Teaching and Learning Culture
Negotiating the Context
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This book is based on educational research conducted by researchers from the Department of Learning and Philosophy and the Confucius Institute for Innovation and Learning at Aalborg University. Empirically, it reports on different approaches to teaching and learning of culture, including a student-centered task-based problem-based learning (PBL) approach, a digital technology-supported approach and more. It also reports on how, when teaching and learning culture, teachers' professional identity and the informal teaching and learning environment impact the teaching and learning of culture in different educational settings from primary school to university.

A central theme in the book is the power of context. The studies illustrate in multiple ways, and from different angles, that “culture is not taught in a vacuum or learned in isolation”, but may be influenced by many factors both inside and outside the classroom; at the same time, culture also influences the context of the learning. The context may be “invisible” and hide itself as tacit knowledge or embedded values, or it may be very visible and present itself as a fixed curriculum or an established tradition. No matter what forms and shapes the context takes, the studies in this book strongly indicate that it is essential to be aware of the power of context in teaching and learning culture in order to understand it and negotiate it.

This book suggests that teachers should not try to limit or avoid contextual influences, but instead, should explore how the context may be integrated into and used constructively in the teaching and learning of culture. This allowance of context in the classroom will allow for teachers, students, subjects and contexts to enter into a dialogue and negotiation of meaning that will enrich each other and achieve the established goal – acquisition of cultural awareness and intercultural understanding.
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FOREWORD

Learning and Teaching Culture Beyond Fantasies?

“Beyond the ideas which are chilled and congealed in language, we must seek the warmth and mobility of life.”


The Joseph E. Hotung Gallery at the British Museum explores China, South Asia and Southeast Asia from the Palaeolithic to the present. In the section devoted to Chinese civilization, one finds a group of 12 colourful and impressive ceramic figures from the tomb of Liu Tingxun, an important military and political character of Tang China from around 700 CE – the “golden age of achievement, both at home and abroad” (MacGregor, 2010, p.55). These were the heydays of the Silk Road. Walking in procession, these creatures, humans and animals of about one meter high, are meant to guard the dead and to impress the judges of the underworld “who would recognize his rank and his abilities, and award him the prestigious place among the dead that was his due” (MacGregor, ibid.). To untrained and ignorant eyes, these sculptures look very “Chinese”, even “typically Chinese.” Yet, when one looks closer at the faces of the pair of lokapāla figures (Sanskrit for “guardian of the world”) one cannot but see Indian faces. At the back of the procession, the horses were, at the time, a new breed in China, brought from the West, while the Bactrian camels originated from Afghanistan and Turkestan.

The Indian, Afghan, and Turkestan references highlight China’s close links with Central Asia and other parts of the world at that time. Like other countries, China has always been in contact with the world and its culture bears witness to the many and varied mixings, mélanges, but also inventions and constructions of different eras. We could do a very similar analysis of Chinese artifacts from the 19th century or even from today – or of any other “culture” for that matter. A cultural artifact such as the Liu Tingxun tomb also denotes both the symbolic power of the “other” and the power relations between “cultures.” As such, the horses and camels, “borrowed” and monetized from other parts of the world, contributed to the General’s prestigious status when facing the judges of the underworld.

When one reads about China in Europe and elsewhere, the country is often described as a “monochrome forest” (Cheng, 2008), in which over 1 billion people (and the Chinese “diaspora” abroad) become “chilled and congealed” (see the quote by Bergson at the beginning of this foreword) in limited, static, and sometimes implicitly negative representations. For Alleton (2007, p. 249), such ideas have
been constructed since the Roman Empire based on the “fragmented information” brought back by merchants, travelers and missionaries who visited China. They also contributed to constructing “illusions and fantasies” about China and the Chinese. As we shall see later, the Chinese themselves have also cultivated these elements by (re)inventing themselves and their culture, and reversing the representations that the so-called West has created. At the same time, however, the Chinese have also othered the “West.” It is always important to bear in mind that othering is an international “sin” of which we are all guilty (Dervin, 2012).

Attitudes towards China have evolved throughout history, changing how its culture has been described and discussed. In the 17th and 18th centuries, China was admired. “Enlightenment philosophers used virtuous China as a foil to decadent Europe. Every aspect of Europe was held up to criticism: Christianity, hereditary monarchy, and scholastic philosophy; by contrast, China was hailed as the perfect state: land of atheism, benevolent despotism, and social harmony” (Lo, 2013, p. 106). In the 19th century, China was described as a cruel and deceitful land while the 20th century marks a certain fascination with the Chinese revolution. Today, China is the “other” par excellence, especially the “other” to be feared. Recent books published in the “West” disclose, in a sense, this fear: China Shakes The World: The Rise of a Hungry Nation (Kynge, 2009); When China Rules The World: The End of the Western World and the Birth of a New Global Order (Jacques, 2012); Tiger Head, Snake Tails: China Today, How It Got There, and Where It Is Heading (Fenby, 2013).

Throughout the centuries, one figure has been used more frequently than any other to construct Chinese culture in China and abroad: the philosopher Confucius (551–479 CE; his name was Latinized for the first time by Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci in the 16th century). Even if Confucianism (a notion invented by the “West”) is said to be the basis of Chinese thinking, behavior, and culture, Confucius has not always been revered in China and has witnessed ups and downs. Philosopher, historian, and writer Li Zhi (1527–1602) was very critical of Confucians and Neo-Confucians. During the May Fourth Movement in 1919, one of the slogans was “Down with Confucianism!” Mao Zedong himself banned the teachings of Confucius in 1949. Finally, The Criticize Lin (Biao), Criticize Kong (Confucius) Campaign (批林批孔运动) that ran from 1973–1976 is also worth mentioning.

Today, Confucius appears to be a “market” (Cheng, 2009), not only in China but also in Korea. The philosopher has also won reverence in Hong Kong, Macao, Singapore, and in overseas Chinese communities. Cheng (2009) goes as far as talking about the emergence of “Confucius Economicus” in the period of 1990–1997. In China, political, media, educational, and social discourses are increasingly related to the importance and influence of Confucius. As such, during the Olympic Games, Confucius’ saying 四海之内皆兄弟也 (“all the people of the world are brothers”) welcomed people from all over the world.

Interestingly, in his 2012 book entitled Confucianism and Democratization in East Asia, Doh Chull Shin shows that so-called Confucian values such as hierarchical
collectivism, interpersonal reciprocity and accommodation, communal interest and harmony, and Confucian familism in Asia are no more Confucian than those of people in other parts of the world. Shin (ibid.) bases his criticisms on extensive surveys conducted from 2005–2008 by the World Values Survey Association and the Asian Barometer Survey. This is potentially a direct blow to culturalist and essentialist approaches to such things as intercultural communication, which have used these elements as a way of defining China and the Chinese for many decades (see, for example, the highly criticized work of Hofstede; MacSweeney (2002) and Holliday (2010) offer very convincing criticisms). These ideas have been taught and “alibied” in the sense that they offer “culture as an excuse” (Dervin, 2013) to thousands of university students, student teachers, businessmen, etc. around the world.

Culture Language and Teaching: Towards a New Agenda?

If one says: ‘You think like this and we think like that’, then we just stare at each other and ‘dialogue’ stops here.

Anne Cheng (2010)

Going back to Henri Bergson’s quote, what the philosopher suggests is that we, as thinkers, intellectuals, researchers, and practitioners, start concentrating on the “warmth and mobility of life” instead of freezing it. The article by Mads Jacok Kirkebæk in this book is quite telling in this sense as it problematizes the central issues of this volume on learning and teaching culture. Asked to create a “China-box” filled with Chinese artifacts for language and culture education in Denmark, the author is puzzled: “How is culture to be defined? Is culture something that can be fitted into a box? If not, how do we teach culture, and how do we fill up that box?”

The excellent book edited by Mads Jakob Kirkebæk, Xiangyun Du, and Annie Aarup Jensen on the power of context in teaching and learning culture offers many answers to these questions. The rich and exciting chapters that they have collected propose a Task-Based approach to these issues in order to infuse instability, mélanges, intersubjectivity, and individuality at the centre of culture learning and teaching. Many of the chapters deal with Chinese “culture” and how to teach-learn it from a complex perspective.

The editors and authors are, in this sense, very close to the current criticisms that have appeared in sinology and anthropology, for example. In what follows, I will take up some of these ideas to summarize and add to the arguments presented in the book.

Let me start with sinologists. First of all, Gernet (2007, p. 21) argues that examining Chinese culture necessitates looking into the alterations that have taken place in China in social, religious, and political terms, and as we did with the Tang tomb figures from the British Museum, to problematize foreign influences and reciprocities.

Anne Cheng, who is a professor of the intellectual history of China at the prestigious Collège de France in Paris, endeavors to “show that there is not one
unique way of thinking in China and to recognize the fact that China did not stop thinking in Ancient times, or when Western modernity was introduced to her” (2007, p. 11). She also suggests avoiding comparison (and, at the same time, opposition) between European and Chinese cultures in favor of examining how ideas have circulated between these two political and “imagined” spaces (2008). According to Laplantine (2012, p. 43), this could allow us to go with the “flux of movements” between China and the rest of the world rather than stop them. He adds: “continuously distinguishing and building up contrasts (…) often turn (them) into stereotypes” (ibid.). In relation to literature, Laplantine (ibid.) suggests examining the many similarities between authors such as Su Dongpo and Montaigne, Lu Xun and Kafka, Shen Congwen and Rousseau, or Lao She and Bertold Brecht.

The philosopher Billeter (2006, p. 82) also argues against making comparisons and suggests that we base our analyses of intercultural encounters between the Chinese and other peoples on the “unity of human experience.” This is very much in line with Moghaddam’s interesting proposal called omniculturalism in the field of education (2012). Based on a two-stage approach, “the omniculturalism imperative compels us to give priority to human commonalities, and requires that children are taught the important scientifically-established commonalities that characterize human beings” (ibid, p. 306). In stage two, differences between groups are introduced to students, but the priority is always human commonalities (ibid.). There will always be differences between individuals, even from the same country, but identifying what we have in common might require more intellectual and strategic work (Abdallah-Pretceille, 1986), which makes this approach more stimulating.

Cheng (2008) also proposes becoming aware of the “spectacles” that we wear when we read the relations between two cultures, as these often blind us. Interestingly, in this volume, this is what Niels Erik Lyngdorf, Ulla Egidiussen Egekvist, Xiang-yun Du, and Jiannong Shi do in their article concerning a dinner organized for Chinese students during an intercultural student exchange program between Denmark and China:

When dinner was ready, the Chinese students were surprised to find that one of the dishes was plain, raw carrots. The Danish teachers had prepared a menu that they believed was very Chinese-inspired (rice, stew, and raw vegetables on the side) to make sure it would be to everyone’s liking; however, they soon realized that the Chinese guests were not used to eating raw vegetables. As a result, only a few Chinese students politely tried eating the raw carrots.

This reflective approach to self and other can lead to new learning, not so much about culture, but about how and why we (co-)construct certain entities in certain ways. For the anthropologist Laplantine (2012, p. 23), when one speaks of the Chinese or when a Chinese person speaks of an “other,” much is said about the self through the way the other is imagined.

This is very reminiscent of how research into ethnicity, for example, has been problematized over the last decades. In his summary of its major paradigms,
Wimmer (2013, p. 1) explains how research into ethnicity, and also research on culture teaching-learning, has moved from primordialism (ethnicity is natural) to instrumentalism (people choose identities as they see fit); essentialism (ethnicity is stable) and situationalism (people identify with different categories depending on the situation); perennialism (ethnicity is stable) and modernism (ethnic distinctions are changing). In my own research on the Chinese (Dervin, 2011; Dervin & Gao, 2012; Dervin & Gao, forth.), through applying the more critical sides of Wimmer’s continuum, I have examined how the opposite sides are put into play in discourses of otherness. In relation to Chineseness, I am especially interested in culturalism. For Eriksen and Stjernfelt (2012, p. 249), this notion refers to the argument that “individuals are determined by their culture only; that these cultures constitute organic and closed wholes; and that the individual, because of this over-determination, is unable to emancipate and free from her culture: on the contrary, she can only blossom in this culture.” According to Laplantine (2013, p. 43), culturalism “erects a wall of opacity between continents and isolates “cultures” in unchangeable oppositions” (ibid.). This is definitely an approach that we may want to avoid in culture teaching and learning.

This leads me to another essential aspect in our renewal of culture teaching-learning that will have to be examined in more depth in the near future. The idea that culture is related to struggles of power has been hinted at earlier in this foreword. In her volume on identity/difference politics, Dhamoon (2009, p. ix) proposes to analyze and critique “how and with what effects power shapes difference.” Through this approach, Dhamoon problematizes an important aspect of “doing culture”: discourses of culture can serve as a way of reinforcing certain supremacies, such as (neo-)colonialism, (neo-)racism, etc. (ibid.: 2). As such, many scholars have examined how culture often serves as a proxy for such things as the concept of race and leads to disguised forms of racism (Bayart, 2002). Dhamoon lists a number of questions that I believe can help practitioners to problematize these issues in their teaching-learning activities (Dhamoon, 2009, p. 56):

How are meanings of difference constituted relationally through discourse (historically, institutionally, and practically)? How do the forces of power constitute subjects differently and differentially, why, and with what effects? How are meanings of difference constituted in different historical social contexts, and how do these meanings constitute social-political arrangements? How can penalizing and privileging meanings of difference be disrupted?

The notion of intersectionality is also central in Dhamoon’s approach. Intersectionality represents the crossing of different identity markers when analysing interaction between e.g. individuals from different countries. So instead of concentrating solely on the old and tired concept of culture, which tends to “wrap us in its suffocating embrace” (Prashad, 2001, p. xi), one should also look into systems of race (or racialization), gender, class, ethnicity, disability, etc. (Dhamoon, 2009, p. 63) and how they intersect.
To summarize the approach to culture learning and teaching as it is put forward in this volume, I would like to refer to the ethnopsychiatrist Georges Devereux’s distinction between two different approaches to research (1968). He uses the metaphor of holding a stick to describe these approaches. The first approach, which corresponds to culturalism and essentialism (or simple and naïve approaches to culture as described earlier), forces the researcher-practitioner to hold a stick very rigidly in the sense that s/he restrains her/himself from infusing any of the following aspects in her/his work: instability, mélanges, intersubjectivity, and individuality. The second approach suggested by Devereux, which is constructivist, contextual, intersubjective, and reflective in relation to culture teaching-learning, consists in holding the stick loosely (ibid.) and letting instability, anxiety, and negotiation enter our teaching-learning. This is, I believe, what the editors and authors are doing with brio in this volume, by moving beyond the fantasies that the rigidly-held stick approach imposes on its holder and those around her/him.

REFERENCES


1. THE POWER OF CONTEXT IN TEACHING AND LEARNING CULTURE

INTRODUCTION

Culture is not taught in a vacuum or learned in isolation; an ongoing dialogue and negotiation takes place between teachers, students, subjects, and context. This happens both explicitly and implicitly, and the implicit dialogue and negotiation is especially in focus here. Teaching and learning are influenced by many factors both inside and outside the classroom and, at the same time, also influence the context. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss and analyze all possible factors that may influence teaching and learning, or to identify all influences that teaching and learning may have on the context. However, we have chosen five factors that we find important, including: (1) views on globalization and culture, (2) concepts of culture, (3) teaching and learning approaches, (4) the teacher-student relationship, and (5) the creation of a supportive learning environment. It is not the intention of this chapter, or of the book as a whole, to make teachers change their views on such things as culture or teaching methods as starting points for their course planning, but only to make them aware of factors, including tacit knowledge, non-formulated beliefs, and embedded values, that may direct and guide their teaching and the students’ learning even without a conscious decision being made. In this way, we hope to help teachers see what they ought to consider when planning courses in culture. More specifically, we end up asking five questions that we believe teachers of culture need to answer for themselves before beginning class.

THREE DIFFERENT VIEWS ON GLOBALIZATION OF CULTURE

Globalization

Globalization is not something new, although its present form has its own distinctive features. Steger (2003, p. 19) believes that globalization “is as old as humanity itself” and identifies five historic periods corresponding to five phases of globalization. Robertson (2003) talks of three “waves” of globalization, the first starting with Spain and Portugal’s maritime expeditions to India and China in the sixteenth century, the second wave, rushing in over the Third World in the nineteenth century as a result of the industrial revolution led by Britain, and the third wave of globalization, beginning after 1945, being marked by the competition between the United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics to win followers for their causes around

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the world. Terminology differs, but scholars seem to agree that the current phase of globalization is characterized by shrinking space, shrinking time, and disappearing borders. Beck (2000) writes that globalization is “the processes through which sovereign national states are criss-crossed and undermined by transnational actors with varying prospects of power, orientations, identities and networks” (p. 11). Friedman (1999) makes the point that globalization, more than anything else, shapes the domestic policies and foreign relations of virtually every country. Globalization is thus seen as a driving force that creates flows of money, ideas, and people and, to an increasing extent, interconnects and links continents, regions, nation states, and individual people’s lives economically, politically, and culturally. Here, our primarily interest is the question of how globalization influences culture.

One Big Family

In his book Cultural Globalization and Language Education, Kumaravadivelu writes that three different views on globalization and culture exist (Kumaravadivelu, 2008), and he terms the advocates of these views hyper-globalizers, localizers, and glocalizers, respectively. The hyper-globalizers believe that “some kind of cultural homogenization is taking place in which the American culture of consumerism constitutes the dominant center” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 38). According to Kumaravadivelu, hyper-globalizers tend to make a simple and direct equation between globalization, Westernization, Americanization, and McDonaldization (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 39), the latter of which Kumaravadivelu explains as being “processes by which the basic principles of the fast-food industry – creation of homogenized consumer goods and imposition of uniform standards – shape the cultural landscape in America and elsewhere” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 39).

Advocates of the cultural homogenization thesis seem to believe that American culture has proved best and that it will therefore spread to the rest of the world. According to this view, cultures are not equal, but placed into a hierarchy with American culture at the top. Anyone is welcome to join, but not to question the dominance of American culture; in order to be part of it, one needs to get in line. Such a view on culture is not new; eighteenth century French intellectuals also thought of culture in the singular. Culture was seen as a hierarchical structure in which the peoples of the world were placed according to their perceived phase of development. Not surprisingly, the French put themselves at the top. It is also very similar to the view of culture in pre-revolution China. In China, it was believed that there was only one culture of any value, namely Chinese culture. However, anyone was allowed to participate and be part of the hierarchy as long as they recognized the superiority of the Chinese emperor and Chinese culture.

Two Worlds: Us and Them

Cultures can also be thought of in the plural. In his famous book The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order, political scientist Samuel P.
Huntington (1997, p. 32) reminds us that “The tendency to think in terms of two worlds recurs throughout human history … us and them, the in-group and the other, our civilization and those barbarians.” This tendency may at least partly explain the reactions to American culture by a group of people that Kumaravadivelu terms the “localizers.” The localizers believe that … a multitude of local cultural identities are being revived and revitalized owing to real or perceived threats from the process of globalization. They reject the proposition about the cultural dominance of the West over the rest, and about the pre-eminence of the American cultural field… (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 42)

The localizers further believe that … globalization has contributed only to the contraction of space, time and borders and not to the expansion of communal harmony or shared values among the peoples of the world. In fact, it has only strengthened the forces of fundamentalism … [and any kind of fundamentalism] … is premised upon a deep desire to protect and preserve local traditional beliefs and practices that are perceived to be threatened by global cultural flows… (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, pp. 43–44)

As was the case with the hyper-globalizers, the localizers’ position can also be traced back into history. In response to the increasing cultural influence from an economically, politically, and militarily stronger France, the German philosopher, theologian and poet Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) formulated a systematic theory of culture, according to which each people had its own culture and the right to defend it. Today, the localizers seem to share similar views.

The hyper-globalizers and localizers agree that an increase in global interaction will influence culture, but they do not agree on how this will come to pass. Hyper-globalizers argue that it will lead to cultural homogenization, and localizers argue that it will result in cultural heterogenization. In addition to these two positions, however, a third position exists. This is the position of the glocalizers.

Cultural Transmission Is a Bidirectional Process

The glocalizers believe that “cultural transmission is a two-way process in which cultures in contact shape and reshape each other directly or indirectly” (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 44). In the view of the glocalizers, no dichotomy exists between “us” and “them,” or our culture and yours. They admit that the local is modified to accommodate the global, but also insist that the global, as part of the very same process, also assimilates with the local. Kumaravadivelu uses the American fast-food chain McDonald’s as an example of how this works in practice (Kumaravadivelu, 2008, p. 45). In order to sell burger menus worldwide, McDonald’s accommodates local food habits and serves Kosher food in Israel, Halal food in Islamic countries, and vegetarian food in India, where most people do not
eat meat. Another American fast-food chain, Kentucky Fried Chicken, does the same in China, where dòujiāng, hot soy milk, has been made part of the local KFC menu.

In this chapter, we will not argue for one or another of the three views on globalization and culture introduced above, but limit ourselves to putting forward the first question that culture teachers may benefit from asking themselves:

**Question 1:** Am I a hyper-globalizer, localizer or – maybe – a glocalizer?

The first question a culture teacher needs to consider and critically reflect upon is where he or she places him or herself within one of these three categories: hyper-globalizers, localizers, or glocalizers. Where do society, school, students, and parents expect him or her to be, and where does he or she feel at home?

**VIEWS ON CULTURE**

Culture is a word with a long history and many meanings, including high culture (film, theatre, poetry, and more), lived culture (cultures-within-cultures), and national culture (Chinese or Danish culture). Therefore, it is not surprising that it has proven difficult to agree on a definition of culture. In the early 1950s, Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) compiled and analyzed more than 150 different definitions from a variety of disciplines before they proposed a definition of culture that contained elements of what they considered the main types of definitions. More recently, Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht, and Lindsley (2006) have published a book with more than 300 definitions of culture in order “to provide the reader with a resource of extant definitions” (Baldwin et al., 2006, p. XVI). Baldwin et al. divide the definitions into seven different types or themes: (1) structure/pattern, (2) function, (3) process, (4) product, (5) refinement, (6) power or ideology, and (7) group-membership (Baldwin et al., 2006, 27–52). We will leave it up to the readers of this chapter to consult these volumes and make their own choice of definition. Here, we will limit ourselves to one aspect of the discussion on culture. This is the question of whether culture is to be understood as a collection of stable, slow-changing systems of values and behaviors that groups of people share, or if, on the contrary, culture is constantly negotiated, constructed, and shared between individuals in different social contexts. This question is of particular interest and importance for teachers of culture because it has great implications for the choice of teaching methods a teacher will use.

*Like Pearls on a String ...*

Different views of culture will influence teaching and learning. Cultures can be regarded as closed systems, which contain a number of people who resemble one another and are different from all those belonging to other cultures. Cultures co-exist like islands in the sea or pearls on a string, but each of them are clearly defined, relatively homogeneous, and change very slowly. As Kirkebæk indicates in chapter 2 (Kirkebæk, 2013) and Marchetti describes in chapter 9 (Marchetti, 2013), this
Culture may also, however, be seen as a set of more open structures, lacking clear borders and constantly changing. This understanding of culture as something more complex has to do with process, development, and transformation. Individuals do not only belong to one culture, but to several, and the number of cultural communities they are part of is not fixed, but may increase or decrease over time. Culture is constantly created and negotiated between individuals and consists of many cultural communities that one shares with some, but not with all. The contributors to this book all belong to Danish academic culture, but some differ when it comes to food and sports culture. The contributors all belong to the English-speaking community, but where some of them are actively involved in the community of those with small children, others have already left for the community of those parenting teens. This may be used as an illustration of the ways in which individuals share many, but not all cultural communities, and that the ones they share may change over time.

As was the case with the descriptive view, the complex view of culture may also influence the way teachers plan and conduct their teaching. If culture is not fixed, but something created and negotiated between individuals and between individuals and context, a teacher-centered, lecture-based approach to teaching culture yields very little meaning. On the other hand, if one believes it is possible to present learners with a precise description and clear-cut picture of Chinese culture, an experience and participation-based learning-by-doing approach to teaching may be considered a waste of time. Therefore, the second question we would like culture teachers to consider and reflect upon is:

*Question 2: Do I subscribe to a descriptive or a complex view of culture?*

This question demands contemplation because it may have great implications for the planning and conduction of teaching culture.

## APPROACHES TO TEACHING AND LEARNING OF CULTURE

### An Informational Approach

Teachers’ approaches to teaching and learning are a third factor that will influence the teaching and learning of culture. Kumaravadivelu (2008) puts it the following way:

*It is fair to state that the predominant approach to the teaching and learning of culture in the language classroom has been mostly information-oriented. That is,"*
learners were given information about the cultural beliefs and practices of their target language community through cultural tidbits about food and festivals, rites and rituals, and myths and manners. In this informational approach culture was treated as no more than static products or facts that may be collected, codified, objectified, and presented to learners in discrete items (p. 178). This approach leaves little room for learners’ active participation and interaction and generally avoids letting learners work with culture spontaneously and independently for fear that it would result in misunderstanding and false knowledge of the target culture.

A Constructivist Approach

In recent years, however, the informational approach has lost ground to a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. Constructivism is embedded in the philosophy that people construct their own understandings of the world in which they live, and that learning takes place in the process of generating meanings and reflecting on experiences. Therefore, the importance of learners’ experiences and their interaction with the social and cultural context is highly emphasized in this approach.

The constructivist approach is implemented in diverse forms, including problem-based learning and task-based learning, among others. At Alborg University, Denmark, a task-based, problem-based teaching and learning approach is employed in the teaching and learning of culture, as presented in chapters 2, 4, and 9 of this volume. Unlike the informational approach, this is a student-centered approach that values individual and different learning outcomes. The teaching and learning process takes place in, to use an expression from Marchetti in chapter 9, a trading zone where participants negotiate their understandings of culture, which are rooted in their individual backgrounds, interests, and pre-understandings (Marchetti, 2013). The task-based, problem-based learning approach to the teaching and learning of culture is inspired by a similar approach to the teaching and learning of language (Du, 2012). The use of tasks in language teaching and learning is exemplified in chapter 5 of this volume. Both approaches emphasize student motivation as the essence of learning and use tasks as an effective tool in motivating students. They require clear definitions of learning goals and expected learning outcomes, and highlight the importance of learners’ active involvement, participation, and engagement in the teaching and learning process, underlining the vital role of collaborative learning. Using tasks places focus on meaning instead of form and employs teaching and learning activities that are associated with the real world. Finally, it also emphasizes the important role of context in teaching and learning.

The choice of teaching and learning approach depends very much on the purpose of the teaching. If, as Kirkebæk notes in chapter 2, the purpose is to prepare students for a multiple choice test, a lecture-based, teacher-centered informational approach may be the right choice. If, however, the purpose is to develop the students’ cultural
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awareness, it may not. Therefore, the only thing we can do here is suggest that culture teachers ask and answer for themselves the following question:

Question 3: What approach to teaching and learning of culture should I use?

The answer to this question is dependent on the purpose of the teaching and critical to ensuring that teachers leave their students with a proper understanding of the material.

THE TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIP

The Teacher-Student Relationship

A fourth factor that may influence the teaching and learning of culture is the teacher-student relationship. In societies with a relatively large power distance between the two, like China, teachers and students will expect the teacher-student relationship to be highly hierarchical. As Li and Du (2013) write in chapter 6 of this volume, many teachers in China expect themselves to act as experts and masters in class. The teachers believe that they are the ones who hold all the knowledge pertinent to the subject, and it is their job to transfer this knowledge to the students. In return, they expect the students’ undivided interest, attention, and respect. Spontaneous questions and discussions during class may be regarded as disrespectful and as a challenge to the teacher’s authority. Many Chinese students also expect the teacher to take the leading role and may consider a teacher that invites student participation, discussion, and critique to be weak or less competent. Li and Du (2013) argue that the teacher-student relationship in China is heavily influenced by the social and cultural context. The context to which they refer is the adherence to Confucian thoughts on human relationships, according to which the subjects must follow the ruler, and the ruler has the obligation of taking care of the subjects.

Danish society is characterized by a relatively small power distance, with the teacher-student relationship appearing to be less hierarchical than in China. In Danish society, important embedded values are equality and homogeneity (Kirkebæk, 2013). In chapter 8 of this volume, Zhang and Jensen (2013), illustrate how this makes Danish teachers minimize differences between individual students and between teacher and student. In order to make the student-student relationship more equal, the Danish teachers refrain from publicly stating which of the students performed the best (or worst) on assignments (Zhang & Jensen, 2013). The Danish teachers also work actively to make the teacher-student relationship less hierarchical and more like a relationship between friends in order to make students feel safe and prevent letting fear of making a mistake keep them from speaking out (Zhang & Jensen, 2013). In Denmark, where equality and homogeneity is the norm, teachers will often refrain from positioning themselves as experts or masters, and will instead invite students to ask questions and even challenge what the teacher is saying. Even though a hierarchy still exists, it is a hierarchy in disguise, and it is considered a failure if the Danish teacher has to openly display that he or she is the person in power.
Mismatches between Teacher and Student Expectations and Behavior

As long as teacher and student expectations of the teacher-student relationship match, there is little risk of conflict, but if there is a mismatch between teacher expectations and student behavior, for example, challenges will arise. Mismatches between teacher expectation and student behavior, or of equal importance, between student expectations and teacher behavior, may lead to misunderstandings and even stereotyping. Kumaravadivelu (2008) mentions three common stereotypes about students from Asia: they show blind obedience to authority, they lack critical thinking skills, and they do not actively participate in classroom interaction. However, what in a Western context may often be explained as “blind obedience” and “lacking participation” may, as Li and Du (2013) elaborate on in chapter 6, be interpreted as students’ proper respect for the teacher in China.

Asking questions, being critical, and having discussions with the teacher are important parts of the ideal student role in the West, so this kind of behavior is expected and rewarded by the teacher. In China, however, asking questions and beginning discussions during class without first being authorized by the teacher would not always be rewarded. It might, on the contrary, be understood as being disrespectful to the teacher and a challenge to the teacher’s authority and position as master. It could even, as Li and Du (2013) write in chapter 6, be seen as a violation of Li (礼), a moral principle or standard that is supposed to secure order and harmony in society.

The above illustrates that cultural capital, in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu (Webb, Schirato & Danaher, 2002), is context-dependent. As Webb, Schirato and Danaher (2002, p. 22) formulate it: “It is important to remember that cultural capital is not set in stone and universally accepted, either within or across fields.” Cultural capital takes different forms in different contexts, and from this follows that the value of the cultural capital teachers and students carry varies very much based on the context. If, to mention one example, a Western teacher goes to China to teach and intends to have an equal and democratic relationship with his Chinese students, the cultural capital that this intention might have earned him in Denmark may prove valueless in China. Li and Du (2013) put it the following way:

A simple transplant of Western educational thoughts to a Chinese context cannot work well because it neglects the particularity of the Chinese context. Therefore, the effort of transforming the Chinese teacher-student relationship is in need of a genuine understanding of Chinese ethical and cultural tradition in order to properly assess both its strengths and limitations (see chapter 6 in this volume).

It might be possible to avoid many unhappy experiences in the teaching and learning of culture if teachers and students in unfamiliar cultural contexts could stop regarding each other based on the characteristics of roles assigned in their home cultures and instead began looking at each other as teachers and students in
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a certain context. Therefore, the fourth question a teacher in culture needs to ask him or herself is:

*Question 4: What roles should the ideal teacher and student play in class?*

It is needless to say that mismatches between teacher expectations and student behavior, and vice versa, will influence the teaching and learning of culture in a negative way. Therefore, it is important for teachers of culture to ask what he or she expects from him or herself and from the students in class.

A SUPPORTIVE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

*Many Different Proposals*

The different chapters in this volume contain many suggestions as to what may constitute a supportive learning environment. Where some suggestions conflict, others overlap or supplement each other. Based on the belief that learning is constructive and takes place in a social context as a meaning-seeking process, Kirkebæk (chapter 2) suggests a task-based, problem-based approach to the teaching and learning of culture. To him, a supportive learning environment not only allows students to receive knowledge, but also to create knowledge through purposeful interaction, communication, and the solving of problems related to the real world outside the classroom. In chapter 3, Lyngdorf, Egekvist, Du, and Shi, through reflecting on their experiences of designing an intercultural exchange program between Danish and Chinese students, suggest that a supportive learning environment for cultural learning should include interactive activities that facilitate cooperation between the students from each group. The activities should provide a context for participation, observation, communication, cooperation, and negotiation of practice, and also be meaningful to those involved. Ruan and Du, in chapter 4, propose a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) inspired approach to teaching and learning culture within formal curricula. Their study suggests that a supportive learning environment for culture is not to transfer factual knowledge about culture, but to facilitate meaningful learning and help students develop cultural awareness and understanding. In chapter 5, Rui and Kirkebæk, after having investigated Danish students’ perceptions of task-based teaching in Chinese, conclude that task-based teaching may be considered part of a supportive learning environment. Li and Du, in chapter 6, argue convincingly that the definition of a supportive learning environment may be different in different contexts. Different views on teacher-student relationships will lead to different views on what constitutes a supportive learning environment. Does an expert-teacher that offers students knowledge in a ready-to-remember format offer a supportive learning environment, or is it, on the contrary, a teacher that creates opportunities for learning and acts as facilitator? In chapter 7, Wang and Jensen, through their study of a group of native Chinese teachers in Denmark, suggest that teachers’ perceptions of Danish students and beliefs in
teaching methods have close connection with and impact on the way they construct learning environments for students. In particular, when these teachers are facing challenges of cultural differences by teaching in a Danish context, they are also struggling to balance their teaching practices so as to provide a supportive learning environment for Danish students. Zhang and Jensen, in chapter 8, investigate three Danish teachers’ constructions of professional identity and discover that an important part of their identity is connected to their ability to create a friendly, relaxed study atmosphere that make students feel safe, equal, and free to speak. In chapter 9, Marchetti investigates the possible contribution of digital technologies to the teaching and learning of culture in museums, and her conclusion is that it may be enriched by the introduction of mediated play. Digital technologies are thus also found to contribute to a supportive learning environment. Finally, in chapter 10, Bertelsen, Ying, and Solinap emphasize the importance of “learning, when you are not learning,” which refers to the importance of an extensive and well-developed informal learning environment at a university, as illustrated by personal narratives from the University of Cambridge, Cité Internationale Universitaire de Paris, Harvard University, and Tsinghua. This leads to the fifth and final question:

**Question 5: What constitutes a supportive learning environment and how do I contribute to it?**

**IN CLOSING**

The intention of this chapter has been to articulate, illuminate, and increase teacher consciousness of five contextual factors that may influence teaching and learning in culture, namely: (1) views on globalization and culture, (2) concepts of culture, (3) teaching and learning approaches, (4) the teacher-student relationship, and (5) the creation of a supportive learning environment. This chapter leaves it to the reader to choose the “right” view on such things as culture or the teacher-student relationship. The chapter’s only aim is to remind teachers of the impact these factors may have on the teaching and learning of culture, so that they become aware of them and become capable of making active, well-considered choices in their course planning.

**REFERENCES**


2. FILLING UP A “CHINA-BOX”

How Task-Based Problem-Based Learning Can Be Applied to Teaching in Chinese Culture

INTRODUCTION

Center for Undervisningsmidler i Ålborg og Hjørring (Center for Teaching Materials in Ålborg and Hjørring) asked the Confucius Institute for Innovation & Learning at Aalborg University (hereafter CIAAU) to prepare teaching material on Chinese culture for primary school students. The teaching material should fit into a wooden box and consist of a number of artifacts representative of Chinese culture. The “China-box” would then be included in the Center’s collection of boxes with artifacts from different countries that primary school teachers can borrow and use in their teaching of history, civics, religion and so on. Filling a “China-box” seemed to be a simple task at first. However, the selection of artifacts turned out to be very complicated. Many questions were brought up, including the following: How is culture to be defined? Is culture something that can be fitted into a box? If not, how do we teach culture, and how do we fill up that box? These questions and the tentative answers to them is the primary focus of this chapter.

CONCEPTS OF CULTURE

Origin and Development of the Concepts of Culture

Our first step, when we started preparing teaching material on Chinese culture, was to look at the origin and development of the concept of culture.

In English. The English word “culture” originates from the Latin verb “colo” that means “to cultivate, take care of, nurse, work on” and this verb was later substantivized to “cultura” – “cultivation”. Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–46 BC) and Plutarch (48–122 AD) expanded the meaning of “cultura” by adding “animi” – a genitive of “animus” – “spirit”. “Cultura animi” – cultivation of the spirit – had a double meaning: (1) Self-cultivation and self-creation and (2) care for the spiritual growth of others. Originally, cultura was the name of a process, that is upbringing, cultivation and education, but during the seventeenth century, cultura also became the name of the result of the process: Intellectual or spiritual maturity (Fink, 1988).
At this stage, *cultura* might not only be used at an individual level, but also at a societal level as an identity marker, an inclusion and exclusion tool and to create positive self-representation and stereotypes of others. In the West, eighteenth-century French thinkers developed cultural criteria by which other societies might be judged sufficiently “cultured” to be accepted as equals or – more often – lower ranking in a cultural hierarchy with the French inventors of the system at the top. This cultural hierarchy was built on the assumption that there is one single standard for what culture consists of. It expressed the idea of culture in the singular. At the same time, however, others spoke of it in the plural as cultures.

German philosopher Johan Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803) introduced the view that there is no universal culture, rather there are many cultures, each of which is ‘cultured’ in its own way and, therefore, ought to enjoy the same status. Herder saw cultures as well-defined, stable and very slow-changing communities with all members having the same mentality and sharing the same values, rules and language. Each community was – to use Karen Risager’s wording – perceived as “a closed national universe of culture, history, people and mentality” (Risager, 2007).

In Chinese. The Chinese word 文化 – *wénhuà* – means “civilization, culture, education and schooling.” Kam Louie (2008, p. 14) writes that the word *wénhuà* literally implies a process of transformation by *wén*, or writing, and that the verbalizing particle *huà* in *wénhuà* indicates the transformative effect of culture.

In China, the original concept of culture had some of the same characteristics as the concept in the West. The Chinese concept of culture was based on the assumption that there was only one culture, namely, Chinese culture, and that China – placed as it was in the middle of a perceived world around it – was the natural center of that culture. China earned, from its own point of view, a special position, because it had created the culture and safeguarded the culture and, therefore, had the authority to decide how close or far away from the cultural center other societies ought to be placed.

China placed itself at the center of a perceived cultural universe for the very same reason as France placed itself at the top in Europe. China strongly believed that it was culturally superior to the rest of the world. It ought to be mentioned though, that Chinese culture was open to outsiders. On the condition that Chinese culture was accepted and recognized as superior, outsiders might be allowed to access and be part of it. In China, it was originally believed that *wénhuà* could be achieved by all who aspired to it so that, through cultivation, anyone could become a cultured person or – as it is put in Chinese – “have culture” (有 文化 – *yǒu wénhuà*). It was only later, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, that the idea of culture in the singular was seriously challenged in China and gradually replaced by the idea of cultures in the plural, and it was only then that culture, as an integrated part of nationalistic ideologies, began to be defined as fixed sets of meanings that distinguished groups of people from each other.

Both in Europe and China, the original meanings of culture were connected with process, development, transformation and inclusion of anyone who aspired to become
‘cultured’. During history, however, the concept of culture has also been used to describe something closed, fixed and static that one was either born into or that one would never be able to be a part of. These two different understandings of culture – as something closed, well-defined and stable or as something open, without clear borders and forever changing – are still very visible in two of today’s concepts of national culture: The descriptive concept of culture and the complex concept of culture.

The Descriptive and Complex Concepts of Culture

The descriptive concept of culture. According to the descriptive concept of culture (Jensen, 2007, pp. 17–20), culture is a well-defined entity within national frontiers, culture is stable and while it changes, it does so very slowly, and culture explains why people act as they do. Culture is perceived as homogenous and all members are considered to share the same ideas, values, rules, and norms that they carry over from previous generations and attempt to transmit to the next one. National culture is a question of birthplace, not of personal choice, and one cannot negotiate or change national culture. It is something that you either have or that you will never be able to achieve. A Chinese person can never be fully integrated into Danish national culture while a Dane, on the other hand, can never escape it.

The complex concept of culture. According to the complex concept of culture (Jensen, 2007), culture is not something that one either has or does not have. Culture is created between individuals, culture is always changing, and culture cannot be limited to nation-states or other fixed entities. Therefore, the significance of culture can never be predicted. Jensen (2007, pp. 20–22) writes that culture in this definition is:

perceived as the knowledge, meanings and values that individuals share and negotiate with others within different social communities.

Culture is thus understood as a number of communities that one shares with some, but not with all. Teenagers in Shanghai may, to mention one example, feel that they have more in common with teenagers in Tokyo and Seoul than they have with teenagers from the Chinese countryside when it comes to taste in music. However, when it comes to language and food, they may still feel closer to the other Chinese teenagers.

A CONSTRUCTIVIST, PROCESS-ORIENTED, TRANSFORMATIONAL APPROACH

A Task-Based PBL Approach to Chinese Teaching and Learning

The next step, when preparing the teaching material on Chinese culture, was to decide which of the two concepts of culture would guide our steps. The complex concept of culture was decided upon because it went well with our own experience with and view of culture and learning.
As teachers in a globalized university setting, we experience the reality that culture is always changing, cannot be limited to entities and that culture is not something one has, rather, something that is created between individuals through encounters, interaction and negotiation within different social communities. However, it is not only an experience, it is also a challenge. How, then, does the teacher teach, if culture is not to be treated as static products or facts that may be collected, put into a box and presented to students one by one? A tentative answer to this question is to apply a constructivist, process-oriented, transformational approach to teaching culture: Task-Based Problem-Based Learning (PBL).

At Aalborg University, Denmark, a Task-Based PBL approach to Chinese teaching and learning is applied (Du, 2012). Task-based PBL is based on three assumptions (Du, 2012, pp. 49–50): 1) Learning is constructive. Knowledge is not understood as a product that a teacher can offer students. Through social intercourse, knowledge is constructed in a social, cultural, and interpersonal process between students and between teachers and students. 2) Learning is individualized in a social context. Learning takes place between the individual students, but a prerequisite for individual learning is communication with others and purposeful interaction with teachers and fellow students. 3) Learning is a meaning-seeking process. Because seeking of meaning is believed to lead to learning, students are engaged in meaningful activities that require them to cooperate and work together to solve problems related to the real world outside the classroom.

The assumptions that learning is constructive, learning is individualized in a social context and that learning is a meaning-seeking process corresponds very well to the definition of the complex concept of culture: Culture is not something fixed, but knowledge, meanings and values are created, shared and negotiated between individuals within different social contexts. Therefore, we chose the complex concept of culture as our point of departure.

AN ANALYSIS OF TWO TEACHING RESOURCES FOR TEACHING CHINESE CULTURE

Step three in the preparation of the teaching material on Chinese culture was to find out if appropriate teaching materials already existed. Teaching materials on Chinese culture are abundant, but we only found two that had the required box-format: The Stationary Kit of Confucius Institute and The Tea Brewing Set from the Tea Culture International Exchange Association. In order to find out how these teaching materials might serve our purposes, we made an analysis on the basis of the following five questions related to culture and to teaching and learning:

Culture

– Are the teaching materials based on a descriptive or complex concept of culture?
– What kinds of cultural artifacts are included in the teaching materials?
– Is any cultural artifact in the teaching materials – in our view – missing?
Teaching and Learning

– Do the teaching materials imply any specific teaching methods?
– What are the teaching and learning objectives?

Teaching Material 1: The Stationary Kit of Confucius Institute

Descriptive or complex concept of culture? It seems quite clear that the Stationary Kit of Confucius Institute (hereafter called the culture kit) is prepared based on the theory that cultures are well-defined, homogenous entities that follow national frontiers and that all Chinese people are considered to share the same culture. In the culture kit, there is no indication whatsoever of cultural differences in China and the selection of cultural artifacts is not discussed in the enclosed specifications. It leaves the teacher and students with the impression that the artifacts are examples of the definitive Chinese culture, not just parts of Chinese culture generally. All of this indicates use of a descriptive concept of culture.

What kinds of cultural artifacts? The culture kit contains 24 cultural artifacts and an USB Flash disk with cultural documentaries, popular films and songs, folk music, folk dance and more. The artifacts are classified into three categories according to their usage, including decorative accessories, experiencing products and learning materials. Decorative accessories include, among other things, traditional Chinese painting scrolls, Chinese knots, face-painting masks and handheld national flags. In the specifications of the culture kit, we learn that the decorative accessories are used for decorating classrooms and teaching environments to create a Chinese cultural atmosphere and stimulate students’ interests.

Nine experiencing products include a swallow-shaped kite, Chinese chess, ancient-style model weapons, a bamboo flute and more. The intended use of the experiencing products is to play Chinese-style games and experience Chinese sports and cultural activities. Learning materials include an ink brush, xuan paper (xuan paper is used in fine arts including calligraphy, painting, rubbing, etc.,”gridded magic cloth for practicing calligraphy”, Chinese knotting cord and sets of seal cutting tools, five items in all.

As indicated above, the majority of the cultural artifacts included in the culture kit belong to traditional, Chinese high culture: painting scrolls, a bamboo flute, ink brushes and seal cutting tools. With the kite and Chinese chess as possible exceptions, the culture kit does not contain any examples of culture of everyday life.

Is anything missing? The selected cultural artifacts illustrate, in the author’s opinion, more the culture of the Chinese elite in the past than the culture of everyday Chinese people in the present. The selected cultural artifacts leave the teacher and students with the impression that culture is something old, precious and stable that needs to be treasured and preserved and, implicitly, because no examples of modern Chinese culture are included, that old, traditional culture is of greater value.
than modern culture. Alternatively, the selection of artifacts may leave the teacher and students with the impression that China is less modern or even backward. A further indication of “antiquity” as an embedded value is that the words “ancient” and “traditional” appear nine times, “Classical” appears three times, and “old” is found two times, whereas the words “modern”, “today” and “present-day” each appear only once in the enclosed specifications.

Does the teaching material imply any specific teaching methods? As an item of teaching material, the culture kit mostly invites a teacher-centered teaching approach. Presumably, the teacher would make presentations, along with show documentaries and films, and play the music. Students are offered games and other cultural and sports items, but in an introduction letter enclosed in the culture kit it is explicitly stated that these items “could be used for students’ extracurricular activities.” Besides that, the teaching material does not prompt students to participate and take active part in the teaching and learning process. It should be remembered, however, that an item of teaching material can be used in ways other than the originally intended way, and that most of the cultural artifacts in the culture kit, therefore, may also be used for more student-centered, process-oriented, problem-based teaching and learning activities.

What are the teaching and learning objectives? The culture kit seems to be prepared with the intention of giving students general information on Chinese culture and this informational approach to culture teaching is very common (Kumaravadivelu, 2008). However, as indicated in the section “what kinds of cultural artifacts?,” focus is almost entirely on high culture, not on culture as everyday life (food culture, greeting culture etc.) or on sub-cultures. The selection of cultural artifacts may indicate a wish to strengthen China’s cultural attractiveness. It focuses on artifacts that can be connected to a perceived “Chinese glorious past,” and therefore may be thought to help increase China’s soft power. Soft power is, in the words of Joseph S. Nye (2004), understood as “the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments.”

Teaching Material 2: The Tea Brewing Set from the Tea Culture … Association

Descriptive or complex concept of culture? The Tea Brewing Set from the Tea Culture International Exchange Association (hereafter called the tea brewing set) also seems to be prepared based on the theory that cultures are stable and change very slowly. All members of Chinese culture are considered to share the same ideas, values, habits and behavior that they carry over from previous generations and attempt to transmit to the next. Therefore, teaching Chinese culture – or the cultural transmission if you like – must also include a century-old tea ceremony. This can be taken as an indication of a descriptive concept of culture.

What kinds of cultural artifacts? The tea brewing set contains eleven different kinds of utensils, including tea tray, electric kettle, teapots, teacups, a lidded teacup
for brewing, cup holders, serving mug, tea filter, tea appreciation dish, cleaning cloth and an accessory set with tea scoops, tea spoons, tea needles and tongs.

In pre-liberation China, the tea ceremony was part of Chinese high culture (Peltier, 2011; Wang, 2005). It was—especially for women—good manners to master the tea ceremony and was considered part of being a well-educated, cultured person. It has changed somewhat since then, but the tea ceremony is still closely connected to high culture.

The tea brewing set does not contain any examples of culture of everyday life. Even though it can be argued that many Chinese people drink tea daily, the way they drink it is very different from the way it is done in the tea ceremony. It may, however, be argued that the tea brewing set is part of a Chinese sub-culture.

Is anything missing? The tea brewing set is an example of a cultural artifact used in a Chinese sub-culture of dedicated tea-drinkers. The designers’ intention cannot be to let it stand alone, but only to be taken as a part of teaching culture. The only thing missing, but it may very well have been left to the teacher, is information that the tea brewing ceremony is conducted in a Chinese sub-culture and not in each and every Chinese family. Like the culture kit, the tea brewing set and the thirteen steps you must follow to use it conveys the impression that culture is something old, fixed and unchanging. Embedded values seem to be ancient history, order and unchangeableness.

Does the teaching material imply any specific teaching methods? The tea brewing set invites a teacher-centered teaching and a PPP (present-practice-produce) approach to teaching and learning. Presumably, it is the teacher who unpacks and sets up the mobile tea brewing set and introduces its history, meaning, and practical use. Based on the information sheets that accompany the tea brewing set (“About Chinese Tea”, “About Tea Ware”, “About Tea Brewing”), the teacher may also introduce the six famous kinds of Chinese tea, the tea ware used in the tea ceremony and explain and go through the thirteen different steps in the tea brewing process, starting from “preparation” and “boil water” and ending with “restore the tea set.” On the information sheet, the instructions that explain how to conduct the tea ceremony and proceed from one step to another are precise and written in great detail.

What are the teaching and learning objectives? The main aim is presumably to give students specific information about one part of Chinese culture: the tea ceremony. In addition to that, the aim may also be to let students have a hands-on experience and try the different steps in the tea brewing process themselves.

More than the culture kit, the tea brewing set leaves room for student participation, involvement and interaction. Students need not be restricted to listening to the teacher’s presentation, but may also—if allowed by the teacher—experience and explore the tea brewing process themselves.
The Need to Work Out New Teaching Material on Chinese Culture

Even though the above analysis indicates that both the culture kit and the tea brewing set are based on a descriptive concept of culture, using an informational approach to teaching culture and mostly inviting teacher-centered teaching, it might have still been possible to use the two teaching resources in a way that corresponded with our views on culture, teaching and learning. Use of teaching materials is not restricted to what is planned by the designers, but may be used differently by individual teachers.

In the end, however, we decided to work out a new item of teaching material for at least two reasons. Firstly, because the focus on ancient Chinese high culture in the culture kit and the tea brewing set would make it difficult for us to fulfill the task we had been given: To prepare teaching material on Chinese culture for primary school students. We needed more examples of Chinese sub-cultures and culture of everyday life. Current culture is closer to the real-life worlds of young children. The second reason that we decided to work out a new item of material was that we not only wanted to inform students about Chinese culture, but also – and maybe more importantly – we wanted to foster in the students cultural awareness and competences that would enable them to critically reflect on, respond to and handle cultural encounters in China and elsewhere, and we did not consider the culture kit and the tea brewing set as the most appropriate tools to reach that goal. We did not only want the students to look at cultural artifacts in a box, but also to raise their eyes and make them look outside of the box and into the diversity of Chinese culture.

A TASK-BASED PBL APPROACH TO TEACHING IN CHINESE CULTURE

After the decision to work out a new item of teaching material on Chinese culture, step four was to design it in accordance with the Task-based PBL approach we normally use. Our aim was to design a teaching material item that not only allowed students to receive knowledge, but also to create knowledge through purposeful interaction with teachers and fellow students and to interact and communicate with each other in order to solve problems related to the real world outside the classroom. Instead of presenting students with a cut-and-dried picture of Chinese culture we did not believe in ourselves, we would allow students to explore different aspects of Chinese culture on their own and give them room to reflect on and discuss their findings as a way to construct learning and increase their cultural awareness and competences. In the following section, it will be illustrated how the Task-Based PBL approach to teaching in Chinese culture was put into practice.

Example Task: Filling Up the “China-box”

Target group. Students from primary school to university level who have not attended classes in Chinese culture before.
FILLING UP A “CHINA-BOX”

Teaching and learning objective. The aim of this task is to allow students to search and evaluate information on Chinese culture, thus helping them increase their reflective skills and cultural awareness and competences.

Teaching and learning method. An unfocused, shared information task. Students doing the task share the same information and the intended product is open, which means that it allows for more than one correct solution.

Teaching material. A lidded cardboard box, pens, paper and mobile phones or computers with internet access.

Task Structure

As tasks often are, the “China-box task” is divided into three distinct phases: Pre-task, During-task and Post-task (Ellis, 2003).

Pre-task. The teacher writes “China-box” on the sides of a lidded card box and brings it into class.

During-task, step 1. Pens and sheets of paper are distributed to the students and as their first task students are asked to discuss and write down three examples of Chinese culture they imagine that the box contains. The results are shown in the table below.

In the student-generated list, you find examples of three different kinds of culture: high culture (calligraphy, rice paper, movies, silk), lived culture (rice, chopsticks, tea, food culture, fireworks, food culture, fireworks, Chinese games, documentaries) and national culture (pictures of the Great Wall, Spring Festival decorations, Chinese symbols). However, as an indication of how difficult it is to put culture into “boxes”, it is also possible to argue for a different distribution of the items on the list.

During-task, step 2. During-task, step two was to open the box and to the surprise of the students it proved to be empty! The teacher explained that instead of filling up the box with Chinese cultural artifacts of his own choice and thus presenting students with a cut-and-dried picture of Chinese culture, he would like to invite students to help.

The teacher also told the students that they would use the students’ pre-understanding of Chinese culture – that is, the examples of Chinese culture that they had listed – as a starting point for deciding what to put into the “China-box.” Because of time limits, the pilot study ended here, but it may be continued as suggested below.

During-task, step 3. The students may work with the items on the list in several different ways. They may all work with the same item or they may work with different items in pairs or groups. “Chopsticks”, that appears no less than seven times on the students’ lists will be used as an example here.
On their lists, students had put forward the hypothesis that chopsticks are part of Chinese culture and the teacher now asks them to verify or refute it. They are asked to do so by formulating and finding answers to questions about chopsticks. Student-generated questions could include the following three:

1. *Who Uses Chopsticks?*
   Students would not have to work long with this question to be able to confirm that Chinese people use chopsticks. They would, however, also find out that not all inhabitants of China use chopsticks regularly (Chinese minority groups like the Uighurs do not) and that chopsticks are used, not only by the Chinese, but also by the Japanese and Koreans, among others. Chopsticks are, therefore, not only part of Chinese culture, but of several other national cultures. Students may also find out that chopsticks are not only a part of national cultures, but also of sub-cultures that have little to do with specific nationalities. Use of chopsticks is – just to mention one example – an important feature of a global sushi culture in larger cities around the world.

2. *How Are Chopsticks Used?*
   Students may go onto YouTube to find examples of how to use chopsticks or they may ask one of their fellow students who is able to use chopsticks to act as teacher. In this way, through peer-learning and peer-to-peer assistance, students’ involvement and participation will be increased and they will be allowed to take responsibility not only for their own learning, but also for their peers’. The students’ investigation may also reveal that there is more than one “correct” way
to hold one’s chopsticks and that people who hold their chopsticks differently constitute different, but overlapping cultural communities.

3. When Are Chopsticks Used?
Interviews with Chinese students and teachers at their own university and searching on the internet for pictures of Chinese school cafeterias and work canteens would reveal that many Chinese people do not use chopsticks, but a spoon for their daily lunch. Internet searches may also reveal that on some occasions when they go out to dine at a fine restaurant or they are together with foreigners, Chinese people use a knife and fork instead of chopsticks, or that they use their hands when they visit McDonalds. Students may also find examples of Chinese people using chopsticks for purposes other than eating: as a kitchen utensil or as a toy, depending on the situation and context.

During-task, step 4. Students present their findings to each other and, together with the teacher, discuss and decide if chopsticks should be put into the “China-box.” After that, the students may continue to work with other items on the list.

Post-task. The teacher sums up the questions and answers, evaluates students’ presentations and explains or elaborates on items related to the task when needed. After having completed the task, students would have created a box with Chinese cultural artifacts that does not claim to contain examples of the definitive Chinese culture, but rather, only representations of their perception of it, and it may – at least in our opinion – be as far as one can hope to get.

DISCUSSION
Is a Task-Based approach to teaching culture efficient? The clear and loud answer to this question is: “It depends!” It depends on the purpose of the teaching. If the purpose of teaching Chinese culture is to prepare students for a multiple choice test on Chinese culture, a lecture-based, teacher-centered informational approach may prove efficient. If, on the other hand, the purpose is to give students cultural competences and prepare them for future cultural encounters in a globalized workplace, then a Task-Based PBL approach may prove more appropriate.

The answer to the question also depends on the teacher’s view on culture. Teachers that see Chinese culture as a fixed set of ideas, values, rules, and norms may find it efficient to present them for the students one by one. If, on the other hand, culture is believed to be vague and forever changing, a Task-Based PBL approach may be considered more useful, because it allows more than one “truth” about Chinese culture and prompts students to pose questions about culture and reflect on and discuss possible answers as a means of developing their reflective skills and cultural awareness.

Finally, the answer to the question depends on the teacher’s view on teaching and learning. Teachers that see themselves as experts that offer learning to novices and
as knowers that transfer knowledge to receivers of knowledge may prefer teacher-centered, lecture-based teaching, whereas teachers that see learning as constructive and a meaning-seeking process in a social context will probably be more in favor of Task-Based PBL.

The main argument for the use of Task-Based PBL in the teaching of Chinese culture is, as opposed to teacher-centered, lecture-based teaching, in our view, that it makes it possible to teach and learn about Chinese culture without constructing a fixed, static picture of Chinese culture that has little to do with reality outside the classroom. Task-Based PBL lets students experience that Chinese culture is more than one thing, and it may, therefore, better prepare them to cope with the cultural diversity of the real world. Nevertheless, the required box-format of the teaching material we were asked to prepare may still have restricted the students in the ways they approached Chinese culture.

An argument against the use of student-centered Task-Based PBL in teaching of Chinese culture might be that it makes it difficult for the teacher to control the learning outcome. A response to this could be that it is always hard to control what students learn even if you apply a lecture-based, teacher-centered approach. No teaching method guarantees that students learn what the teacher teaches. Another argument against the use of student-centered, Task-Based PBL in teaching of Chinese culture might be that it involves a risk that certain important aspects of Chinese culture would be left out because students do not choose to focus on them, and it is a risk that the teacher, as facilitator of the teaching and learning process, must be aware of.

CONCLUSION

The Confucius Institute for Innovation & Learning at Aalborg University was asked to prepare a teaching material on Chinese culture consisting of a box containing cultural artifacts. Since an analysis showed that two of the existing boxes with Chinese cultural artifacts were based on a descriptive concept of culture using an informational approach and inviting lecture-based, teacher-centered teaching, it was decided to introduce a new box without cultural artifacts that took a complex concept of culture and a student-centered Task-Based PBL approach as its point of departure. The purpose of applying a Task-Based PBL approach to teaching Chinese culture is not only to give students information about aspects of Chinese culture that the teacher finds interesting, but to use students’ curiosity, interests and cultural pre-understanding as a starting point for the teaching and learning process. Instead of presenting students with information about culture, they are required to create knowledge and share it among themselves. A pilot study indicates that curiosity, interest and cultural pre-understanding create a need-to-know mindset that fuels students’ search for answers to the questions they have formulated. Additionally, it encourages them to evaluate and reflect on the possible answers they may find. It is hoped that this student-centered, task-based PBL approach will allow students to
develop cultural awareness and competences that make it possible for them to, not only know about, but also notice, respond to and handle cultural encounters outside the classroom in a balanced, reflective way.

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Teaching Materials Analyzed in the Study

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