as most difficult, Steve and Terry enjoyed completing these language-oriented tasks. Steve had lived in China for two years, interacting with his Chinese housekeeper’s family on a daily basis (Steve, task essay 3). He was the only student out of the 15 participants that completed an extra-credit task. He completed both of the language-oriented tasks: Task 2 on contextual factors to language use and Task 3 on situational factors shaping language use. As discussed in Chapter Four, Steve’s Task essay 3 demonstrated his remarkable knowledge of Chinese and the related cultural practices which were not taught in the textbooks; most of his essays drew upon the memories of what he experienced in China (FG 2: 51; see excerpt above).

Terry, who had lived in Taiwan for two years, impressed me with his Taiwanese Mandarin accent and his description of its tendency to use nasalized sounds and softeners at the end of sentences. Megan noticed Terry’s language knowledge about the subtle use and slang in Chinese and cultural practices as well. She attributed it to his two-year mission experience in Taiwan:

Terry: I like the one: demonstrate awareness of social or religious factors on communication. I like the religious one since that's what I did for two years. When I was in Taiwan, I had opportunities to *talk* about religions *with the local people*, and the *arguments* turned out to be *discussion* about Buddhism, baibai [i.e., prayer]. That's interesting. So I just shared some experiences.

Megan: Can I share something very quickly? I personally think it interesting and very good how Mormon people, when they go out on their missionaries, *they can learn language and culture so much on the local community*. Like, I knew a Mormon guy in my Japanese class, Steven. He used to be in the missionary in Japan for awhile, and he loved the culture. I was so surprised that he learned a lot of Japanese culture, and his language skill is amazing. I felt his religion is integrated so much with culture.

Terry: That's what we would say. People ask where we learn Chinese, and we would say: 路上大學 [street university]. (FG 1: 78-80)

In this excerpt, Terry describes how his religion created opportunities for him to use his target language to talk, discuss, and even argue with the local people. Megan recognized the contribution of the immersion experience to learning “language and culture so much.” Terry’s response to Megan’s compliment confirms that he agreed that such immersion use of the target language in authentic settings was the key to his deep language and cultural learning.

Use of the In-situ Experiences in Completing the Assignment

It appears that the five students who had had an immersion experience felt confident with the intercultural learning assignment because they could complete the ethnographic tasks by recalling memories or obtaining information from the local people with whom they had built relationships when they were in the Chinese-speaking community. There were differences within this group, however, determined by the length of stay abroad. The students who had lived in a Chinese-speaking community for a comparatively longer period of time, like Sean, Steve, and Terry, tended to use the immersion experiences as the main, if not the only, information source. In contrast, the

two female students who had stayed in China for only one month used their immersion experiences as one among many sources of linguistic and cultural information. Both Sofia and Grace searched for information from the Internet and interviewed their language exchange partners, other Chinese speakers, or other people who had the immersion experience (e.g., Grace's parents), as I discussed at the end of the section of Theme 3.

Connections with native speakers. Living in a Chinese-speaking community for a certain period of time was helpful in another way, which was ongoing social networks with local people whom they could access for information for the LAE tasks. For example, Terry was in contact through emails with the Taiwanese people he had made friends with when he was in Taiwan (FG 1: 45). Steve asked his Chinese friends for their stereotypes about Americans for Task 1 through the online communication service (FG 2: 62). It may have been due to easy access to old connections that resulted in the three male students circumventing the language partner requirement. After listening to his classmates talk about their disappointing interactions with language exchange partners, Sean abruptly asked, "We had to have a partner?" (FG 2: 64) In the discussion of the language exchange partners, Steve replied, "I actually don't have anyone" (FG 2: 60), and continued, "It [my first task essay] was all from my [Chinese] friends. I talked with them online" (FG 2: 62). Terry had a similar response (FG 1: 43).

Impact of long stay. While previous immersion experiences were viewed as lending validity to students' assumptions and even as a necessity for the intercultural learning assignment, it may have also prevented the students from searching multiple information sources for further investigation. Terry said that he "*always* used [his]

memories” (FG 1: 102) and that in his task essays he “*just* shared some experiences” (FG 1: 78). Steve said that for completing the tasks he had to “*just* recall everything that [he] saw in China” and “*just* put it straight in [his] paper” (FG 2: 51). The use of *just* in Terry’s and Steve’s reflections not only indicates their confidence in drawing upon their past immersion experience to complete the assignment, but also implies that they may not do further investigation. When asked how much time he spent on each task, Sean answered: “it didn’t take long because I didn’t do the research part” (FG 2: 25).

One of the reasons why the students relied too much on their past immersion experiences instead of doing further investigation is that it was an easy information source. Grace, who had attended the one-month summer program in China, admitted that she felt she “could easily write two pages” for the tasks “without looking at something else [*sic.* doing any research]” (FG 2: 116). Therefore, the first two tasks were difficult to her because “it’s hard to sit down by researching things you think you already know about” (FG 2: 116). Not until Task 5 did Grace begin to search for information on the Internet, interview her language exchange partner, and integrate information from multiple sources with her immersion experience in China. The result was a thoughtful and intriguing essay about the different social meanings of drinking in China and the U.S. Thus, different stay lengths in a Chinese-speaking community seemed to lead to different *degrees of engagement* in the research assignment.

Theme 5: Cultural Representations

In Chapter 4, I discussed the issues regarding the Chinese cultural representations in students’ task essays, including over-generalization of Asian cultures,

over-emphasis on ancient China, and neglect of the Chinese-speaking communities other than China. Analyses of the interview transcriptions expanded the theme beyond Chinese cultural representations. An additional theme emerged: students' perspectives on culture moved from defining culture by national boundary to seeing cultural as situational representations co-constructed by the group members.

Experiences of Crossing Cultural Borders in Completing the Intercultural Learning Assignment

Megan was a Japanese American born in Okinawa, an island “geographically and culturally” remote from the mainland Japan, in Megan’s words. In Okinawa there is an U.S. military base and mixed marriage is common. Megan has spoken Japanese with her Japanese mother and English with her American father for as long as she can remember. She received her elementary school education in a traditional Japanese school and her middle school education in an American school in Japan and then came to the U.S. for college education. Her reflection, “My stereotypes were, like, what Japanese people think about U.S. people or what U.S. people might think of Asian people in general” (FG 1: 86.3), suggests that she positioned herself halfway between Japanese people and American people.

In her senior year, Megan took the Elementary Chinese course because she was “very interested in Chinese characters” (FG 1: 77). During the period of this research, she had been living with a European American and a Chinese American (Fay) for approximately three years and dating a young Chinese man (Young) for one semester. Although Megan had never been to a Chinese-speaking country, she constantly crossed the cultural borders from Japanese culture to American culture and Chinese culture and

made continuous observations about the cultures roughly defined by nationality. The unique demographic background along with her rich experience of cultural boundary crossing may have caused Megan to do constant comparative analyses, giving her a different perspective from her classmates. Analyses of Megan's reflections show that she noted other students' over-generalization of Asian cultures, their lack of knowledge about China's development, and their bias in cross-cultural encounters including her own investigation for the intercultural learning assignment.

After Megan described her interviews with the American informants for Task 1,

Wren asked:

Wren: So did people actually say, like, bad stereotypes about *Chinese* people?

Megan: Yeah.

Wren: 'Cuz everyone I know has been like, "*Asians* are really good students, and they're really polite"

+Megan: Yeah, what I heard is either "they're very smart"

+Wren: Yeah

+Megan: Or "you'll never know what they're thinking, so they're scary." Or, like, I got "money hunger" as one of the negative aspects. That was pretty strong among my business friends. They said they tend to see that more amongst *Asians*, I guess not necessarily Chinese. (FG 1: 87-92)

Wren and Megan asked their American informants for stereotypes about "Chinese people," but they replied with impressions about "Asians." In the end of this conversation, Megan explicitly pointed out the other students' tendency to over-generalize about Asians.

The following excerpt reveals Megan's constant comparisons and interpretations of Japanese and Chinese cultures:

I was weird in the Japanese schools because I made a lot of mistakes. But I wanted to read the characters anyway. Is there a similar saying in China? Because in Japan, they say 'A nail that sticks out gets hit right away.' Like, you're not supposed to stand out. (FG 1: 253)

Megan's question indicates that she distinguished between Chinese culture and Japanese culture instead of lumping them together as "Asian cultures." She was aware that common sayings disclose cultural values and that educational goals may differ from culture to culture.

Megan was constantly comparing the Japanese culture she was from and the Chinese or Taiwanese culture she was exploring, as indicated in the following excerpt:

Megan: One thing I want to bring up is, I was impressed by how Taiwanese or Chinese people are honest about their pride for their countries.

T: Pride?

Megan: Yeah, their cultures, their countries, everything. They're very honest, whereas the culture I grew up [i.e. Japanese], that's opposite. You put down. Like, if you marry someone, you talked about the bad things of your husband. That's the norm.

T: Did I give you that impression?

Megan: At times. It's not direct, but I can see there's [a] cultural difference. (FG 1: 120-124)

Again, Megan distinguished between the cultures of three Asian countries. She found that Taiwanese and Chinese people were proud of their countries while Japanese people tended to be modest on the topic. Moreover, this excerpt shows Megan's confidence in her ability to see cultural differences.

Unlike her classmates who tended to locate their discussions of Chinese culture in ancient China, Megan noted China's development, as indicated in her reflections on her conversations with her boyfriend Young. She found that "some words and usage existed in his grandfather's generation but not anymore," and "how much development is going on in China." Moreover, by comparing the "new ideologies" of the "new generation" in China to those in Japan, Megan acknowledged that "China is still a developing country." She concluded that China was a country whose "development seemed to have happened in Japan, like, maybe three generations ago" (FG 1: 77).

These comparisons confirm my observation that Megan distinguished between the cultural representations of these two countries instead of viewing them as “Asian cultures.”

Although Megan did not over-generalize Asian cultures, she argued that over-generalization and making stereotypes are unavoidable. After Wren voiced his concerns about the validity of information translated or written by English writers (FG 1: 100), Megan said:

Yeah, that happened to me, too. I think that paper itself was written by a Chinese person about America, and it was very *biased*, too, so it's really difficult to figure out what's *good* and what's not. Like the TV shows in Japanese. They would say something like “here are some things you didn't know about U.S.” So they're trying to get rid of *stereotypes* and giving you the *recent* information. But this recent information seems *typical* or *biased*. It's kind of difficult to get information from a different country about that country. (FG 1: 101)

Megan proposed that cultural representations by members of other cultural groups tended to be biased, despite their attempts to avoid stereotypes. It is noteworthy that her argument was based on the assumption of a one-to-one correspondence between nationality and authorship of the national cultural representations. To her, only national citizens could interpret the culture *of their own* without bias. That is, Japanese people understand Japanese culture best and interpret it most correctly. Only Chinese people can interpret Chinese culture without stereotype. To Megan, information about American culture, whether represented in the books written by Chinese authors or in the TV shows produced by Japanese people, could be as biased as the information that the students found about Chinese-speaking communities.

Furthermore, Megan noted the common unawareness of the inevitable stereotypes made by any foreigners when trying to represent the culture of other

countries. This overgeneralization “makes sense” to her, because she had found that “all Europeans are Europeans to me” (FG 1: 86.3). She honestly admitted her own bias due to her ethnic background: “My stereotypes were like what Japanese people think about U.S. people or what U.S. people may think of Asian people in general.”

Situational Cultural Representations

Toward the end of the first focus group, the students’ conversations gradually shifted away from the interview topics that I had prepared. Spontaneous reflections upon their intercultural learning experiences and cross-cultural encounters arose. Topics related to the contribution of a native-speaker teacher and classroom culture emerged. It seems that students’ perceptions of Chinese cultural representations and perspectives on culture changed as the focus group moved on and became more like a casual sharing of cross-cultural encounters than a structured interview. The free talks centered on the codes of classroom courtesy. In the beginning, the group participants distinguished the cultural practice by national boundary, but gradually they seemed to achieve a consensus that cultural practices were co-constructed by the group members according to the temporal situation rather than the defined nationality. Analyses of the discursive talks yield information to the second research question regarding students’ perspectives on intercultural learning. The results of rich data regarding students’ perceptions on the cultural practice in discussion and perspectives on culture emerging from the spontaneous interactions indicate that research on cultural learning needs to analyze learners’ discursive behaviors in addition to the data collected through structured methods. The results of analyses also suggest that the LAE approach should

include open discussions for learners to learn from each other and widen their perspectives.

Sofia brought up the topic of native speaker teachers when I encouraged the group to say whatever they wanted to say before leaving the focus group. Sofia expressed the aspiration to learn “classroom culture” and “some tips on how to respect teachers in your culture” because her religious group “had a lot of trouble” in China in the year preceding this research (FG 1: 245). I gave her an example: “In Taiwan, when students are late, they need to at least show guilt, they have to say, ‘I’m sorry I’m late’” (FG 1: 250). Then I described how I was shocked to see American students come to class late without apologizing. Megan immediately replied, showing her rich experiences of cross-cultural encounters and knowledge about the classroom norms in the U.S. and Japan:

I heard a lot of U.S. teachers, when they went to Japan to teach, they would have cultural shock. They’re like, “Oh my god, the students are already sitting when you walk into the classroom.” They said it felt really uncomfortable because the students are so formal. (FG 1: 251)

The group began to discuss classroom courtesy in the U.S. Megan elaborated on the complexity of cultural representation. She pointed out that there were different practices varying among different classes in the same college:

And within the U.S. college system, it [i.e., the classroom courtesy] can be different, too. Like the business class, they call their professors, Professor someone, but in the art classes, they have to call their teachers by their first name. And during class we just make coffee in class. (FG 1: 260)

Megan’s choice of the example of making coffee in class shows that it was not common in most classes, or at least those she had attended in Japan. More importantly, her perspectives on culture change from that defined by national boundary to different

situations, that is, business class or art class. In the previous excerpt of the turn 251, she distinguished between U.S. teachers' expectation of students' classroom behaviors and Japanese teachers' expectation, but she distinguished between teachers' expectations in different classrooms in the U.S.

Wren shared his own experience in the music college and at the same time brought the conversation back to the topic of punctuality:

It does depend. For example, in music, it's pretty much, given that, like, for example, if you're fifteen minutes early, you're on time. And if you're on time, you're late. So I don't think it's necessarily an U.S. thing; it depends on the context. (FG 1: 261)

Wren explicitly noted the problem of the one-to-one correspondence of nationality and cultural practices and implicitly argued against the impolite image of American students described earlier by me (FG 1: 250) or the informal image of American students expected by American teachers in Megan's description (FG 1: 251). Since the American students in his college are expected to come earlier, the students that I saw come to class late and behave rude cannot represent all American students. Neither can the American teachers who held lower expectations of American students in Megan's description represent all American teachers. Wren's mild confrontation suggests that he defined cultural norms beyond the national boundary and raised the cultural conversation to another level, viewing culture in *context* that was not limited to the national boundary.

Sofia responded to Wren and added students' performance as a contextual variable of the different expectations of punctuality in different colleges:

And I think it depends on the students, too. I mean, like, the typical student in a music class is probably a student that's getting good grades and has been doing well all along. (FG 1: 262)

Sofia suggested that people tended to set higher standards of behavior for the students whose school performance was better than those of their peers. In this sense, classroom courtesy was co-constructed by teachers and students.

Megan agreed with Sofia's observation and elaborated on the co-construction of classroom courtesy. She illustrated how the expectations were related to students' images of diligence and relationships with teachers:

Art teachers are biased. If they see you in the studio working outside of class, like, I can go to class an hour late, and they won't say anything. Whereas another student, if he gets there late, one of my professors will yell at him. For our system, it's more about how much effort you're showing in the art department and how you develop relationships. (FG 1: 266)

Comparison of the three excerpts of Megan's assertions show that her perspectives on culture evolved as the discussions with other group participants developed. Like the cultural practice in discussion, learners co-constructed their perspectives on culture.

While Megan and Sofia underlined the co-construction of classroom courtesy and its members' interactions, Wren reminded the group that nationality did not define situational cultures (FG 1: 261). He shortly commented on Megan's example: "In the music department, a lot of our teachers are not U.S." (FG 1: 267). On one hand, his remarks agreed with Megan's focus on the teacher's role in defining classroom courtesy. On the other, he re-emphasized his earlier position that the classroom courtesy issue should not be simplified as exclusively corresponding to national culture. In this way, Wren was reminding Megan's reflection on the inevitable over-generalization (FG 1: 86.3).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 analyzes students' perspectives on intercultural learning, drawing upon students' reflections on their exploratory processes in completing the intercultural learning assignment. The five themes emerging in the analyses of the focus group transcriptions cover the issues concerning the assignment, accessibility to native speakers and validity of the interview information, accessibility and validity of Internet information, the experience of studying in a Chinese-speaking community, and cultural representations.

Students in general felt excited about the intercultural learning assignment because they believed that it added a critical and interesting dimension to the foreign language course. The ethnographic tasks of the assignment guided students to search for the needed information and directed their attention to the linguistic and cultural phenomena which may be otherwise taken for granted. On the other hand, students were worried that the assignment would add workload to the already-tight course syllabus. They were also concerned about the limitations of the foreign language contexts in terms of the poor accessibility to valid information for completing the assignment. Based on their experiences of completing the tasks, students suggested that the intercultural learning assignment should be integrated into any foreign language classroom with careful pedagogic preparation, allowing students more exploration time and covering a greater percentage of the course grades.

Students' evaluations of the task difficulty were related to their learning situations. They found little access to native speakers in the school community. Due to the time constraints and residence distance, students were not be able to build

relationships with their language exchange partners to the degree that they had hoped for, and therefore, obtained little information or assistance in the assignment.

Furthermore, the Chinese speakers' English language proficiency diminished the learners' access to conversational Chinese. The American students' perception that they were not representative of Chinese or Taiwanese people due to their temporal and spatial distance from the home communities further diminished the potential usefulness of the information they could offer, in the eyes of the learners-as-ethnographers.

The Internet seemed more accessible than native speakers and was therefore an important information source for almost all of the students in this non-immersion intercultural learning program. However, students encountered difficulties in selecting related and valid online information from the overwhelming amount of the online information. On the other hand, students' insufficient Chinese skills limited their information source to English websites, which were perceived as containing English speakers' biases and stereotypes. Students who attempted to diminish the risk of inauthentic information by accessing multiple sources and integrating the information from the Internet, interviews with the native speakers, and students' past experiences of studying abroad completed better task essays with substantiate evidence.

A majority of students believed that having the immersion experience contributed to intercultural learning, whether they had been in a Chinese-speaking community or not. However, a close examination of students' evaluations of task difficulty reveals that the students who had joined the summer study-abroad trips in China felt no more confident with the language-oriented tasks than those who had no previous immersion experience. Only the students who had *lived* in a Chinese-speaking

community for at least two years and *interacted frequently* with the locals had a sufficient cache of cultural and linguistic knowledge for completing the assignment and felt confident with the language-oriented tasks. On the other hand, the students with a long-stay experience may have over-relied on their memories without doing further investigation for the intercultural learning assignment.

The theme of cultural representations expanded beyond Chinese cultural representations and included issues regarding American cultural representations, situational cultural representations, cultural stereotypes, and authorship of cultural representations. At the end of the focus group, students spontaneously talked about their impressions of Chinese speakers and experiences of crossing cultural borders in different situations. These free conversations revealed students' perspectives on the co-constructed and situational orientation of culture.

CHAPTER VI

DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This study explored how the integration of the learners-as-ethnographers approach (LAE) in a Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) curriculum facilitated American students' intercultural learning through the two research questions addressing the effectiveness of the LAE approach and the learning experiences in a non-immersion context. Fifteen university students registered for the Elementary Chinese class in the spring semester of 2010 were required to complete an intercultural learning portfolio which contained six ethnographic tasks. Each of the tasks had subtasks guiding students to explore the linguistic and/or cultural phenomena in the U.S. and a Chinese-speaking community. Students were assigned four tasks and required to write an essay for each. At the end of the semester, two focus groups were conducted, and 11 students were interviewed.

I analyzed 56 task essays and two interview transcriptions to examine students' perceptions of culture, reflections upon their intercultural explorations, reports of the difficulties they encountered, evaluations of the task contribution to intercultural learning, and suggestions for future implementation of the LAE approach in foreign language classrooms. Findings from this study will further our understanding of non-immersion intercultural learning and refresh our thoughts about intercultural education. In this chapter, I will first summarize the findings and answer the two research questions. Based on the findings, I will propose directions for future researchers on

intercultural education and make recommendations to educators who wish to implement the LAE approach in other foreign language classrooms. Lastly, I will note the limitations of this study.

Summary of Findings

Answering the First Research Question

Analyzing students' task essays in regards to the accomplishment of the learning objectives and the benefits of the learners-as-ethnographic approach perceived by students can answer the first research question regarding how the LAE approach facilitated intercultural learning among American university students learning Chinese as a foreign language.

Accomplishment of the six learning objectives. Analysis of task essays show that the ethnographic tasks created learning opportunities for students to recognize and evaluate cultural stereotypes, the impact of contextual or situational factors on cultural artifacts/practices/perspectives, culture-specific connotations or misunderstanding, and potential bias in the intercultural exploration. The tasks with open-ended topics and coherent pedagogic objectives effectively guided students to achieve the six intercultural learning objectives and facilitated the development of the intercultural communicative competence (Byram, 1997; Byram & Feng, 2005; Byram & Zarate, 1994).

Extensive benefits perceived by students. Analysis of students' reflections upon their intercultural explorations reveals other benefits perceived by the students in completing the ethnographic tasks. The assignment added an important dimension to the foreign language course and motivated the learners to notice, contemplate, and

inquire into the taken-for-granted linguistic and cultural phenomena in their native community and also the strange and foreign ones in a Chinese-speaking community. The ethnographic tasks created opportunities for the learners-as-ethnographers to explore the cultural phenomena in the target language-speaking communities while remaining in a non-immersion context. Students acquired linguistic and cultural knowledge which was not included in their course books. The tasks also led students who had studied abroad to recall and re-examine their experiences.

In conclusion, the LAE approach enabled the CFL learners to learn about linguistic and cultural phenomena without being in the target language-speaking community through a well-designed intercultural learning assignment. The ethnographic tasks created opportunities for foreign language learners to experience language-culture connections, practice ethnographic skills, and learn more about their target language and cultural phenomena of the social community speaking it. These findings echo those in the previous studies (e.g., Barro et al., 1998; Carel, 2001; Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998; Monahan, 2003; Roberts et al., 2001; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996; Su, 2008; Tanaka, 1997). In addition, during the intercultural exploration, the learners-as-ethnographers developed the ability to recognize their assumptions about knowledge and its legitimization in their social group and to view the knowledge of other societies with openness. Gradually, the students became aware that culture is situational and contextual (Roberts et al., 2001). Ultimately, the ethnographic inquiry processes facilitated students' development of epistemological relativity, reflexivity, and critical consciousness, and also increased their intercultural communicative competence, as Leung (2005) maintained.

Answering the Second Research Question

Analysis of students' task essays and the two interview transcriptions yield five themes related to students' experiences and perceptions of intercultural learning. These five themes answer the second research question regarding how the learners perceived their experiences of intercultural learning through the LAE approach. The first four themes are related to the critical issues of implementing the LAE approach, namely, collection and use of information in a non-immersion context. The last theme is about other issues of implementing the LAE approach. The five themes are:

- (1) Study abroad experiences might have different influences on intercultural learning, depending on the lengths of stay, temporal contexts, and transferability of the experiences of crossing cultural borders;
- (2) The accessibility to Chinese speakers did not guarantee the information necessary for completing the ethnographic tasks;
- (3) The use of the Internet to expand the information access for the home ethnographers needs supportive preparations;
- (4) Students' perceptions of Chinese cultural representations and perspectives on culture might evolve; and
- (5) The intercultural learning assignment needed to be well designed in order to practice in foreign language classrooms and expand the benefits of the LAE approach for intercultural learning.

Design of intercultural learning assignment. Because the LAE approach highly depended on the ethnographic tasks as well as the Internet, native speakers, and/or students' past in-situ experiences for the needed information, learning in the LAE approach was strongly influenced by the accessibility, selection, and validity of the cultural-linguistic information needed for completing the tasks. In addition, the design of the ethnographic tasks, portfolio assignments, and grading schemes, along

with classroom instruction, all influenced students' intercultural learning, as indicated by the repeated issues in the students' task essays and focus group interview transcriptions.

Information from the Internet. With its convenience and accessibility, the Internet appealed to learners-as-ethnographers who used it as one of the main sources. The overwhelming amount of information on the Internet led to challenges of selecting and evaluating information. The abundance of the convenient information resulted in over-reliance on the existing studies on the Internet or course books. Students might simply copy what they found without interpreting or triangulating the information from different sources. Inaccurate information on the Internet might be therefore reproduced and result in the opposite of what was intended in intercultural learning. Moreover, due to the insufficient Chinese language skills, the students tended to read information about China in English, most of which was translated or written by English speakers, raising questions about the authenticity of representation of Chinese speakers. On the other hand, not all Chinese-speaking communities had stable online connections or reliable websites. The websites registered in China might be censored and blocked, while the accessible websites might serve the purpose of propaganda and offer incorrect information about China.

Information from interviews. Collecting information by interviewing Chinese speakers had limitations as well. First of all, not all the learners-as-ethnographers could access native speakers, particularly in the foreign language learning context. In the university where this study was conducted, there were only 61 international students from Taiwan and 20 from China. The accessibility to Chinese speakers and their

communities was incomparable to that in Robinson-Stuart and Nocon's (1996) research for the American college students learning Spanish in California.

Even with the pre-project arrangement of language exchange partnership, the accessibility to Chinese speakers in the non-immersion context did not increase much. Due to the insufficient language skills, distance between residences, and busy schedules, students were not able to be in frequent contact with their language exchange partners, let alone build relationships to such a degree that would allow them to obtain information or language assistance. Sofia's case highlights how frequent contacts and sustainable relationships with the language exchange partner are critical to obtaining information in a non-immersion learning context. On the other hand, Helen's and Brian's cases suggest that the failure of building relationships with target language speakers might be the main cause for the ineffective information elicitation. Wren's and Megan's reflections upon their dominant use of English instead of Chinese illustrate how the asymmetric proficiencies and learning motivations between partners impeded the exchanges of linguistic and cultural information.

Even when the learners had access to native speakers and were able to build relationships, the native speakers might not be able to offer useful information, due to the lack of critical distance from their native language/culture and the consequent deficiency in thinking reflectively about it. In addition, insufficient vocabulary or meta-linguistic knowledge on both sides might have impeded the exchanges of knowledge and experience. Megan's Chinese boyfriend did not know what *stereotypes* and *connotations* meant when interviewed by her for Tasks 1 and 4. Wren felt that his Chinese skills were not sufficient for him to interview Chinese speakers in Chinese and

elicit their real thoughts, to read authentic Chinese websites, or to complete the assignment to a level of quality to which he aspired.

The difficulties Megan encountered in having the international students newly arrived from Taiwan speak about their stereotypes of American culture point out another problem of interviewing native speakers who are outside their home community. The newcomers might feel uncomfortable with certain topics and therefore might not answer the interview questions honestly. Megan reported that the exchange students from Taiwan that she interviewed were too shy to tell their stereotypes of American culture. In effect, Sofia adopted similar hedging strategies when asked by the Chinese students about American perspectives on China's politics during her second week in China.

Still another issue related to interviewing native speakers is their representativeness. Students felt that they should interview Chinese speakers who did not leave their homeland for a considerably long time, but they found that interviewing the newcomers was frustrating. In contrast, the Chinese speakers who had been in the U.S. for a while were more accessible and communicative than the newcomers and more likely to share intercultural learning experiences. However, it must be conceded that these informants had a greater distance from their home community and perhaps a degree of acculturation to American society. Grace, Brian, and Megan expressed concerns about whether these acculturated Chinese speakers could adequately represent the "average" Chinese person and doubted the validity of the information they offered.

In-situ experience. In general, the student participants viewed the experience of being in a Chinese-speaking community as a prerequisite for effective intercultural

learning. They believed that those who had the in-situ experience had an advantage over the students who did not in completing the language-oriented tasks. Few students doubted the validity of using the past memories for the present learning assignment or questioned to what degree the students immersed themselves in the linguistic and cultural activities when they studied abroad. It was evident, however, that after returning, the students who had studied in a Chinese-speaking community tended to draw upon their memories without scrutinizing or examining them in reference to information from other sources. Sean, who had lived in a Chinese-speaking community for almost three years, did not seem to have developed the intercultural communicative competence demonstrated by some students who had not lived in a Chinese-speaking community. Terry and Steve seemed to have obtained sufficient knowledge of Chinese and local cultural practices during their two-year stay in Taiwan and China but did not demonstrate the curiosity to continue their intercultural explorations or develop skills to do so. In contrast, Grace and Sophia, who had studied in China for only one month, and Megan and Wren, who had not been to a Chinese-speaking community, demonstrated strong curiosity or openness about Chinese speakers as well as critical reflections upon the cultural phenomena and values in the U.S. As Child (1981) pointed out, curiosity and exploration influenced attention. The students who had not been stayed in a Chinese-speaking community for long enough to feel familiar with the cultural phenomena might have been more curious about the cultural aspects the assigned tasks addressed and therefore tended to explore them more thoroughly to discover what they were about. For the students who had not been to a Chinese-speaking community and who still felt foreign with Chinese culture, understanding the

cultural aspect required by the ethnographic task was a problem-solving task, and such cognitive processes triggered strong motivation for exploration (Green, 1993). Perhaps driven by the strong curiosity about Chinese communities, Megan and Wren did serious research and explored various information sources. Their dedication and effort might have led to the development of intercultural exploratory skills, which in turn, might have compensated for their insufficient knowledge about Chinese and Chinese-speaking communities.

Nevertheless, the in-situ experience had its critical benefits for intercultural learning. First, it expanded students' knowledge of the target language and the cultural phenomena of its social group. Steve's task essay 4 on culture-specific connotations shows that the long-term residence in the target linguistic/cultural community and frequent contacts with the locals expanded information repertoire of language and culture. Sofia's task essay 5 about the Tiananmen Massacre shows that even a one-month stay could create the opportunity for first-hand observation, which was particularly critical for investigating China, where the websites were censored and information about certain issues were lacked or unverified. Grace's essay 5 on the cultural value of the drinking practice in China further confirms that the study abroad experience could create interactions with locals and therefore contribute to intercultural learning.

Moreover, the participant observation in an unfamiliar surrounding gave the learner a fresh view on the social practice that the learners have been too familiar with to see the cultural value. For instance, Grace understood the social practice of drinking to Americans through comparing it with that to Chinese people. Sofia realized how

freedom and human rights were valued in the U.S. through her experience in the Tiananmen Square. Last but not least, Steve, Grace, and Sofia were the only three student participants who either completed an extra task besides the required ones or revised their task essays. Probably having the in-situ experiences had brought confidence, which in turn, had motivated Steve, Grace, and Sofia to improve their former ethnographic tasks. These benefits created by experiential learning cannot be substituted by virtual interactions via telecommunication tools or any second-hand information transactions through interviews with native speakers.

Cultural representations. The LAE approach encouraged the non-immersion learners to search for Chinese cultural representations from available sources to complete the ethnographic tasks. The open-ended topics with pre-planned, coherent subtasks gave the students directions to explore the cultural phenomena, without defining what Chinese culture should be. Therefore, the cultural representations that students could see or experience highly influenced their interpretations of Chinese culture. On the other hand, the students' imagined Chinese culture greatly influenced their information selection to represent and interpret it. Students' reflections show that they were most concerned about the "accuracy" of Chinese cultural representations in the sources they could obtain at first but were gradually liberated from those concerns as the semester went. At the end of the focus group, the first group participants seemed to change their perspectives on culture and realize its situational and co-constructed orientations.

Chinese cultural representations in students' task essays. As this study focused on learning processes and encouraged learners to interpret cultural phenomena

they observed, the cultural representation in students' essays were not judged by "accuracy" (Carbaugh, 2007; Clifford, 1986; Eisenhart, 2001). However, students' essays show three noteworthy tendencies. First, some students mixed Chinese culture with Asian cultures and Chinese speakers with Asians. Second, most students limited their discussions to the cultural phenomena in China, despite the difficulties in obtaining related information and the awareness of the potential bias in the information strictly censored by the Chinese government. Only Terry paid attention to Taiwan, and Sofia recognized the difference and competition of these two countries. Third, few students saw the modernized image of China, and the few task essays, for example, Jessie's and Lily's essays 4, were limited to a passive receiver of westernization without much resistance.

Re-conceptualization of culture. In the reflective essay and in the beginning of the focus group, students were very concerned about the "accuracy" of their interpretations of Chinese culture and the "representativeness" of their informants. However, in the spontaneous talk at the end of the first focus group, some of the students gradually changed their concepts of culture and began to view it as co-constructed and unbounded by national boundaries. The perspectives on culture might have evolved because the learners-as-ethnographers were not limited by the task topics or pre-designed interview questions and therefore might feel like sharing their experiences of cross-cultural encounters. The open, spontaneous talks outside the classroom might have facilitated the development of new perspectives on culture. Another explanation for the concept change is that the intercultural explorations have raised the learners-as-ethnographers' awareness of the situational and co-constructed

orientation of culture (Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998; Schulz, 2007). Both possibilities confirm the significance of *dialogue* that has been emphasized in the research literature on culture and cultural studies (e.g., Saphonova, 1996; Savignon & Sysoyev, 2002) and highlight the importance of providing students with opportunities to experience and discuss.

Theoretical Implications for Intercultural Educationists

The findings from this study shed light on our understanding of intercultural education and suggest directions for researchers who are interested in the influence of study abroad programs on intercultural learning, information elicitation and selection in the non-immersion context, and cultural representations perceived by foreign language learners.

Study Abroad

Among the 15 student participants, three students had lived in a Chinese-speaking community for at least two years, another two studied in China for one month, and still another two studied abroad speaking languages other than Chinese.

Comparison of the seven students' intercultural learning experiences before and during participating in this study shows that the influence of study abroad on intercultural learning should be discussed from three aspects: the length of staying in the target language community, the applicability of the experience of studying in other cultural communities to the new exploration of the currently researched community, and the temporal context of the study abroad experience in relation to the LAE activities.

Length of stay. Previous researchers on study abroad maintained that immersion in the target language community had positive influences on students'

intercultural learning. However, the present study shows that long-term and short-term study abroad experiences might have different influences on the development of the four components of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), namely, knowledge, skill, attitude, and critical awareness (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2001). The long-term in-situ experiences gave Steve and Terry more linguistic and cultural *knowledge* of the Chinese-speaking society than the other students, as shown in their essays for the language-oriented tasks and performances in class. However, students who had long-term in-situ experiences might feel so confident in their knowledge that they simply drew upon their past memories without further exploration. In this way, the long-term in-situ experience was a double-edge blade; it increased the learners' knowledge while impeding the development of exploratory *skills*. In contrast, the short-term stay might trigger the curiosity about the target language community and motivate learners to continue exploration. Grace and Sofia, who had taken a summer language program in China for one month, cultivated strong *curiosity* about China and developed exploratory *skills* in discovering and comparing.

Applicability of previous study abroad experiences to new explorations.

Previous studies on the LAE effectiveness in intercultural learning limited the researched field to the community speaking the target language. The current study shows that students might be able to transfer their former intercultural learning experiences to explore a new socio-cultural community. Neither Wren nor Megan had been to a Chinese-speaking community, but Megan grew up in a bilingual/ bicultural family and moved from Japan to the U.S. for college education. Wren had been an exchange student in Spain and lived with a local Spanish family for one year before

taking the Elementary Chinese course. Both Wren and Megan had had rich experiences in crossing cultural borders and showed sustainable engagement in the intercultural learning assignments of this intervention. They completed most task essays and gave thoughtful comments on culture and cultural learning. It is possible that their experiences of crossing cultural borders had established a foundation for the ICC components of critical awareness and exploratory skills. They were aware of the different cultural meanings to the same phenomena and formed habits of inquiry. The exploratory skills and critical awareness in turn increased their knowledge of the currently researched community, whether China or Taiwan. In one word, Wren and Megan developed ICC, probably by transferring their previous experiences of intercultural learning in a sociolinguistic community other than English- or Chinese-speaking community to the current intercultural exploration. These findings indicate that the experiences of constantly crossing cultural borders could be transferred to the new context of intercultural learning. If study abroad experiences are transferable to a new exploration of a different cultural community, the site of study abroad would not be limited to the community speaking the target language.

Temporal context of study abroad. The discussions about the influence of study abroad on intercultural learning should consider the temporal context of study abroad in relation to LAE activities—whether it occurs before, during, or after the LAE tasks. In most of the previous investigations on study abroad effectiveness (e.g., Barro, et al., 1998; Roberts, et al., 2001), students completed the learning task when they were in the researched community or at least had been informed of the assignment and direction of the research focus. In the present study, the students who had experiences

of study abroad, including Steve, Terry, Sean, Megan, Wren, Grace, Sofia, and Jessie, were not equipped with training in LAE tasks before leaving for the target language community. Their in-situ experiences were unsystematic, as they were not given directions for observation before going abroad. When given post-immersion ethnographic tasks, the students tended to use their *past* in-situ experiences as the primary information source. However, memories can be misleading, and reliance on memory for completing the post-immersion learning assignment might strengthen former stereotypes or wrong impressions.

Another direction for future researchers is to examine whether and how participation in this study influenced students' subsequent motivation to continue intercultural learning or cultivated their exploratory skills, as almost all the students who had not been to a Chinese-speaking community went to China for a one-month summer program (Brian, Wren, Laura, Leo, Helen, Katie, and Jessie) or attended a one-year exchange program in Taiwan (Brian) in the second year after participating in this study.

Re-examining the influences of study abroad on intercultural learning.

Previous research on study abroad emphasized its benefits to intercultural learning without examining the shortcomings (e.g., Barro, et al., 1998; Roberts, et al., 2001). In the present study, the students generally believed that having the experience of being in a Chinese-speaking community was an advantage, if not a requirement, to learning Chinese. This general assumption might impede intercultural learning. On the one hand, it might have diminished the confidence of the students who could not afford study abroad and prevented them from investigating the target language and cultural

phenomena. On the other hand, the assumption might have prevented the students who had lived in a Chinese-speaking community from doing further exploration and led them to rely on memories and unexamined impressions formed during the stay. The memories could serve as a facile but unreliable source. The impression formed during the immersion could be stereotypical if the students were not guided to think critically about their impressions or did not have opportunities to discuss their impressions with other observers. Even if the memories were not distorted, they needed triangulation in order to balance potential bias and avoid over-generalization. However, few students in this study felt the need to confirm, adjust, or discard their first-hand information.

It is true that people develop generalizations naturally from “tacit knowledge, intuition, and personal experience” in “looking for patterns that explain their own experience as well as events in the world around them” (Stake, cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 211). However, intercultural education should aim to diminish the risk of developing naturalistic generalizations into permanent stereotypes. Students should be instructed to triangulate their immediate impressions with information from other sources, update the analyses through constant contacts with native speakers, and compare and adjust their first impressions to align with new experiences and critical discussions. For all the reasons above, unstructured study abroad programs may not be more beneficial to intercultural learning than the non-immersion programs as defined in the LAE approach.

Use of Interview as a Tool for Learners-as-ethnographers

Previous studies on non-immersion intercultural learning highly encouraged learners-as-ethnographers to interview target language speakers (e.g., Egan-Robertson & Bloome, 1998; Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996; Su, 2008). The present study

reveals that the effectiveness of eliciting information by interviewing the Chinese speakers in the university community might be related to the students' target language proficiency and also informants' representativeness and ability to provide information.

Target language proficiency. Su's (2008) study demonstrated that learners-as-ethnographers' insufficient speaking and listening skills in their target language impeded the interview process and information collection. In the present study, Wren's confessions of his insufficient Chinese proficiency and dominant use of English to communicate with his language exchange partner highlight issues that have been little discussed in the previous studies on LAE. First of all, the Chinese speakers that the learners-as-ethnographers could access may not want to speak Chinese since practicing English was one of the reasons for them to come to the U.S. As a matter of fact, the non-immersion context for the American students to learn Chinese was an immersion learning context for the Chinese speakers in which they were motivated to use English instead of Chinese as a means of communication. That is, the learners-as-ethnographers' language learning goals may conflict with those of their language exchange partners. Moreover, the English proficiency of the international students in the U.S. tended to be higher than the Chinese proficiency of the American students learning Chinese as a foreign language. Wren's language exchange partner had studied English more than ten years and passed the TOFLE test before coming to the U.S., whereas Wren studied Chinese for less than one year. The unequal target language proficiencies probably resulted in the dominant use of English in the language exchange partnership and limited information collection.

Other obstacles encountered in interviewing. The interviewers' skills and also the interviewees' language proficiency, knowledge about the linguistic and cultural phenomena in their native community, and perceptions of the topic sensitivity might have impeded information collection by means of interview. This could be one interpretation of the diverse difficulties Megan encountered in interviewing Chinese speakers. Her Chinese boyfriend did not understand Megan's question because he did not know the meanings of *stereotype* and *connotation*. The de-stereotyping task, which involved Megan's request to criticize the U.S. seemed to be too sensitive for the Taiwanese students who had recently arrived in the country. Sofia was the only one participant who was satisfied with the contribution of the language exchange partnership in completing the ethnographic tasks. Sofia not only learned Chinese and contemporary Taiwanese cultural practices but also her language exchange partner's perspectives on the Taiwanese and American cultural phenomena. In other words, the partners were both learners-as-ethnographers and contributed to each other's intercultural learning. These cases called for the need to re-examine the use of interviewing as a method for de-stereotyping (Abrams, 2002; Allen, 2004; Byon, 2007; Wright, 2000), and raised questions about its feasibility in non-immersion contexts.

Selection of the Information from the Internet

In seeking information on the Internet, learners-as-ethnographers faced similar challenges to interviewing. Their insufficient target language proficiency in reading limited their searches to translated websites that may lack representativeness or authenticity. At the same time, the overwhelming amount of information on the Web made selection difficult for the learners-as-ethnographers. To select trustworthy

information, students would need to use the experiences of living in the target language community or accessing native language speakers as a reference, neither of which, however, was warranted in the non-immersion context.

Wren and Helen were aware of the double bind of using the Internet as the primary resource for intercultural learning. On one hand, there was too much information, and some of it was contradictory. On the other hand, the information sources that learners-as-ethnographers could use were constrained due to students' insufficient Chinese proficiency or the strict censorship in China. Previous studies on using the Internet as the primary information source did not discuss the dilemma that Wren and Helen encountered. Since the Internet is a relatively accessible information source to non-immersion intercultural learners and opens a "window" for the LAE to learn about the researched community without being there, future research on non-immersion intercultural education and LAE implementation should continue to investigate how the information limitations influence learners-as-ethnographers' learning and how these limitations might be overcome. Below, I will make some tentative recommendations for overcoming these limitations.

Using the Internet as a communication tool. One of the strategies to expand the advantage of the Internet for intercultural learning is to use it as a communication tool that offers non-immersion learners more opportunities for interaction with target language speakers rather than as a source of information. Two examples of this can be seen in Carel's (2001) *The Virtual Ethnographer* and Furstenberg et al.'s (2001) *The CULTURA Project*. They took advantage of computer as a powerful telecommunication means to create a virtual immersion environment for learners-as-

ethnographers to interact synchronously with target language speakers who also had the objectives of intercultural learning. In this way, the difficulty in selection and evaluation caused by the overwhelming amount of Web information can be eliminated. Learners-as-ethnographers would gain a rough understanding of their partners' backgrounds and would therefore be more likely to correctly identify the cultural representations under discussion. More importantly, learners could recommend useful information sources to each other and cultivate the ICC *side by side*. These mutual contributions might increase the target language speakers' motivation to offer information and lower the anxiety of the foreign language learners whose target language proficiency is comparatively lower, as both sides contribute to their partners' intercultural learning.

Cultural Representations

The LAE approach encourages learners-as-ethnographers to search available sources for cultural representations of the researched social groups. This study focuses on the exploration processes rather than the learning outcome and encourages imagination in interpreting the observed cultural representation instead of judging the "accuracy" of the interpretations. Analysis of the culture representations in students' task essays and focus group discussions can better our understanding of intercultural learning through the LAE approach.

Chinese cultural representations in the U.S. According to Chen (2009), the literature for young people published in the U.S. often represented Chinese culture as set in ancient China. This author's observation may explain why the students in the present study focused on the cultural phenomena in China, even though they found it

difficult to obtain verifiable information. The American students may have been influenced by such cultural representations and developed assumptions about what Chinese culture should be and what counted as useful information for the learning assignment in the first place. The potential relationships between learners' imaginations and interpretations of Chinese culture and the rare and biased cultural representations they were exposed to point out two research directions: (1) how do learners reproduce the cultural representations of a remote cultural community; and (2) how can formal instruction in school help learners become aware of the reproductions of cultural representations.

“Accuracy” of cultural representations. The students believed that they could obtain valid information only by living in the target language community or at least interviewing Chinese speakers in Chinese. In reality, however, few of the non-immersion students had the in-situ experience or access to native speakers or developed sufficient language abilities to conduct a Chinese interview. This conflict between the belief and the reality left the learners-as-ethnographers in a contradictory position. On one hand, they could communicate with the “native speakers” who had been living in the U.S. for a considerably long period of time more easily than the Chinese speakers who arrived recently. On the other hand, the learners-as-ethnographers doubted whether the “Americanized” informants could represent average Chinese speakers and whether the Chinese cultural representations they offered were “accurate.” Previous research on the LAE approach which encouraged learners to interview native speakers from/in the target language community (e.g., Robinson-Stuart & Nocon, 1996; Su, 2008) did not report learners' perspectives on the nativeness of the informants or the

authenticity of cultural representation. The findings of the present study point out the worth of investigating these unknowns.

Re-examining Intercultural Education

Process-oriented intercultural education. The dilemma noted above should not be taken as a limitation of the LAE implementation in foreign language classrooms because the pedagogic objectives of the LAE approach and portfolio approach were process-based rather than product-based (e.g., Abrams, 2002; Allen, 2004; Byram & Michael, 1998; Byon, 2007; Paige et al., 2003; Schulz, 2007). Intercultural education should create opportunities for learners to experience intercultural explorations rather than differentiate nativeness and strengthen otherness.

Intercultural communicative competence. This study shows that not all the students who had the experiences of living in the community speaking the target language could make cultural interpretations of the linguistic phenomena they observed. This finding suggests that the in-situ experiences can be a rich resource for the linguistic and cultural *knowledge* for completing the tasks, but completing the intercultural learning tasks would require more than knowledge. The abilities to stretch the cultural *imagination* that Forehand (2007) described and to make the *critical awareness* that Byram and his associates promoted (Byram, 1997; Byram et al., 2001; Byram & Zarate, 1994) were essential, as the ethnographic tasks required not only literal meanings of linguistic phenomena but also their use in *discourse* and students' *interpretations*. For Task 4, Terry provided literal meanings for one classic phrase and two slang expressions which are still commonly used in Taiwan, but he did not connect these language forms and meanings to the cultural phenomena he had experienced there.

Making the language-culture connection needs imagination, in the way Wren and Helen demonstrated in their task 4 essays; a certain level of critical thinking, as Wren and Steve demonstrated in their conclusions for task 4 essays; and exploratory skills, as Sofia and Megan demonstrated in their task essays.

Stretching imagination. Forehand's (2007) theory of stretching imagination in intercultural learning can help explain the comparatively fewer interpretations students made for the English linguistic phenomena they observed. The students might be too familiar with American cultural phenomena to extend their imaginations or apply a critical analysis. This is to say, familiarity with native phenomena posed the difficulty of making language-culture connections. Moreover, the subtask requiring students to recognize and evaluate native linguistic phenomena seemed to lack challenges and failed to motivate students to make further investigation or stretch their imaginations, similar to how the students who had long-term residence in a community speaking the target language over-relied on their past memories without doing further investigation. The interrelationship between imagination, topic familiarity, task difficulty, and engagement are worthy of exploration.

Recommendations for Practitioners

Based on the findings of this study, I propose the following suggestions for foreign language educators who attempt to integrate intercultural learning into language instruction: (1) intercultural education should be integrated into foreign language classrooms; (2) intercultural learning can be implemented through the LAE approach, with ethnographic tasks of sophisticated design; and (3) ethnographic tasks can serve as preparation for study abroad or other immersion learning programs. In particular,

analyses of students' task essays and reflections on the intercultural exploratory processes reveal specific directions for improving the design and implementation of ethnographic tasks.

Ethnographic Task Design

Design engaging tasks. Teachers should consider students' interests and task difficulty in designing tasks. In general, students prefer tasks that are relevant to their lifestyles and ways of knowing. For a university foreign language course consisting of students from different majors, the ethnographic tasks should not impose fixed topics but instead, open-ended topics for students to relate to their lives. This study also shows that Tasks 2 and 3 on the impact of situational or contextual factors to language use and Task 4 on culture-specific connotations seemed more difficult than other tasks to the foreign language learners. Students' task essays for Tasks 2 and 3 showed few connections between the contextual and situational factors and language use, and two of eight students did not complete Task 4. In the focus groups, students in general commented that the language-oriented tasks were more difficult. The difficulty might be related to students' insufficient knowledge of linguistic and cultural phenomena, limited accessibility to the necessary information, and lack of exploratory skills, as shown in students' reflections upon the difficulties they encountered in explorations. The first five ethnographic tasks of this intervention were adapted from the five intercultural learning tasks designed by Schulz (2007). Although Schulz claimed that the tasks she designed were suitable for American foreign language learners at high school or college level, the results of the present study show that beginner learners

might have difficulties in completing the language-oriented tasks. Therefore, a reference list should be attached to such language-oriented tasks.

Include a reflection task. This intervention added a reflective essay to the last of the intercultural learning assignment and adopted the assessment form of portfolio. Analyses show that most students were unable to continuously search for new information or cultivate new visions. Only two students made modifications for their earlier tasks such that their portfolios were process-oriented. This unexpected result can be caused by the time constraints and difficulty in obtaining new information or the sparse connection between the first five ethnographic tasks. Accomplishment of the latter tasks did not lead to new thoughts or motivate students to go back to the previous tasks to make revisions. That points to the weakness of Schulz's (2007) design.

Although the students did not have sufficient time to elaborate on their investigations, modify their previous essays, or construct a process-based portfolio, the reflection task allowed the students to elaborate on their investigations, review the former task essays, and comment on any potential significance and bias. This finding suggests that the reflection task fits well with Schulz's model and can serve the process-orientation of the portfolio approach. The inclusion of a reflective essay at the end of the intercultural learning project might compensate for the infeasibility of the portfolio approach and achieve the purpose of enhancing students' meta-awareness of their intercultural exploration.

Pedagogic Implications for Teachers

This study has shown that there are challenges in implementing the LAE approach that have not been previously explored in the research literature, and proposes

practical directions for future implementation of the LAE approach in foreign language classrooms. Teachers play a critical role in maximizing the benefits of the LAE approach. They should (1) consider students' background and learning situations and the learning context in designing ethnographic tasks; (2) provide students with multiple information sources and guidance of sensible use and evaluation; (3) identify willing language exchange partners, facilitate partnership development, and encourage their interactions; and (4) organize discussion forums for students to exchange their intercultural exploration experiences and findings.

The findings show that task design should take learners' background and learning contexts into account before integrating the intercultural learning assignment into the tight foreign language course schedule. The language-oriented tasks would need more pedagogic preparation—for example, arranging field trips to the Chinese-speaking communities within travel distance, inviting native speakers to class, and setting up language exchange partners in advance—to help the foreign language learners overcome the contextual limitations.

To reduce students' workload and allow thorough investigation in a semester, this study required the students to complete four compulsory tasks instead of all six. However, the student participants still felt the investigation time was not enough and wished that they could spend the same amount of time completing one or two tasks thoroughly. Team work and class discussions may not solve the time constraints but also reduce students' workload and enable students of different majors and intercultural learning experiences to learn from each other. To reduce students' workload, teachers can require each of the students to complete the tasks on stereotypes and reflection and

then assign one of the remaining four tasks. An alternative solution is to assign students to five research teams, with each team taking charge of one of the first five tasks and all students writing their own reflection. To display the comprehensive aspects of the intercultural learning project, students would present their studies in class so that those who did not assign the task could have the exposure to that aspect of cross-cultural learning by seeing others' explorations.

The Chinese cultural representations in most of the students' essays were limited to the social phenomena in ancient China, undifferentiated from other Asian countries, and greatly influenced by the limited information they could obtain. These stereotypes might be reproduced if students are not instructed to search multiple information sources and evaluate critically the obtained information. To increase the validity of the online information, teachers should select reliable websites for students and provide guidelines for evaluating Web resources for intercultural learning. Teachers should guide students to examine the quality of their information and its potential bias and help students tackle the issue of representativeness and demonstrate awareness of over-generalization. Meanwhile, teachers should increase the accessibility to native speakers by arranging language exchange partners and encouraging their interactions and partnership development. Expanding contacts with native speakers beyond the community via telecommunication technology is a strong alternative. Moreover, teachers should have students present their research in class so that the class can have the opportunity to acknowledge the existence of other Chinese-speaking communities and various cultural representations. The classroom discussion after the individuals' presentations can offer the presenters different perspectives on their studies.

To overcome the limitations of the LAE approach and expand its effectiveness, teachers should conduct scaffolding measures in a thoughtful timeline. They can have the students who have the in-situ experience share their reflections and initiate class discussions and then give students a brief introduction to the various Chinese-speaking communities and their relationships and histories. Before sending the class to conduct the research project, teachers should equip students with basic ethnographic concepts and skills.

Lastly, the selectivity and integration of the information as well as the awareness of the validity of the information source should be included in the assessment criteria of intercultural learning. Teachers should give students more than just a grade point but also constructive feedback to guide them to contemplate their investigation and encourage further exploration.

Conclusion

This study confirms the benefits of the LAE approach in enhancing intercultural learning. It overcomes the limitations of the non-immersion context and helps foreign language learners to vicariously experience the culture shaping the target language which is physically remote. Moreover, analyses of multiple learning cases reveal the complexity of intercultural learning in a non-immersion context, particularly the difficulties students encountered in collecting information. These issues point to directions for future research. In addition to the implications for researchers, I also proposed suggestions for foreign language classroom teachers. In order to expand the benefits of the LAE to the best, it needs well-designed tasks which fit students'

language proficiencies and individual difference as well as efficient cohort measures in integrating the LAE into the existing foreign language syllabus.

Any research is deemed to have limitations related to the methodology and theoretical framework it employs. The context-specific research design of this study may restrict the generalization of its findings. The use of students' task essays and focus group interview transcriptions as the data of analysis inevitably limits the investigation to my subjective selection and interpretation, despite my constant effort to increase the trustworthiness of my research through the strategies and procedures that I have explained in the Methodologies chapter. In this study, I was the instructor researcher, and the student participants were taking the course with me. They might have identified my beliefs, and their opinions might have been influenced accordingly. The unequal power relationship between teachers and students might have prevented students from feeling free to express their thoughts. Researchers or educators interested in the findings of this study should take these methodological limitations into account.

Hennick (2008) holds that a focus group moderator from a different socio-cultural background from participants may facilitate more detailed explanations of socio-cultural phenomena from the participants as they might perceive the need to help the mediator understand. However, the accuracy of the analyst's interpretations from a different socio-lingual background has little been considered but may become an increasingly important issue as global mobility and the need of international research increase. In this study, I used my participants' native language (English) to conduct the interviews and transcribed the recordings of the focus group interviews. Although I had an American university student verify my transcriptions, experts of English writing

proofread my manuscript, and my dissertation committee members comment on my research, readers of this study should keep in mind the potential misinterpretations due to my linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD (IRB) APPROVAL



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Using the “Learners-as-ethnographers” Approach to Enhancing Chinese as a Foreign Language Learners’ Intercultural Learning

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Under the direction of Dr. Dana Walker, School of Teacher Education; phone number: 970-3512720

Purpose and Description: This research aims to examine the effectiveness of the learners-as-ethnographers approach integrated with a learning portfolio project on facilitating Chinese as a foreign language learners’ intercultural learning. Over the research period from the day when its proposal is accepted by the Institutional Review Board around February, 2010 to the end of the semester in early May, 2010, you will be surveyed through two questionnaires and interviewed by the researcher about your experiences of and perspectives on intercultural learning by developing your cultural learning portfolio. Your portfolio as well as other artifacts such as journals and oral presentations will be analyzed.

All the data will be either scanned or transferred into digital forms and stored in my laptop and an extensive drive, both of which are accessible exclusively to the researcher. The audio and video recordings and your artifacts will be temporarily stored in locked file cabinets. After they are stored in the digital form, the recordings will be destroyed, and the artifacts will be returned to you.

The transcriptions of the interviews and the analysis results of them, your responses to questionnaires, and your artifacts will be shared with the researcher’s advisor and dissertation committee members as well as other educational scholars when this research is published as a doctoral dissertation or in academic journals, or presented at conferences. However, the researcher will do her best to keep the information shared confidential. Any identifying demographical information will be changed. The researcher will assign an alphabet identifier to you and only she will know the name connected with a subject alphabet identifier. When she reports data, your name will in no way be attached to the answers provide.

With the steps the researcher take to ensure confidentiality, there are no foreseeable risks to you; if any, the risk is no greater than those normally encountered during regular course participation, such as the discomfort of having views challenged in interviews and the stress in completing the course assignments.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this research study and if you begin participation you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. No matter whether you participate in the research or not, all the students will have the same opportunity to get an extra credit (0.5 percentage of the course grade) for each questionnaire and extra ethnographic task they finish and hand in as well as participation in each group interview.

You do not stand to benefit directly from your participation, although you will benefit from your participation by gaining knowledge and learning skills. At the end of the research project, the researcher would be happy to share her findings and your data with you at your request.

Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored Programs, 25 Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.

(Participant's Printed Name)

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX B
BACKGROUND INFORMATION OF
STUDENT PARTICIPANTS

Table 4
Participants' background information

Name	Gender	Age	Major	Foreign language learning experience	Study abroad experience
Megan	F	20	Art History	20 years Japanese	5 years; U.S.
Sofia	F	21	Athletic Training	4 years Spanish in high school	1 month in Beijing, China
Grace	F	22	Special Education		1 month in Xian, China
Helen	F	21	International Studies	3 years Spanish in high school	
Laura	F	18	Graphic Design		
Mia	F	18	History	2 years Spanish in high school	
Katie	F	19	International Business		
Lily	F	18	Anthropology		3 weeks in Japan
Jessie	F	25	Theater		1 year in Spain
Wren	M	20	Music	2 years Spanish in high school; 2 years German in college	
Steve	M	18	International Studies	2 years Chinese	2 years in Shanghai & Beijing, China
Leo	M	18	History	2 years Spanish in high school	
Brian	M	20	International Studies+ Economics	2 years Japanese & 5 years French in high school	
Terry	M	21	Business		2 years in Taipei, Taiwan
Sean	M	19	(undeclared)		3years in Singapore

APPENDIX C
ELEMENTARY CHINESE COURSE SYLLABUS

Course Objectives

This course will continue the basic training in Mandarin Chinese pronunciation and tones, Chinese character writing, conversation, listening comprehension, and reading begun in CHIN 101 (Chinese Conversation and Culture). The focus will be on continuing to develop basic skills in the four areas necessary for effective communication: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. By the end of this course, students will be expected to conduct simple conversations and write on the following topics in Modern Mandarin Chinese:

- Transportation & travel
- Dining & Chinese food
- Chinese holidays and birthdays
- Using the library and language labs
- Asking directions and locations
- Visiting the doctor, talk about illness and allergies
- Dating
- Renting apartments
- Conducting simple transactions at the bank and post office
- Sports
- Make domestic & international travel plans

Course Evaluation

Your grade is determined by your performance in the following areas:

Attendance/Participation.....	15%
Tutorials	4%
Homework.....	15%
Journal.....	7%
Cultural activities.....	8%
Vocabulary Quizzes.....	15%
Chapter Written Tests.....	15%
Oral Tests	6%
Final Oral Presentation	5%
Final Written Exam.....	10%

APPENDIX D
LANGUAGE SOCIALIZATIONS OF
THE TWO INSTRUCTORS

A Taiwanese Teacher

I was born and grew up in Taiwan. Before going to the kindergarten at age five, I used my mother tongue, Taiwanese, to communicate. I started to learn and use Mandarin Chinese, the official language, in communication when I started school. Due to the official language and the instruction of my dedicated teachers in the elementary school, I became proficient in Mandarin. During my 5th to 10th grade years, I won prizes in speech contests, writing contests, and calligraphy contests.

Like most pupils in my generation, I started to learn English in the summer after graduating from the elementary school. English was a required school course from 7th grade to the first year of college in Taiwan at that time. I did quite well. I majored in English Language in the undergraduate and Teaching English as a Foreign Language in the graduate school. However, my English has never been not as good as Mandarin due to my enduring dependence on Mandarin in thinking. Also, I am more proficient in reading than in speaking or listening, partly because English learners in Taiwan have few opportunities to listen to or speak English with English native speakers and partly because I enjoy and spend a lot of time reading. Most of my knowledge or, stereotype, of U.S. people and society phenomena, comes from reading American literature and watching American movies or TV shows.

I am highly interested in culture studies. I travel around the world during vacations. In addition to the English-speaking countries such as the UK, the U.S., and Canada, I have been to the European countries such as France, Czech, Russia, and Turkey and other Asian countries such as China, Japan, Cambodia, and Vietnam. My first time to the U.S. was in 1997 on a trip sponsored by the Taiwanese government. I stayed in a community college in Ohio with a group of 25 middle school English teachers for one month. In 2007, I came to study at a western university as an exchange student. In the first month when I attended one of the cultural activities organized by the Chinese Culture Club directed by Dr. Johnson, who later became my supervisor of the teaching assistantship for teaching Chinese.

I have taught English in the secondary schools in Taiwan for more than 10 years. Teachers are highly respected in our traditional society. I myself learned a lot from my teachers; therefore, I have high expectation of my teaching career, strong professional consciousness, and work ethics. I work hard, hoping every student in my class can learn from my teaching and from being with me. I believe that students will respect the teachers who really help them learn and who treat them sincerely. Reciprocally, I expect my students to treat me sincerely and study hard.

A Chinese American Teacher

My supervisor Dr. Johnson is an American with Chinese heritage. She was born and grew up in California. Her mother tongue is Cantonese, although she cannot speak it in sentences. It is fair to say that English, instead of Chinese, is her native language. She majored in Chinese Literature in a western university, and obtained her doctoral degree in Comparative Literature Studies in Chinese Literature and American Literature. She spent one year at Beijing University as an exchange student when she was an undergraduate student and a summer in a Chinese language course in Taiwan when she was a graduate student. She started teaching Chinese as a graduate teaching assistant. Since 2006, the second year after the university where this study is located had Chinese courses, she became its faculty member teaching Chinese.

APPENDIX E
INTERCULTURAL LEARNING PORTFOLIO AND
ETHNOGRAPHIC TASKS

Introduction

To learn a language means to learn the culture shaping the language. If you only know some language skills without knowing the culture, you may not be able to use the language appropriately. Communication breakdown or serious cross-cultural misunderstanding is very likely to occur, often not due to a language problem but differences in cultural expectations. Therefore, it is better to learn the culture while learning the language. The purpose of this culture portfolio assignment is to create opportunities for you to discover and examine some of the differences in cultural products (what), practices (how), and their underlying perspectives (why), by collecting supportive evidence for whatever generalization you may arrive at. The Chinese speakers you can meet in your community including your language exchange partner, your teacher, or through the Internet, and the electronic resources such as films, TV shows, online discussion groups, etc. will provide the major sources of your evidence.

Procedures/Instructions

During the course of this semester, you are required to develop a portfolio, demonstrating the extent of your growing awareness about the phenomenon of culture and intercultural understanding. You are required to complete four ethnographic tasks. Each is worth 2% of your total grade. Completing any extra task will earn two extra points for the semester grade. Please keep the following tasks in mind so that you may collect as much supportive evidence as possible.

Make sure to document all sources you use in your portfolio, such as the quotes from or your conversations with your language exchange partner or instructor, the texts from Web sites, films, or journalistic texts, etc. Put all of your evidence, including the completed tasks and the audio/video recording with your language exchange partner in a file. You may use English or Chinese, but you are encouraged to use as many Chinese sources as possible.

Deadlines

Your culture portfolio will be collected four times during this semester: in weeks 8, 11, 13, and 15, as indicated in the course schedule. Feedback as well as a tentative progress grade will be provided. Attach my feedback and mark the accordingly modification you make (if any) when you turn in your portfolio.

Evaluation criteria: Your assigned/chosen tasks will be evaluated on a scale from 3 (excellent) to 1 (needs improvement) on the following five criteria: task completion, amount of data gathered in support of assignment, documentation of resources and citations, organization/representation, and reflexivity. Please see the assessment rubrics posted on the course Blackboard.

Ethnographic tasks

Task 1: Recognize the stereotypes about the Chinese speakers and U.S. people and societal phenomena and evaluate them in terms of substantiating evidence.

1.1. Give three examples of stereotypes many Chinese or Taiwanese hold about Americans and societal phenomena. What evidence may have given rise to these stereotypes? To explore such stereotypes, you may interview your language exchange partner, do an informal survey among the international students from China or Taiwan

or other Chinese speakers in your community, or collect data from an internet discussion group. Another alternative resource is the films involving the intercultural contacts and conflicts (such as Ang Lee's *Pushing Hands* or *The Wedding Banquet*). You can discuss the stereotypes underlying the representations.

1.2. Give three examples of stereotypes many Americans hold about Chinese or Taiwanese people and societal phenomena. What American perspectives may have given rise to these stereotypes? Again, you may conduct an informal survey among your American relatives or friends, or in an internet discussion group to explore such stereotypes.

1.3. Evaluate these stereotypes. How do you feel about the stereotypes of your people and your societies? Ask your language exchange partner how he/she feels about the stereotypes of the Chinese/Taiwanese peoples/societies.

Task 2: Recognize the contextual variables (e.g., geography, history, economics, religion, and politics) in the U.S. and Taiwan/Chinese and evaluate their impact on the cultural artifacts, practices, or perspectives.

2.1. Compare the United States and China/Taiwan on at least two of the categories (e.g., geography, climate, population, political system, average income, GNP, religion, education system, important historical events, social security safety net). Draw a table to show the differences between the two countries in the two aspects.

2.2. Discuss these differences and hypothesize how they could influence the two countries examined. For instance, if you have examined the population densities of the U.S. and Taiwan, what may be some of the effects that greater/lower population density may have on the lives and institutions of the two countries?

2.3. Select a minimum of two artifacts/practices/perspectives (e.g., popular food, literary selections, musical compositions, items of clothing, architectural monuments) in the U.S. and Taiwan/Chinese. Conjecture about the reasons for the popularity or lack of the two artifacts/practices/perspective due to the geographic, historical, demographic, or other contextual factors. You may search for the findings of the previous studies and cite them in your research.

Task 3: Demonstrate awareness that situational variables (e.g. context and role expectations and social variables such as age, gender, social class, religion, ethnicity, and place of residence) shape communicative interaction and behavior in important ways.

3.1. Give at least three examples of observed differences in English language used by one of the speaker groups (younger versus older people, male versus female, east coast versus southern, or speakers of other varieties of English versus “standard” media English).

3.2. Give at least three examples of observed differences in Chinese language used by one of the speaker groups (younger versus older people, male versus female, rural areas versus urban areas, speakers of other varieties of Chinese versus “standard” media Chinese, or the Mandarin used in Taiwan versus that in China.)

3.3. Describe a minimum of three behaviors (e.g., greetings, apologies, compliments, requests, invitation giving and receiving, sending and receiving gifts, etc.) that illustrate similarities and/or differences in contextual expectations in the American society and

Chinese/Taiwanese society.

3.4. Interpret these similarities/differences.

Task 4: Demonstrate awareness that languages have culture-specific connotations of some words, phrases, proverbs, idiomatic formulations, gestures, symbols, etc.

4.1. List at least five culture-specific connotations in words and phrases in English. For each item, describe or imagine the misunderstanding it has caused or may cause.

4.2. List at least five culture-specific connotations in words and phrases in Chinese. For each item, describe or imagine the misunderstanding it has caused or may cause.

Task 5: Demonstrate awareness of misunderstanding between Chinese speakers and Americans due to their different perspectives of social phenomena and cultural values.

5.1. Compare how an event (e.g., the U.S. troops withdrawal from Iraq), product (e.g., dish washers), or practice (e.g., throwing parties on the weekend nights) in the U.S. is viewed in the Chinese-speaking communities. You may use the Web sites, newspaper articles, advertisements, or other data sources. You may interview your language exchange partner or do a small survey on the internet discussion group.

5.2. Try to explain the causes for the different views.

5.3. Link your explanations to the values behind the phenomenon. Identify and interpret two examples of explicit or implicit values observed in texts and events in the Chinese-speaking communities and the U.S. For example, the wide use of dish washer may represent American value of time and convenience, while its limited use in Taiwan may result from the fact that most Chinese dishes are too greasy for a dish washer or may represent the value of saving energy.

5.4. Evaluate how the different values may cause misunderstanding or communication breakdown between Americans and Chinese speakers.

Task 6: Demonstrate awareness of the potential bias in exploring, describing, and interpreting cultures and the potential influence of their intercultural exploration.

6.1. Review your intercultural learning portfolio. Whenever you feel the need, modify your previous conclusions and add new data. Mark them in a different color. The demonstration of your developments in cross-cultural awareness and understanding, skills of exploring cultures, and reflectivity upon your research will be the grading points.

6.2. Identify the potential bias in your research due to the internal factors (e.g., your/your informants' ages, genders, ethnic/educational/religious/socio-economic backgrounds, etc.)

6.3. Identify the potential bias in your research due to the external factors (e.g., power relations between the nations or between you and your informants, or the limited access to the Chinese speakers, etc.).

6.4. Describe how these factors may have influenced your research.

6.5. Describe how your research (process as well as product) may have influenced/will influence your informants.

Assessment rubrics for the ethnographic tasks

Student's name: _____ Task number: _____

Score	Task completion	Amount of data	Documentation of information sources	Argument/reflectivity	Organization/representation
3	Complete all the subtasks	Use multiple sources <i>and</i> multiple modalities	All sources are well documented	Reasonable arguments and deep reflectivity	Very well presented and organized; totally legible
2	Complete half of the subtasks	Use either multiple sources used <i>or</i> multiple modalities	Some sources are documented	Most arguments are reasonable; demonstrate some degree of reflectivity	Not very organized, but still legible
1	Complete only one subtask	Use very little resource and only one modality	Few sources are documented	Illogic arguments or shallow reflectivity	Poorly presented and organized; almost illegible

Average: _____; extra point: _____; point transferred to the semester grade: _____

APPENDIX F
QUESTIONING ROUTE OF FOCUS GROUP

- Opening: Tell us your year and major.
- Introductory: Tell us how many cultural tasks you have completed and what they are.
- Transition: Think back to when you were told about the cultural learning assignment. How did you feel?
How did you brainstorm for the first task?
- Key Questions: Tell us which task you enjoyed doing the most (and why).
Which task did you find the most difficult (and why)?
The rubrics contain five criteria: task completion, data variety, source documentation, argument/reflectivity, and organization/representation. Which criteria did you find the most difficult to achieve and which is the easiest (and why)?
How did you overcome the difficulties or solve the problems?
Have you revised any task (and why not)?
What tasks would you like to revise, if you have time, more access to data, or if you have changed your opinions (and why)?
- Ending Questions: What advice would you give to make this cultural learning portfolio assignment more effective?
Is there any aspect that I missed? Is there anything that you came wanting to say but didn't get a chance to say?

APPENDIX G
TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

Conventions:	Functions:
square brackets	Square brackets [] include either the researcher's interpreting or re-phrasing the speaker's utterance to make it comprehensible to readers or the researcher's accounts of speakers' non-verbal languages or the pause length record to aid readers to interpret the context, communicative acts, and interaction sequence.
...	Omitted by the author for the space constraint
Names	T refers to the teacher; SS refers to a majority of the students having the same utterance/action.
Xxx	Inaudible or illegible utterances
+	Interruptions and overlapping turns of speech
italic words	Researcher's emphasis
Capitalized words	Speaker's emphasis