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UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

**TEXT MEMORISATION IN CHINA: HEARING THE
LEARNER AND TEACHER VOICE**

Xia Yu

Thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2010

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHAMPTON

ABSTRACT

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

TEXT MEMORISATION IN CHINA: HEARING THE LEARNER AND TEACHER
VOICE

by Xia Yu

This thesis investigates text memorization, a widely used yet under-explored language practice in foreign language teaching and learning in mainland China. The inquiry was conducted along two lines: to conceptually examine a number of issues central to the understanding of the practice of text memorization in the Chinese context, and empirically inquire into Chinese learners/teachers' practices and perceptions of the inclusion of text memorization in foreign language learning and teaching.

The review of literature shows that (text) memorisation had been widely practiced in other parts of the world until recently, including the Anglophone west. By challenging the belief that emphasis on memorisation stifles and creative thinking, which is believed to be one of the key aims of Western education, I argue that memorisation or memorised knowledge is not only legitimate in but constitutes an important part of learning. I also demonstrate that Confucius' theory of learning, which allows the coexistence of emphasis on memorisation and critical thinking arguably can be of relevance to education in the 21st century. Also advanced in the conceptual study is the argument that the methodological considerations underlying ALM (Audio Lingual Method), despite its western origin, match up to some fundamental Chinese conceptions of learning and teaching.

The empirical study reported in this thesis addresses the need for a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the practices and beliefs of Chinese learners and teachers regarding the use of text memorization in foreign language learning and teaching. This study bases its methodology on semi-structured interviews complemented by small-scale surveys. The data was collected from a group of

58 Chinese learners (N=42) and teachers (N=20) affiliated with 10 schools and 6
59 universities at three different educational levels, i.e. junior high, senior high and
60 college, which constitute the major part of foreign language education in China. Data
61 collection was mainly based in a single Chinese inland capital city and lasted for one
62 year and two months involving two fieldwork trips to China.

63

64 Analyses of the data lead to two major findings. First, both learners and teachers hold
65 overwhelmingly positive perceptions of the use of text memorization in foreign
66 language learning and teaching. The practice was perceived to be beneficial not only
67 because it assists learning in a number of ways but because it builds the learners'
68 sense of achievement and confidence. Second, the informants' positive beliefs about
69 text memorisation, though context-constrained, might be more attributable to their
70 perception of benefits to their language learning and teaching than to the view that the
71 practice is consistent with traditional Chinese culture and values.

72

73 In sum, this inquiry promotes a 'different-rather-than-deficit' perspective in
74 understanding Chinese learners and their learning practice as well as problematizing
75 the uncritical assumptions about the negative impact of a Confucian philosophy of
76 education.

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DECLARATION OF AUTHORSHIP

I, XIA YU,

declare that the thesis entitled

TEXT MEMORISATION IN CHINA: HEARING THE LEARNER AND TEACHER VOICE

and the work presented in the thesis are both my own, and have been generated by me as the result of my own original research. I confirm that:

- this work was done wholly or mainly while in candidature for a research degree at this University;
- where any part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree or any other qualification at this University or any other institution, this has been clearly stated;
- where I have consulted the published work of others, this is always clearly attributed;
- where I have quoted from the work of others, the source is always given. With the exception of such quotations, this thesis is entirely my own work;
- I have acknowledged all main sources of help;
- where the thesis is based on work done by myself jointly with others, I have made clear exactly what was done by others and what I have contributed myself;
- none of this work has been published before submission.

Signed:

Date:.....

(Signed)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

In preparation for this thesis, I have benefited, in no small measure, from numerous people in various ways.

Above all, I had the privilege of doing research under the supervision of Professor Rosamond Mitchell, who is highly respectable in terms of intellectual breadth and depth as well as her unusual level of dedication and skills to her role as a supervisor. I am grateful to her for teaching me research skills through her inspiring lectures, face-to-face supervisions and insightful written comments (on my regular research reports as well as each chapter of this thesis). More importantly, she guided me through the whole journey of this research – including the re-orientation of the thesis – as an unflinching source of monitoring, support and encouragement.

I feel indebted to Dr. Glyn Hicks and George Blue, two members on my upgrade panel whose comments have helped me to see things from different perspectives. I am also grateful to Dr. Jaine Beswick, my advisor, who was generous to me of her time.

All the participants who were involved in the research deserve my heartfelt thanks, especially those who agreed to participate without receiving any type of rewards.

Special thanks go to Xiaobing Chen, my husband, for his unselfish financial support, enduring love and extraordinary patience.

I would also like to convey a special note of gratitude to Mr and Mrs Parriss for filling me with the warmth of home while sojourning in a foreign country with their hospitality and generosity, and more importantly, for helping me to see a fuller meaning of life and work.

This thesis was funded by the LASS Faculty International Bursary Scheme (FIBS) and School of Humanities Research Studentship at University of Southampton (2007-2010). Part of the travel expenses for my fieldwork was covered by a HUMS PGR research windfall award 2009 (School of Humanities). I bow with gratitude to my *Alma Mater* University of Southampton for generous provision of resources and facilities without which it would be impossible for me to complete the study.

365

366 In thanking all the people I have been blessed with, I hereby proclaim that any and all
367 inconsistencies, ambiguities and errors committed herein are exclusively my own.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

389		
390	ALM	Audio-lingual method/ audiolingualism
391	CHC	Confucian-heritage culture
392	CLT	Communicative language teaching
393	EFL	English as a foreign language
394	ELT	English language teaching
395	ELL	English language learning
396	ESL	English as a second language
397	FLTRP	Foreign language teaching and research press
398	GT	Grammar-translation
399	LTM	Long term memory
400	SLA	Second language acquisition
401	STM	Short term memory
402	TCM	Traditional Chinese method
403	TESOL	Teaching English to speakers of other languages

404

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406

407 **CHAPTER ONE**

408 **TEXT MEMORISATION: A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

409

410 As an experienced English learner and foreign language educator brought up in China, I have
411 long been fascinated by the way some Chinese learners learn English—learning texts by
412 heart¹. Yet it was not until recently that I began investing serious thinking in this learning
413 practice when I found that it continued to be used by the new generation of Chinese learners
414 of English even though they were equipped with various types of modern language learning
415 equipment such as video, multimedia systems, language laboratories, internet and so on. One
416 student born in the 1980s wrote:

417

418 From Junior One to Senior One, I spent four years learning texts by heart. According
419 to our ancestors, ‘Memorizing 300 Tang poems makes one a poet himself’. ... It is
420 also true to foreign language learning. I regret not reciting enough texts then. (L. Sun,
421 2005: 218; Chinese original)²

422

423 The research to be reported in this thesis was, in effect, inspired by English learners like Sun
424 in China, who seem to have a lot to say on this practice based on their own learning
425 experiences. Anecdotes abound, and feelings are strong and mixed. Is it something our
426 students ‘can neither live with nor live without’ (Ding, 2004)?

427

428 The practice of learning texts by heart makes one straightforwardly relate it to the stereotype
429 of Chinese learners who have long been described as ‘proverbial rote memorizers or
430 recyclers’ (Dekert, 1993: 133) or ‘relentless rote learners’ (J. Biggs, 1991: 27). There has
431 been an increasing interest in Chinese English learners with the influx of more Chinese
432 students into western countries. A number of attempts have been made to depict and explain
433 the specificity of Chinese learners, but these reveal a contradictory and, in most cases, over-
434 simplified picture (Jiang & Smith, 2009). Continuing debate on Chinese learners and the

1 Throughout this thesis, the terms *learning texts by heart* and *text memorisation* are used more or less
2 without differentiation.

3 2 The Chinese quotes (including proverbs or sayings) throughout the thesis are translated by myself except
4 otherwise noted.

Chinese ways of English learning has kindled in me even greater interest in seeking a fuller understanding of the largest group of English learners in the world through investigation into Chinese learners' practice of learning texts by heart.

Economic reforms and the opening of the doors to the West have been in operation for over 30 years and profoundly changed almost every aspect of Chinese society including its value system. While many traditional beliefs crumble and people have undergone enormous ideological changes, why is it that the Chinese English learners have not dispensed with traditional learning methods, in this case, learning texts by heart – an extreme use of memorisation? How can they benefit from the practice with which they might start from kindergarten and continue onwards up even to university? This is the overall motivation underpinning this inquiry.

This research thus attempts to explore how learning texts by heart is practiced and perceived in modern China by accessing English learners' and teachers' voices. It is hoped that this investigation may shed light on the question of why Chinese learners have continuing interest in employing this learning method which might be primitive in every aspect seen through western spectacles. It is also hoped that an inquiry from an emic perspective can push ahead the current understanding of Chinese students who 'were learning rather more effectively than they "should" have been, given what Western research predicted to be counter-productive teaching/learning environments' (Watkins & Biggs, 2001: preface; see also Watkins & Biggs, 1996). This thesis follows two lines of enquiry: (1) to explore relevant literature in order to offer a systematic analysis of the role of memorisation in (language) education in general and in relation to Chinese learners in particular, a huge group who are notoriously known as rote-memorizers; and (2) to report on an interview-based empirical study which investigates Chinese beliefs and practices regarding text memorisation as a learning/teaching device by accessing the individual voices of a group of learners and teachers.

Before taking the perspective of cultural pedagogy/education as the approach to the current research, I also substantially explored the memory base of language and its implications for foreign language learning from a psycholinguistic perspective (X. Yu, 2011). Along with the recent development in psycholinguistics, applied linguistics and corpus linguistics, the memory base of language has been gaining increasing amount of attention in SLA (Second

Language Acquisition). For readers who are interested in this topic, I would like to invite them to consider the following three lines of inquiries, namely, the dual-nature view of language (Skehan, 1998) and the formulaicity of language (cf. Bolinger, 1975; Sinclair, 1991; Widdowson, 1989; Wong-Fillmore, 1976; Wray, 2000, 2002) as well as the role of rehearsal in memorisation and implicit learning (cf. N. Ellis, 2002; Robinson, 1995, 1996; Williams, 1999). Since these inquiries are well beyond the scope of discussions in this thesis, I would not go further into these areas.

Being aware that there are a number of historical reasons for Chinese learning methods (Harvey, 1985), I would like to begin my inquiry by reviewing the practice of text memorisation in China from a historical perspective.

1.1 Text memorisation in China

This section will discuss how text memorisation is practiced in China from ancient literacy education to contemporary foreign language teaching and learning.

1.1.1 Text memorisation in Chinese literacy education

Given that text memorisation has been a traditional way of acquiring Chinese literacy in China, this subsection explores how memorisation of textual materials was practiced in different historical periods and examines why great importance was attached to the practice in Confucianism-dominant China.

1.1.1.1 The practice

Despite the fact that memorisation of classics was highly valued in the literacy education of ancient China, literature on how text memorisation was practiced remains sparse. For example, a western scholar mentioned it in passing in a book on Chinese tradition:

The Four Books [‘The Great Learning’ (*Da Xue*), ‘The Mean’ (*Zhong Yong*), ‘The Analects’ (*Lunyu*) and ‘Mencius’ (*Mengzi*)] ... were for six centuries (A.D. 1313-1905) used as school primers, to be recited and memorised, and as the basis of the civil service examinations which selected bureaucracy. (De Bary, 1960: 113)

503

504 From the reading of this document and similar sources, it appears that learning through
505 memorisation occupied an important place in the traditional, Confucian education prior to the
506 advent of modern China in the 20th century. Boys of wealthy families were said to start their
507 literacy education as early as the age of three using three textbooks³: (1) the Trimetrical
508 Classic (*sanzijing*), which ‘contained three-character lines of verse consisting of 1,068
509 characters; (2) the Thousand Character Essay (*qianziwen*) which ‘consisted of 1,000
510 characters in lines of four characters each with no character repeated throughout the entire
511 book’; (3) the Hundred Names Primer (*baijiaxing*), which ‘contained 400 family surnames’
512 (Cleverley, 1985: 16). The boys first learned to copy the characters from these books and read
513 them aloud. They were required to memorise these texts and recite them verbatim.

514

515 Boys of seven and above were sent to private family school (*Sishu*), starting with the writings
516 from the Confucian canon which are usually grouped as the Five Classics (*Wu Jing*)⁴ and
517 Four Books (*Si Shu*). Students kept memorising these texts through reciting, drilling and
518 checking understanding until they were ready to tackle the imperial civil service
519 examinations (or *keju*). According to Unger (1982), a boy on average memorised a new 200-
520 character passage every day for six years and he would have memorised textual material up
521 to over 400,000 characters by the time he reached age 15.

522

523 Following is a brief description of recitation performed in the family school:

524

525 After the teacher finishes his explanation and checks with the students to see if they
526 have correct comprehension, the students are required to read the text just learned 100
527 times: slowly at first, then a bit faster. The text should be read with rhythm, correct
528 pauses and accurate use of the four tones. If any student cannot perform the reading-

5 3 These books are thought to have originated in the 13th century, the early 6th century, and the 11th to the
6 13th centuries AD respectively. Versions of these three primers, which were used together, dominated
7 elementary education in China for seven centuries despite the fact that one of them (the Hundred Names
8 Primer) was an apparently meaningless collocation of more than four hundred words for surnames
9 (Woodside, 1992). The Thousand Character Essay, which had been in use for 14 centuries, was
10 undoubtedly the most durable and influential literacy primer in world history (Z.-G. Zhang, 1962).

11 4 The Five Classics are ‘The Book of Changes’ (*Yi Jing*), ‘The Book of History’ (*Shu Jing*), ‘The Book of
12 Poetry’ or ‘Odes’ (*Shi Jing*), ‘The Ritual’ (*Li Ji*), ‘Spring and Autumn Annals’ (*Chun Qiu*). Tradition
13 ascribes the authorship or editorship of most of The Five Classics and Four Books to Confucius, but in fact
14 they are a collection of writings from widely different times (Price, 1970).

aloud properly, another 100 times of reading are required of him. (Shu, 1961; Chinese original)

A vivid picture of how text memorisation was conducted is offered by Price (1970):

Texts were committed to memory, with the aid of liberal physical encouragement and much noise. When successfully mastered they were recited by the individual student, back to his teacher, facing the class. The English pronunciation of the word used for this system of learning by heart, *bei*, or to ‘back’ a text, suggests well the sound of a busy classroom, with each pupil reciting at full voice his peculiar passage. (Price, 1970: 95; emphasis [italics] original)

‘Liberal physical encouragement’ can mean such exaggerated actions as swaying one’s head to accompany the rhythm of recitation. If the use of body movement suggests there was some fun in this practice, the story in the Three Character Classic (*sanzijing*), however, was by no means pleasing. It was said that two scholars were so afraid of falling asleep over their studies that they tortured themselves to keep awake: one tied his hair to a beam in his house (*tou xuan liang*) and the other kept pricking his thigh with an awl (*zhui ci gu*). Stories like this⁵ have always been cited to show the hardship of memorisation, so to speak, if it is the main approach to learning in traditional education.

This traditional practice had such a long-lasting influence that it was still in existence in the early decades of the 20th century. This can be attested by the brief mention of the way of studying Chinese in the biography of Madame Chiang Kai-shek, the former first lady in Taiwan:

She [Madame Chiang Kai-shek] was ... in favour of engaging an old-fashioned scholar to tutor her several hours a day in the classics and calligraphy⁶. She memorised her lessons in the traditional way of schoolchildren, chanting them aloud

⁵ The two scholars in the story are often made paragons of enduring trouble and hardship for the young generation of Chinese learners. The popularity of the story shows the high respect of virtues of hard working in Confucian culture rather than advising the learners to physically follow ancient scholars.

⁶ This episode took place in around 1917 when Madame Chiang Kai-shek went back to China after having been studying in America for ten years. Her parents insisted that she hone her fluency in Chinese when they found that she had difficulties in communicating in her native tongue.

while rocking the body rhythmically. The tutor was ‘terribly strict, and expects me to accomplish the almost impossible,’ she wrote ... She persevered in her studies for many years, later translating Chinese folk tales and stories from history. (Tyson Li, 2006: 43)

The limited documentation of the practice of memorising textual materials, especially classics seems to suggest that this traditional Chinese learning habit was as deeply ingrained as the historical process that developed it was long and slow.

1.1.1.2 Reasons for heavy use of text memorisation

Emphasis on text memorisation can be said to be historically rooted in the Chinese tradition in education, for it is associated with the Confucian⁷ educational philosophy that exalts and even worships ‘established text’, and ‘...memorization is seen as a significant part of learning in the Confucian tradition’ (Lee, 1996: 36).

Confucianism, as a politico-ethical doctrine, is regarded as conservative by modern Chinese scholars who have noted that traditional Confucian schooling usually confined learning to dogmas printed in the textbooks (Ding, 1987). Books, especially those writings which form the Confucian canon, enjoyed the status of ‘absolute and uncontested authority’ (Hayhoe, 1989: 12) for thousands of years as they are thought of as

... an embodiment of knowledge, wisdom and truth. Knowledge is ‘in’ the book and can be taken out and put inside the students’ heads. Hence the reverence with which books are treated, the value they are assigned, and the wish to learn by heart what they contain. (Maley, 1983: 98)

Therefore, respect for authority and enthusiasm about the value of books, to a great extent, have encouraged the practice of text memorisation.

⁷ Confucius (551BC – 479 BC) was a Chinese thinker and social philosopher of the Spring and Autumn Period.

Confucius’ thoughts have been developed into a system of philosophy known as Confucianism. It was introduced to Europe by the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci, who was the first to Latinise the Chinese name *Kongfuzi* ‘Great Teacher Kong’ as ‘Confucius’ (Ivanhoe, 2000).

587

588 An equally, if not more, important contributing factor is the examination system, which some
589 Western scholars have called the Chinese Imperial Civil Service Examination (*keju*) system⁸.
590 This system had far-reaching backwash effects. According to the document ("Ancient
591 education," 1998), in the Tang Dynasty, the main subjects of the examination were writing
592 and study of classical books. The examination testing knowledge of the classical books
593 followed the method of filling in blanks. Usually one page of a book was chosen and several
594 lines would be omitted. The candidates were required to fill in the missing lines.
595 Alternatively, they might be required to explain some of the lines in the book. The form and
596 content of the examinations might vary in different times, but what is consistent in the
597 traditional selection system prior to the advent of modern China in the 20th century is the
598 great importance attached to the memorisation and elaboration of the classics. In most cases,
599 all a candidate had to do during the exam was to write a lengthy essay on a quotation from
600 the classics. This essay was expected to conform to the standard interpretation and from the
601 Ming Dynasty onwards, had to be written in a rigidly formalised style (known as 'eight-
602 legged' essay or *baguwen*⁹) that was also modelled after the classics.

603

604 Summing up, the Imperial Civil Service Examination set the required standard of 'mastery of
605 the classics' as its measure, actually judging the quality of the candidate in accordance with
606 his ability to recite fluently both the texts and their annotations. Little else apart from classics
607 was required in the exam and therefore little else was imparted in traditional schooling (cf.
608 Cleverley, 1985; Spence, 1990). As a result, the need to be able to recite or memorise the
609 officially recognised classic works was paramount. As Price put it, 'While at its best the
610 [examination] system produced educated thinkers of the highest quality, its general effect was
611 rather to confine the mind and train the memory' (Price, 1970: 95).

612

613 1.1.2 Text memorisation in foreign language education

614

27 8 During the long period from the Tang Dynasty (A.D. 618-906) to the late Qing Dynasty, in 1905, the
28 ruling bureaucracy of China was selected by such a state system of examinations (Price, 1970).

29 9 *Baguwen* is characterized by a rigid rhetorical format which allows little room for creativity.

So far I have pursued, albeit rather sketchily, how text memorisation was practiced in Chinese literacy education. In this section, I will delve into how the practice was transferred and used in Chinese foreign language education.

1.1.2.1 A historical perspective

Although a plethora of records document the history of China's foreign language education (see, e.g. Adamson, 2004; Hayhoe, 1984, 1992; Price, 1970, 1979; Shu, 1961), there is a dearth of accounts of the practice of text memorisation in foreign language learning, especially in the first half of the 20th century. A brief review of the historical development of English language teaching (ELT) in China, however, may shed light on such issues as when and why text memorisation gained its momentum in ELT in China as well as our understanding of what is happening in present-day Chinese foreign language education. Foreign language education is discussed in this section, even though throughout this thesis a primary (although not exclusive) focus is on the teaching/learning of English due to English's unchallengeable status of being the 'first foreign language'¹⁰ in China (Cheng, 2000; Ge, 2003).

It was not until 1903 that English courses were commonly given in institutions of higher education and in middle schools, although the earliest school offering English courses was set up in 1862¹¹, called *Jing Shi Tong Wen Guan* (the Imperial Foreign Institute¹²) (R. Sun, 1996). Given that the purpose of this school was to train interpreters and translators, it is not surprising that translation was the only course carried through almost the entire eight-year

¹⁰ As early as 1914, English was declared by the Ministry of Education the most important foreign language in most regions of China (Q. Chen, 1961). In recent decades, approximately 97% of China's 320,000 full-time secondary school foreign language teachers teach English (Ross, 1992). At tertiary level, the overwhelming majority of students are learning English although a variety of other foreign languages are taught to undergraduate and postgraduate students.

¹¹ Strictly speaking, formal foreign language teaching has existed in various forms in China for a millennium. Especially since the Yuan dynasty, state-sponsored and private foreign language education has been implemented to facilitate trade, territorial expansion, foreign affairs and treaty negotiation (cf. Fu, 1986). My focus, however, is on the history of foreign language teaching in contemporary and modern China.

¹² It also bears the name of 'Beijing School of Combined Learning' (Ross, 1992: 240). This first school of foreign-language translation was established under the advocacy of a small but powerful and high-placed group of statesmen who believed that Chinese proficient in foreign languages could learn Western technical skills, turn them against Western aggression, and protect the spiritual core of Confucian China.

curriculum (X.-Y. Wu, 1961). Translation as a method used for training interpreters and translators was later carried over to almost all English programmes in China (C.-C. Yu, 1984). This may also represent the earliest development of a grammar-translation approach in China. It is unclear whether text memorisation was practiced among the first batch of English learners in modern China as a way of skill training.

Following the introduction of science in the modern sense from the West beginning in the middle of the nineteenth century, especially as a result of the One-Hundred-Day Reform Movement in 1889, a series of reform measures were undertaken in education, such as the establishment of natural sciences as part of the school curriculum, new-type schools replacing academics of classical learning, and the abolition of the ‘eight-legged’ essay (Fan & Cohen, 1996). What is of particular interest to me is the possible impact on the practice of text memorisation of the downplay of classical learning and ‘eight-legged’ essay, the existence of which might, to a great extent, have been encouraging text memorisation (see 1.1.1.2). While the documentation of the practice of text memorisation in the period of the post-Imperial Civil Service Examination is lacking in the literature, it is clear that ‘there was a continued, though ambiguous, emphasis on English’ throughout the early years of the twentieth century (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002: 54), typified by the well-known slogan *zhongxue weiti, xixue weiyong* (‘study China for essence, study the West for practical usage’ (translation from Adamson, 2004: 27)) .

From the founding of the Republic of China in 1912 until the Communist victory in 1949, foreign language education seemed to be characterised by ‘discontinuity’ (Ross, 1992: 242). Foreign language policy became enmeshed in fervent debate on the difference between ‘modernisation’ and ‘westernisation’, a dilemma¹³ confronted by the then Chinese leaders. ‘While widespread foreign language expertise was still acknowledged as necessary to China’s survival by both communists and nationalists, its consequences became increasingly ideologically suspect’ (Ross, 1992: 242). As a result, both English and Japanese language

¹³Since institutions such as *Tong Wen Guan* were replaced in 1903 by a Japanese-inspired ‘modern’ educational system, foreign languages (predominantly English and Japanese) accounted for more hours per week of the secondary school curriculum than any other subject. In the five-year secondary schools established in 1903, students studied a total of 1,444 periods of foreign languages. In the four-year secondary school system of 1912 to 1923, English was studied for a total of 1,056 periods. (Q. Chen, 1961) When foreign languages were on their way to becoming identified with foreign substance as well as function, it was seen as a dangerous association whenever China’s leaders have wanted to assert not ‘Western’ but ‘Chinese’ modernity (Ross, 1992).

were denounced for ‘denationalising’ or ‘enslaving’ Chinese students¹⁴ (ibid), and some scholars called for the removal of English and other foreign languages from the school curriculum (cf. Tsang, 1967).

669

In post-1949 modern China, the fluctuating fortunes of ELT have been seen as a ‘barometer of modernisation’ (Ross, 1992: 239). In the early fifties, there was an abrupt shift from English to Russian for political reasons¹⁵. Russian became almost the only foreign language taught in colleges and universities. Consequently, the Soviet Union exercised a strong impact on foreign language education in China, some of which (for instance, the five-step approach¹⁶) is still seen even today. Methodologically, the grammar-translation method was adopted to train massive numbers of people to learn Russian with emphasis on vocabulary, translation and grammar in order to understand the revolutionary ideology (Ng & Tang, 1997). Beliefs in foreign language teaching at that time may be best summarised by three-centeredness: teacher-centeredness, textbook-centeredness and grammar-centeredness (see, e.g. Campbell & Yong, 1993; Ding, 1987; Ross, 1993; Schoenhals, 1993; L.-X. Tang, 1983). The Soviet tradition of intensive reading from French origins (see Ding, 1987; Maley, 1983 for more discussion) – concerning itself with the fine details of language – eventually evolved into the Intensive Reading Course (*jindu*) which has been dominant in ELT in China for decades till now. It is argued by some scholars (e.g. Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Sampson, 1984) that the Intensive Reading Course is a product of particular social, economic and linguistic circumstances and thus inherent in the fabric of Chinese society. The ‘intensive study’ view that ‘the passages should not just be read for meaning, but also parsed and recited’ (Adamson,

14 The total number of classroom periods secondary school students studied foreign languages dropped from 1,080 in 1933 to 800 in 1948 (Ross, 1992).

15 The percentage of class periods devoted to foreign language instruction in the secondary school curriculum dropped from 11.8% in 1950 to 6.7% four years later (Ministry of Education, 1984), eventually leading to the ‘discontinuation of lower secondary school foreign language teaching in 1954 (Ross, 1992: 242). Because students were not to begin language study until upper secondary school, the foreign language teaching plan called for a reduction of total class periods spent on foreign languages from 800 to 408.

16 Soviet educator-pedagogue I.A. Kairov’s so-called 5-step teaching methodology still appeals to many Chinese teachers of English, especially the ex-Russian-language teachers, who constitute a very large percentage of English teachers in science departments at the tertiary level (approximately 60% up to early 1980s). Kairov’s idea is that a good lecture should consist of 5 steps: (1) reviewing the old material; (2) orienting the new material; (3) explaining the new material; (4) consolidating the newly-learned material; and (5) giving assignments, with each step being carefully scheduled and written out in great detail. In fact, review and consolidation fit well into Confucian approaches to learning. While the five-step approach imported from Russia was used in foreign language teaching in post-1949 China (Penner, 1991; C.-C. Yu, 1984), it was said to be taking on Chinese characteristics after Mao broke ties with the Soviet Union (Simpson, 2008).

688 2004: 69), may, to some extent, legitimatise and consolidate the practice of text
689 memorisation.

690
691 Following the first intimation of Sino-Soviet tension in the mid of 1950s, concern for
692 improving China's foreign relations with the West brought back the legitimacy of other
693 foreign language training including English. In the late 1950s and early sixties there was a
694 slow shift back from Russian to English. This time, a four skills approach (speaking,
695 listening, reading, writing) was advocated to replace 'deaf and dumb' (*longzi, yaba*)
696 grammar-translation methods (Ross, 1992). Experimental English textbooks used in 1965
697 were found to be indicative of moves towards oral language production (Audiolingualism) to
698 replace the former emphasis on grammatical rules (Price, 1979). The audio-lingual
699 influences, together with drills and substitution tables, became popular (Jin & Cortazzi,
700 2002). For instance, English textbook series (cf. *English Book (1-4)*, 1961) contain a number
701 of dialogues and significant amounts of oral practice, having features – superficially at least –
702 akin to those of Audiolingualism, which was emerging internationally as a preferred second
703 language pedagogy at the time (Adamson, 2004: 88). The actual implementation of the
704 teaching reform, however, was restricted due to the inability of the government to find
705 qualified English teachers¹⁷.

706
707 The Cultural Revolution beginning at the mid of 1960s led to a nearly stagnant status of
708 English teaching in China because the teaching of English was outlawed for a time. When it
709 was allowed again, the teaching of English was to serve the purpose of cultivating students
710 who are 'both red and expert' (communists and professionals), that is, to teacher them enough
711 language to learn the socialist perspective without being tainted with 'bourgeois ideas' (Ford
712 1986, cited in Q. Li, 1994: 30). Based on the belief that '[A] foreign language is a weapon in
713 the struggle of life' (a quote from Karl Marx), frequently used for English drills were political
714 slogans (such as 'Long Live Chairman Mao! Long Live the Communist Party of China!) or
715 anti-rightist/anti-foreign expressions (such as 'Drop your weapons and come out with your
716 hands up!') (Q. Li, 1994: 17). Creative use of the language was called into question when the
717 approved method and materials for learning was reciting quotes from Mao's Red Book or
718 Communist newspapers (Simpson, 2008).

69 17 It is estimated that one-half of these schools were supposed to begin teaching English with qualified
70 teachers. In 1957 there were only 73 full-time lower secondary and 770 full-time upper secondary school
71 English teachers in all of China (Ministry of Education, 1984).

719

720 After a decade of hiatus in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), English was again seen as
721 important in the reform and modernisation of China although there were occasional fears that
722 it would bring cultural contamination or ‘Spiritual Pollution’ (Adamson, 2004; Jin &
723 Cortazzi, 2002; K.-S. Li, 1995). The formal status of foreign language teaching, especially
724 English¹⁸, rose again in the early 1980s and studying English is currently prestigious – ‘the
725 vogue, the fashion, the rage’ (Dzau, 1990) for the nation. In fact, Chinese people have
726 embraced the study of English in recent decades with fervour despite the traumatic
727 experiences of the Cultural Revolution and other political movements with anti-Western
728 elements (cf. Adamson, 2004).

729

730 It is clear from the preceding review that a considerably long period in the history of foreign
731 language education in contemporary China witnessed a lack of continuity and coherent
732 foreign language policy due to political turmoil and tightened political control (see Adamson,
733 2004 for a fascinating history of English and English teaching in China, especially how
734 political concerns have continuing influence on the English language curriculum). R. Sun
735 (1996) identified the following five stages through which ELT in China has progressed or
736 regressed:

737

- 738 1. Initial period (1862-1949)
- 739 2. Initial Postliberation period (1949-1956)
- 740 3. Formation period (1957-1966)
- 741 4. ‘Cultural Revolution’ period (1966-1976)
- 742 5. Development period (1977 up to now)

743

744 During the Development period, new pedagogies from the West, such as Grammar-
745 Translation (GT) and Audiolingualism (ALM), came in with the re-entrance of foreigners
746 (Han, 1992). If the traditional approach to ELT in China is indeed a ‘curious combination of
747 the grammar-translation method and audiolingualism, which is characterised by systematic
748 and detailed study of grammar, extensive use of cross-linguistic comparison and translation,
749 memorisation of structural patterns and vocabulary, painstaking effort to form good verbal
750 habits, and emphasis on written language, and a preference for literary classics’ (Hu, 2002a:

72 18 English was gradually accorded the same weight in the college entrance examination as that of
73 mathematics and Chinese (Ross, 1992)

93), these imported methods were compatible with the already well-established traditional Chinese method (TCM) and have since added to the strength of its intractability and its repulsion of communicative language teaching (CLT) introduced in the 1980s (Hu, 2002a; Simpson, 2008) (see 3.2 and 3.3 for more discussions).

Interestingly, in terms of methodology, language teachers seemed to have enjoyed the freedom of choosing whatever teaching method they prefer. When Chairman Mao reinstated the policy of ‘[L]et one hundred flowers blossom, let one hundred schools compete¹⁹’ in the 1950s, it also served as a guiding principle in solving the controversy over the methodology of teaching in China. Chinese open-mindedness in this regard is nicely summarised as follows:

The Chinese concept is that anything that is really bad, or does not work, will eventually die out in the process of competition. Every method has some reason in it, and every new method is developed out of some element from older ones. There is no such thing as absolutely right or good. Methodology is seen as both an art and science. To a great extent, it permits teachers to exercise their individual gifts and talents. (C.-C. Yu, 1984: 34-35)

In fact, any method can be used in English teaching in China, ‘from the ancient Chinese tradition of recitation, memorisation, to grammar-translation, pattern- and structure-drill, communicative exercises, or eclecticism’²⁰(C.-C. Yu, 1984: 35). New features of ELT in post-1949 China may include the amalgamation of a range of pedagogical approaches. For instance, Adamson (2004) observed that pedagogy reflected in English textbooks published in 1960s (cf. *English Book (1-4)*, 1961; *English Book (1-6)*, 1965) did not fit any of the major international English language methods. Along with China’s reorganising its approach to foreign language education after the schism with the Soviet Union, many changes arose and

¹⁹ This slogan was very popular in the period of Spring and Autumn and Warring States (B.C. 403-221) and marked the unprecedented prosperity of literature, art and science of China in that period (C.-C. Yu, 1984)

²⁰ In the mid 1980s, efforts were made in secondary schools to reconceptualise foreign language education’s ‘three-centeredness’: teacher-centeredness, textbook-centeredness and grammar-centeredness. Attempt to dislodge the authoritarian hold for teacher, text and grammar-translation methods on foreign language teaching are commonly described by secondary school teachers as ‘diversification’ or ‘eclecticism’ (*duoyangxing*) (Ross, 1992).

some of these changes came from the grassroots (Adamson, 2004). Text memorisation, an indigenous practice transferred from the traditional way of learning and teaching classics may naturally find its place in language teaching methodology given the unsystematic and discontinuous development of ELT in China. Based on occasional mentions of text memorisation in literature, we should surmise that this practice in foreign language learning and teaching is likely to have been continuously existent even after the abolition of the Imperial Service Examination System in 1905. For instance, in a case study of foreign language teaching in China conducted in the 1960s, Price (1970: 181) noted that

‘[T]he basis of the method used [in English teaching] was a text which was memorised by the students, and in a high proportion of cases understood with the aid of translation’.

He also described the efforts made by the students to rehearse the texts:

Apart from hearing the recorded text a number of times and repeating it in various ways in class, the students spent many hours reading it aloud. (Price, 1970: 182)

...

As they get up early in the morning, sounds of reading can be heard near the classrooms and in the sports ground. (Guangming Ribao [Daily] cited in Price, 1970: 182)

It seemed that the traditional method of acquiring Chinese literacy- ‘reading aloud for memorisation’ has been practiced in foreign language teaching and learning at least in the past decades. Interestingly, Price appeared to be predicting the disappearance of this practice by saying ‘[T]hat such traditional methods die slowly will be attested to by foreign teachers recently working in China’. Is the practice dying, then?

1.1.2.2 **Current situation**

Although Confucian authoritarian education has long fallen into disfavour in modern China and the status of text memorisation as a learning method has thus been challenged (Ding, 2004: 9), the practice of memorising textual materials among Chinese learners seems to be dying hard. In the online NNEST (Non-Native English Speaker Teachers) caucus forum, I

812 read the following account of Li, an English lecturer and a successful early researcher from a
813 prestigious Chinese university:

814

815 I was born in a small peaceful town in Northern Jiangsu, Mainland China, in the
816 1970s. ... As a kid, I remember being forced to practice calligraphy and memorize
817 Tang poems. ... Many years later in a middle school in Nanjing when I started to
818 learn English, I did start to develop a flair for learning texts by heart. Fine combing of
819 grammar points, pattern-drills, and **learning texts by heart finally led to my good**
820 **performance in English in the entrance examinations for higher learning**
821 **institutions.** So I landed at an English Department. (Y.-Y. Li, 2008; English original;
822 emphasis added)

823

824 Li's case is perhaps typical of many Chinese English learners who employ learning texts by
825 heart as one of their main learning strategies and eventually surpassed their peers in English
826 learning. A further example comes from another Chinese scholar (born in the 1970s) now
827 working in a Hongkong university, who mentioned in passing in his thesis:

828

829 I started learning English in junior middle school at the age of 12, memorised words
830 and texts for the National College Entrance Examination, and later majored in English
831 at a [national key] university on the Chinese mainland. (Gao, 2007a: 8)

832

833 Similarly, a Chinese college student Zhang, born in the 1980s, who was convinced that
834 '[R]ecite as many English passages as possible' might be one of the 'best tools possible'²¹ for
835 learning English, wrote in his blog:

836

837 For nearly seven hundreds days, I have been remembering new words, imitating the
838 tapes, reciting numerous English passages, in the belief that one day I will be amply
839 rewarded. ... and now, I have really blossomed, I aced [sic] the CET4²² with 90 points
840 [out of 100] (quite awesome in other people's eyes at that time) and won the top prize

82 21 The other two are: 'Imitate as vividly as possible' and 'Do dictation for 1000 hours'. According to
83 Zhang (2007), 'each of these methods stems from three successful English learners' experiences'.

84 22 CET4 (College English Test Band-4) is a nation-wide standardized English language proficiency test
85 for non-English majors in Chinese colleges and universities. It is designed and administered by the
86 National College English Testing Committee on behalf of the Chinese Ministry of Education.

of the National English Contest for college students in 2004. (X.-D. Zhang, 2007;
English original)

He seemed to be satisfied with the fruits that this practice had yielded according to his
writing: without it, '[T]o be frank, I think it would take me longer to reach that point' (ibid).

If no judgement can be made on the popularity of learning texts by heart in modern China
from several anecdotal narratives, the viewpoint held by influential language teaching experts
may not be ignored. Yu MinHong²³, a celebrated educator and seasoned English teacher who
was born in the 1960s, wrote:

I have been frequently asked the question of how to learn English well. I can give my
full answer in just one sentence: learn by heart any one well-written textbook as
fluently as possible. I cannot, of course, suggest the Bible for the fear that people
would take me as a preacher. (M.-H. Yu, 2008; Chinese original)

This position might be related to his early experience of learning Chinese texts by heart. He
wrote,

In primary and secondary school, all that we had were several thin textbooks. Without
any other books to read, we had to recite the texts again and again - so much so that I
could recall them till now as if they were carved in my heart. (M.-H. Yu, 2008:
Chinese original)

He also admitted that, to his disappointment, most of the texts memorised were about
political propaganda. Nevertheless, he did not therefore denigrate the method of learning
texts by heart. On the contrary, he commented, 'If only those elite texts on the essence of
Chinese culture were included in the textbooks! I believe the memorisation of those classic
passages can benefit us for a lifelong time' (ibid).

²³ Yu MinHong is the founder and president of the New Oriental Education and Technology Group (more
commonly New Oriental). He is honored as the 'Godfather of Study Abroad' among Chinese students.
Founded in 1993, New Oriental has grown from a class of only 30 students to China's largest private
education service provider with more than three million student enrolments in over 20 schools all over the
nation. New Oriental was listed on the New York Stock Exchange in September 2006, the first private
education company to achieve this feat. Yu is thought to be China's richest teacher with about 2 billion
yuan (250 million U.S. dollars) of assets. (Source: Xinhua, 2006)

870

871 Moreover, text memorisation is sometimes mentioned by the guest experts who are invited to
872 recall their experience of learning English in academic journals or English learning
873 magazines. For instance, Zhao ShiKai, a leading linguist in China, said:

874

875 Learning texts by heart is extremely helpful to me. It works much better than
876 memorising individual words in the sense that memorising on the basis of whole
877 passage or at least whole sentence enables us to better understand word meaning,
878 grammar and even rhetorics. The so-called text linguistics and pragmatics we study
879 today are all included in the text. (Zhao, 2002: 11; Chinese original)

880

881 It can be seen from the foregoing review that the reason why some English learners (or
882 subsequent teachers) remain enthusiastic about this practice may lie in the fact that this is the
883 way they themselves were taught or used for learning a foreign language for years and they
884 perceived it to be effective to some extent. Xu GuoZhang, a highly influential foreign
885 language educator had taken ‘to recite repeatedly for memorisation’ (*long du er neng bei*
886 *song*) (Xu, 1999) as his maxim of learning English. It is not surprising that memorisation of
887 paragraphs, poems and idioms becomes a requirement throughout the whole textbook series²⁴
888 Xu has chief-edited. Though his textbooks contradict Western culture in many ways, Xu
889 maintains a firm footing in English study circles to this day ("English Craze Leaders," 2002).

890

891 Today, rather than a dying practice, text memorisation is ‘still widely practiced in schools
892 throughout the country [China]’ (Ding, 2004: 9; see also Rao, 1996; Jin & Cortazzi, 2002).
893 Students may spend hours memorising texts and some teachers require individual students to
894 recite these texts in class or in the teachers’ offices (Jin & Cortazzi, 2002). Learning texts by
895 heart seems to be gaining attention from language educators and researchers as more and
896 more cases of successful English learners are reported claiming to have intensively employed
897 this practice as a learning strategy (see, e.g., Ding, 2004, 2007; Gao, 2007a; Huang & Qi,
898 2005; Wen, 1996). One example in point is that a widely used textbook series for non-English
899 majors in university, *College English - Integrated Course* (Y.-H. Li, Zhang, & Wang, 2001),
900 for the first time, to the best of my knowledge, set in each unit a regular assignment of
901 learning by heart several (usually 3 to 4) paragraphs in the text. This may epitomise an

94 24 The four-volume English textbook which is titled *Xu GuoZhang English* dominated English study in
95 Chinese university for 39 years. ("English Craze Leaders," 2002)

official recognition of the value of this traditional way of learning. Having been challenged as a learning method due to the disfavour of Confucian authoritarian education in modern China (Ding, 2004), the practice of text memorisation may need to be re-examined, for it cannot simply be dismissed as ‘primitive’, ‘old-fashioned’, or ‘misguided’ (Harvey, 1985).

Prior to proceeding further, I would like to provide a brief analysis of the work done by two Chinese scholars. Ding (2004) investigated the beliefs and strategies concerning the learning and using of language chunks through text memorisation by examining journal entries and interview reports produced by a group of English majors in a prestigious university in China. The author attempted to tap into – among other things – the following two issues: students’ opinions as to the effectiveness of the method of learning text by heart and their comparison of learning text by heart with other methods. It was found that the participants viewed the method of textual memorisation as effective in helping them to improve both their speech and writing despite the hardship they have experienced.

Gao (2007a) conducted a longitudinal ethnographic inquiry into mainland Chinese undergraduates’ shifting strategic engagement in acquiring English competence on the Chinese mainland and Hongkong. Twenty-two mainland Chinese students were interviewed about their language learning experiences on the Chinese mainland, immediately after their arrival in Hongkong and fifteen of them were interviewed for the second time about their language learning experiences in Hongkong. The participants were a group of relatively successful or ‘elite’ Chinese learners from a middle-class family background. It was reported that many participants in this study found the memorisation of textual materials (either in the form of English essays, speeches or song lyrics) helpful with their English learning.

An interesting phenomenon associated with text memorisation that needs to be mentioned here is the wide use of *New Concept English* (Alexander, 1967) among millions of Chinese English learners. Recalling his English learning experience in college, Tang Jun²⁵, the most expensive professional manager in China (born in the early 1960s), wrote in his biography:

²⁵ Tang Jun was crowned as China's "emperor employee" with an annual salary of 100 million RMB, or 14 million U.S. dollars. He had been working in Microsoft for ten years and was appointed president of Microsoft China in 2002. (Source: crienglish.com, 2008)

932 I set a goal for myself. That is, I must learn one text by heart each day. In this way, I
933 memorised all the texts in the first three books of *New Concept English* series. (J.
934 Tang, 2008; Chinese original)

935

936 *New Concept English*²⁶ is a popular UK-imported textbook series which is used in secondary
937 and tertiary institutions, especially private English training schools. Its vast impact on English
938 teaching and learning in China is such that there is an emergence of a *New Concept English*
939 industry, inclusive of textbooks, supplementary materials, multi-media products, and training
940 programmes (P.-Y. Li, et al., 2004). To the best of my knowledge, it is very likely to be the
941 textbook whose texts are mostly memorised by Chinese learners (cf. Ding, 2007; Gao, 2008).
942 There is an anecdote which was told by a Chinese netizen and also quoted by a few of my
943 participants to support their beliefs about text memorisation as well as their worship for the
944 book series:

945

946 I heard that there was some guy from Peking University²⁷. He memorised all the texts
947 in *New Concept English* book 1, 2, 3, and 4. Later, he went to study in the United
948 States. His professor thought that he copied people's works in writing since he
949 believed that no Chinese could write such native-like essays. To prove his innocence,
950 he asked his professor to name a text in the *New Concept English* textbooks. And he
951 retold it using the exact words ... (Bababa, quoted in Gao, 2008: 441)

952

953 While the story is likely to be an imagined incident which is at best for us to read for fun, the
954 following reflection by Li PengYi, the President of the Foreign Language Teaching and
955 Research Press (FLTRP) in China may deserve our attention:

956

957 My personal connection with *New Concept English* started 25 years ago, when I first
958 began to learn the language, at the age of 23. We all know that learning a foreign
959 language is a formidable challenge for adults. But *New Concept English* inspired my

99 26 First published in 1967, *New Concept English* not only swept the western world but also quickly
100 became the most popular English course in China. In 1997 a new edition was published. This edition was
101 written specifically to address the needs of English learners in China. Since its publication, the sales of the
102 four main books alone, not to mention the support components (supplementary materials and multi-media
103 products), have exceeded 7 million copies. Book One was reprinted 50 times by the summer of 2004.
104 (Source: P.-Y. Li, Ethridge, Yang, & Alexander, 2004)

105 27 One of the top universities in China.

interest and build up my confidence. Even today I can still recite some passages I studied back then, ... (P.-Y. Li, et al., 2004: 21)

As the best-recognised classical English course book, *New Concept English* has been enjoying a legendary and continual success in China and ‘fully established Louise Alexander [the author] as the indisputable ELT guru in China’²⁸ (cf. P.-Y. Li, et al., 2004; McArthur, 2002). The enduring popularity of the book series may lie in the fact that it is not only just a source of information; ‘it is a pedagogical tool’ (P.-Y. Li, et al., 2004: 25):

Carefully sequential, consistent, and punctuated with unambiguous directions to both teacher and student, it [*New Concept English*] is perceived as a model of how teachers can guide students to use English actively while simultaneously learning systematic and lexical knowledge. (Ross, 1992: 246)

In addition to skilful compilation, the attractiveness of the book series may largely be attributable to careful selection of its texts, which, according to some learners (participants in the interview study reported later in the thesis), are much more interesting than the domestically compiled textbooks. There are many good stories in this course book which easily engage the learners’ curiosity, surprise and feelings (P.-Y. Li, et al., 2004) through shared humanity across cultures. The use of texts in *New Concept English* by Chinese learners as materials to learn by heart was also constantly mentioned by learners and teachers involved in the interview study. I was surprised to discover in the fieldwork that a state school was also using *New Concept English* as their formal textbook. This is not only a sign of moving from state-determined towards client-determined in terms of choosing textbooks for ELT in public schools, but also an indication of the phenomenal recognition of *New Concept English* in China.

1.2 Text memorisation outside China

²⁸ Louis Alexander’s vast impact on English teaching and learning in China was reflected in the fact that a bronze statue was raised in his honour in the grounds of the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press (FLTRP), one of China’s largest schoolbook publishers. The inscription on the base of the statue reads: ‘... The man who cracked the linguistic code of the English language and made it learnable for millions of students worldwide through *New Concept English* and many other course books’ (P.-Y. Li, et al., 2004: 20).

It needs to be pointed out that the Chinese are not the only people in history who have heavily practised or attached importance to text memorisation. Given that ‘[U]ntil about 4000 b.c. all literature was oral’, all cultures in the world have in the past maintained oral traditions whose continued existence depended on memory, for, at that time, ‘all of what is called literary expression was carried in the memory of the folk, and especially of gifted narrators’ (S. Thompson, 2009). Since the world learned to use writing, written languages in various cultures made it possible to standardize established texts. The practice of using writing was however, in the earliest stage of record-making, ‘exceptionally for solemn religious or oral purposes’ (Clanchy, 1993: 2).

1.2.1 Text memorisation in religious practice/education

As a special kind of oral tradition, religious ceremonies and healing rites often require their performers, i.e. priests and shamans, to reproduce ritualistic texts word for word, with complete faithfulness to what has been passed down to them (S. Thompson, 1997).

To illustrate how the accuracy of memory was emphasized in ritualistic routines in a medieval Christian monastery or church, Clanchy noted:

By constant repetition the clergy learned the liturgy by heart. In monastic choirs the demon Tutivillus was believed to collect up sackfuls of dropped syllables from the Psalms to be weighed up at the Last Judgement against those who voiced the texts inaccurately²⁹. Monks who failed to say their prayers correctly invalidated them and endangered not only their own souls but their patrons’ as well. (Clanchy, 1993: 62)

Modern mnemonic techniques, according to Carruthers (1990), can be traced back to the inheritance of classical antiquity which the monks used to help them memorise the many works they had to read. As van Houts (1999: 7) put it:

²⁹ In one of his sermons Jacques de Vitry told the story of how a cleric in choir saw a devil weighed down with a sack. The devil explained that the sack was full of ‘syllables and slurred utterances and verses of the psalms’ which the clergy had stolen from God when enunciating their prayers incorrectly. (For more about the story, see Clanchy, 1993: 187)

No monastery had enough books, Bibles, biblical commentaries or important classical texts for each monk to have his own bookshelf. Hence monks had to memorise a considerable amount of literature. To be able to understand and interpret the Bible, for example, one had to be sure that the text was firmly fixed in one's mind. All sorts of tricks were devised to make this job easier.

Hugh of St Victor, an influential teacher of biblical studies in the 12th century, devised several schemes to help his pupils memorise psalter and Biblical texts for precisely these reasons (cf. Carruthers, 1990: 261-266; see 2.3.2 for more discussion). It was recorded that, in writing a compilation of patristic texts on the Gospels, St. Thomas Aquinas, an Italian theologian in the 13th century, 'put the compilation together from texts that he had read and committed to memory from time to time while staying in various religious houses' (Gui cited in Carruthers, 1990: 3). It seemed that enhancing one's memory capacity became an essential part of monastic life. It was also recorded that in one monastery, each monk was given one book to study for a year (Clanchy, 1982). This was not very different from private school students in ancient China who spend years learning by heart only a few classics.

In ancient Hindu education, the Veda³⁰, the scripture of the Hindus, was also taught in a similar way to how the Confucian classics were learned in ancient China:

The teacher would instruct the few students seated on the ground about him by rote, and for many hours daily they would repeat verse after verse, until one or more was mastered. Sometimes, to ensure correctness, the hymns were taught in more than one way, ... or in even more complicated ways. (Basham, 1954: 163)

It is this remarkable system of mnemonic checks and the patience and brilliant memories of many generations of teachers and students which preserved the Vedas for posterity in much the same form as that in which they existed nearly a thousand years before Christ (ibid). Even today, parts of the Veda are still recited and memorised as a 'religious act of great merit' (van Buitenen, 1997: 529).

1.2.2 (Text) memorisation in medieval Europe

³⁰ Veda literally means 'knowledge' and is regarded as the embodiment of eternal truth that was once revealed to gifted and inspired seers (*rishis*), who in turn transcribed it into Sanskrit (van Buitenen, 1997)

Although text memorization has generally been marginalised in contemporary Western education or even worse, treated as, in Cook's (1994: 133) words, 'an unforgivable sin' or 'as though there is no case to argue' against it, it is by no means absent in history. On the contrary, memory was the psychological faculty valued above all others in the period stretching from late antiquity through to the Renaissance (Carruthers, 1990).

In her detailed analysis of uses of memory and the conceptions of memory in the Middle Ages, Carruthers (1990) showed how memory played a significant role in medieval people's intellectual and cultural lives. The great values they attached to memory can be sensed from Carruthers's depiction:

Ancient and medieval people reserved their awe for memory. Their greatest geniuses they describe as people of superior memories, they boast unashamedly of their prowess in that faculty, and they regard it as a mark of superior moral character as well as intellect. (Carruthers, 1990: I; emphasis original)

...

Memoria, ..., was a part of litteratura: indeed it was what literature, in a fundamental sense, was for. Memory is one of the five divisions of ancient and medieval rhetoric; it was regarded, moreover, by more than one writer on the subject as the 'noblest' of all these, the basis for the rest. (Carruthers, 1990: 9; emphasis original)

What is captured from the above quotations, among other things, is that in addition to serving as a rhetorical tool to assist scholars, the tradition of medieval memory was even a matter of ethics, for,

A person without a memory, if such a thing could be, would be a person without moral character and, in basic sense, without humanity' (Carruthers, 1990: 13).

To highlight the fundamental role of memoria, Carruthers considered memoria as 'one of the modalities of medieval culture (chivalry might be another)' so that it had a very long life as a continuing source and reference for human values and behaviour (Carruthers, 1990: 260). From this view, the European Middle Ages can be meaningfully spoken of as a 'memoria culture' (ibid).

Olson provided the following picture of medieval writers' conceptions of memory when commenting on the Carruthers (1990) work:

... Medieval writers never thought of writing as a substitute for memory but rather as an aid to memory. Writing was thought of and used merely as a mnemonic device, a system of visible marks that could be used to check memory. Memory was thought of as 'writing' on the mind and memory was the primary instrument of thought. (Olson, 1994: 61)

It is clear that medieval scholars relied primarily on memory rather than written texts in most of their scholarly activities. Memory skills were valued as highly by scholastic masters as they were by ordinary monks. In his treatise on use of memory, Master Hugh of St Victor, a famous theologian and historian in the mid twelfth century, said, 'knowledge is a treasure and your heart is its strongbox' (Carruthers, 1990: 261; see also Clanchy, 1993: 172-173).

Because the heart is a treasure of precious information, remembering is the process of extracting a particular item from it by recalling its 'colour, shape, position and placement' in the archive of the mind (Clanchy, 1993: 173). Having recommended remembering what one read, rather than depending on the written text (Clanchy, 1993: 193), Hugh set out ways to imprint the knowledge so that it can be easily retrieved. For example, he wrote at length on how to learn the psalter word for word by heart (cf. Carruthers, 1990: 261-266). Hugh's scholarly advice was followed in the schools and universities of medieval Europe and his instructions for memorizing texts were even thought to have 'helped to keep the textual traditions of important authoritative works more or less intact' (van Houts, 1999: 8).

One aspect of the formation of medieval literate habits which was thought to be peculiarly medieval was that 'medieval writing was mediated to the non-literate by the persistence of the habit of reading aloud and by the preference, even among the educated, for listening to a statement rather than scrutinizing it in script' (Clanchy, 1993: 186). Despite the increasing use of documents, traditional oral procedures such as the preference for reading aloud rather than scanning a text silently with the eye, persisted through the Middle Ages and beyond (Clanchy, 1993: 2). This tradition, again, displayed similarity to that practiced by students in ancient China (see 1.2).

While many moderns view memory as something devoid of intellect, real thought or true learning, according to Carruthers, medieval people would not have understood our separation of memory from learning because

[I]n their understanding of the matter, it was memory that made knowledge into useful experience, and memory that combined these pieces of information-become-experience into what we call ‘ideas,’ what they were more likely to call ‘judgments.’ (Carruthers, 1990: I)

This position might be a projection of medieval belief that ‘all learning is based in remembering’ (Carruthers, 1990: 259) or ‘human learning is memorative [sic] in nature’ (Carruthers, 1990: 260). Without retention in the memory, according to Hugh, there is no learning, no wisdom (Carruthers, 1990: 82).

Echoing and furthering this position, Miller (1963: 44-45), one of the founders of modern cognitive psychology, stated that learning can be seen as a process of acquiring smarter and richer mnemonic devices to represent information, encoding similar information into patterns, organizational principles, and rules which represent even material we have never before encountered, but which is ‘like’ what we do know, and thus can be ‘recognised’ or ‘remembered’. This is obviously a perspective that medieval writers would have agreed on.

It is clear from the above discussion that text memorisation has been a salient feature of learning and scholarly tradition in the West at a particular time in history. Although scholars have always recognised that memory necessarily played a crucial role in pre-modern Western civilisation, ‘insufficient attention has been paid to the pedagogy of memory, to what memory was thought to be, and how and why it was trained’ (Carruthers, 1990: 8).

1.2.3 Positive voices on text memorisation in the modern West

I realised that memorisation of textual materials was probably not an exceptional practice in nineteenth century UK education when my supervisor (Rosamond Mitchell, personal communication, August 06, 2010) drew my attention to the following episode in *Jane Eyre* (Bronte, 1994) where Jane Eyre explains how she learned French:

1152 Fortunately I had had the advantage of being taught French by a French lady; and as I
1153 had always made a point of conversing with Madame Pierrot, as often as I could, **and**
1154 **had, besides, during the last seven years, learnt a portion of French by heart**
1155 **daily** – applying myself to take pains with my accent, and imitating as closely as
1156 possible the pronunciation of my teacher – I had acquired a certain degree of
1157 readiness and correctness in the language, and was not likely to be much at a loss with
1158 Mademoiselle Adela.

1159
1160 This may well serve as an example of how ordinary the practice of memorisation was in
1161 nineteenth century UK education.

1162
1163 Even in the modern West, there are those who appreciate the benefits of memorisation of
1164 texts as a useful learning technique. For instance, a major western scholar said the following
1165 when offering advice on English teaching:

1166
1167 *Memorising or Repetition* is especially good, because, by aid of it, the form and flame
1168 of expression adhere to the mind, and little by little taste is acquired, good literature
1169 becoming a sort of personal property of the recipient, to act as an antagonism to the
1170 mediocre. (Herbert Palmer 1930: 32 cited in Pennycook, 1996; emphasis original)

1171
1172 In a similar vein, a western learner expressed his feeling about memorisation:

1173
1174 I have learned that there are many benefits to memorizing. For me, personally, it
1175 deepens my understanding of the passage and fixes it in my heart. As you go over and
1176 over a passage in your mind, you think about it again and again. The richness of the
1177 words, the way they are put together, the possible symbolisms, the clever use of
1178 literary devices, and new meanings that you may never have noticed or understood
1179 before—all become apparent in the process of memorizing. Memorizing can put
1180 words in our hearts as well as in our minds. Learning by heart—which may be
1181 somewhat of a dying tradition—means to learn something so deeply that it becomes
1182 part of our core: it fills us; it changes us. (Tanner, 2004)

1183
1184 To elaborate on how text memorisation is positively viewed by some western scholars, in the
1185 remaining part of this section I will examine two studies: Stevick (1989), which analyses

conversations with successful language learners, exploring the strategies they used and isolating implications of what the learners reveal of the complex social and cerebral process of language learning; and Cook (1994), which is purely a conceptual work, speculating on the relevance to and implications for TESOL of ‘intimate discourse’³¹.

1.2.3.1 The Stevick (1989) study

Stevick (1989) performed an interview-based case study with seven outstanding adult language learners from varied professional and L1 backgrounds. Data were entirely from hour-long recorded conversations the author had with the informants. The case of Bert, an L1-English learner of Chinese, aroused in me great interest. He was, according to Stevick (1989: 21), ‘a young diplomat who had reached *an extraordinarily high level of competence* both in speaking and in reading Chinese’ (my emphasis). I was fascinated by Bert’s story not only because the author used the most unambiguous expressions to describe his high achievement in Chinese learning, but because many of the techniques he claimed to have adopted were typical of the well-known Audio-Lingual method which has been challenged and largely replaced beginning in the late 1960s in the West. Apart from massive ‘mimicry-memorisation’ and intensive mechanical drills, Bert even took ‘memorisation of texts’ as one of the learning activities. His reaction to text memorization was reflected in the following quotation:

‘What about memorizing connected texts in a foreign language, such as dialogues or little stories or the like?’ I asked. ‘Is that something you thrive on, or something you can do but don’t care for, something you detest?’

‘Well, this is essentially what we were required to do in Chinese. **Within reason, of course.** I mean, one doesn’t sit down and memorize these pages of text—of narrative, but there is something to be...’

‘Memorization wasn’t something that particularly bothered you?’

‘**No. No, within reason.** By that I mean that one had to have assurance that this was what people really said. If I was going to spend the time on it, I wanted to be sure it was going to be worth the effort.’

‘But memorizing twenty or twenty-five lines, or something like that...’

³¹ This was defined by Cook as ‘discourse between people in minimal power relations which they would not wish to share with outsiders (1994: 134).

1218 **‘No, that didn’t bother me.’**

1219 ‘You’d go home and do it, and bring it back the next day, and ...’

1220 ‘Yes, and I stress that because, with the text we’re using in this language, I think all
1221 of us have a feeling that the language in the book is rather stilted and artificial, and not
1222 necessarily what we’d be saying.’

1223 ‘That feature of the Chinese course was what gave you an instinct for what is
1224 actually said in the language—for how sentences are put together.’

1225 ‘Yes. In this language I feel that I just have countless patterns sort of swimming
1226 around in my head.’ (1989: 29-30; emphasis [bold] added)

1227
1228 A number of intriguing issues arise from this episode. First, Bert seemed not bothered by this
1229 practice at all (see words highlighted in bold in the above quotation) even as a learner brought
1230 up in the Western culture of learning. Theorists or researchers are often oblivious of activities
1231 which mean a lot for the learners, though not significant for them. The caveat here is that the
1232 perspectives of learners who are actually engaged in learning a second language have not
1233 been given enough space in SLA research, which, has been biased towards ‘expert talk’ (e.g.
1234 Parry, 1998). Second, perceptions or beliefs habituated in the learners’ mind for one reason or
1235 another, serve as, in Bartelt’s (1997) term, ‘folk models’ which guide and motivate their
1236 learning and explain why they behave the way they do. For instance, Bert claimed to have
1237 developed from text memorisation an instinct for ‘how sentences are put together’ and felt
1238 himself to have countless patterns swimming around in his head. This perception may not fit
1239 well with certain theoretical points of view, nor can it convince any experts or learners who
1240 have not experienced the memorisation of text. However, this reflects how the learner
1241 perceives what has been effective in his learning process. Success with foreign language, as
1242 Stevick found in this study of successful learners, ‘does not come by one simple formula’
1243 (1989: xi). Another issue that transpires from this episode is learners’ awareness of their
1244 learning behaviour or strategy. A successful learner is not only a learning theorist (A. L.
1245 Brown, Bransford, & Campione, 1983), but also a reflective and pragmatic or purposeful
1246 learner. When he said he had to make sure that the text to be memorised should be ‘what
1247 people really said’, Bert apparently bore in his mind the purpose of oral communication. He
1248 seemed not to be spending time on a learning activity at will; rather, he weighed up carefully
1249 whether ‘it was going to be worth the effort’. Instead of unconditionally accepting whatever
1250 the teacher promoted, he critically or selectively made use of text memorisation, i.e.
1251 committed to memory only texts he considered to be useful or rewarding.

In the comments³² following the interview transcript, Stevick made no reference to any of the issues discussed above. Instead, he discussed briefly the appropriateness of language samples given to the learner based on a complaint by Bert which was not actually evidenced in the interview excerpts quoted:

Bert is complaining that in his present course (i.e. the later language, not Chinese), samples of language appropriate for one situation or one social level are mixed with samples appropriate for other situations and levels. This causes trouble whether he is 'learning' or 'acquiring' the language. 'Learning', in the narrow sense ..., is something like playing an intellectual game. To ask a learner to keep track of new patterns on more than one social or geographical level is like asking a new checker player to play on a three-dimensional board. 'Acquisition' is more like developing a new self, and the same complications can keep that self from developing in a well-integrated way. To use yet another figure of speech, Bert must have felt like a beginning marksman who is asked to shoot at a moving target before he has learned to hit a stationary one. (1989: 30)

Stevick's comments appeared not to the point given the content of the script on which they are targeted (i.e. memorisation of texts). Talking about 'learning' and 'acquisition' at this point seemed to be discursive or farfetched. However, one issue of relevance to my discussion might be the appropriateness of the language sample (textual material) provided for learners to memorise if text memorisation is used as a teaching device. What Stevick intends to say might be that the language sample should be carefully chosen to be tailored to the learners' proficiency level or focusing consistently on a single aspect of L2 use.

Though failing to express his stance on text memorisation in comments on Bert's practice, Stevick was indeed an advocate of Audiolingual-style activities as he wrote in the summary chapter under the section title of *What I myself would do with a new language*: 'I would like to have (in fact, I would probably insist on having) a chance to do a fair amount of purely

³² The writing of the results of the interview study was organised throughout Stevick's book in the following pattern: the author first present what the learners themselves actually said, then provide a few comments on some of the principles illustrated, and suggest how the reader may work critically with the ideas.

mechanical practice, something like the technique with the cuisenaire rods...' (1989: 148; emphasis original). More importantly, Stevick did not exclude memorisation of texts from 'mechanical practice':

I would even do a certain amount of memorisation, because memorisation is easy for me and because I have frequently been able to **use** in conversation **various adaptations of things I had learned by heart**. (1989: 148; emphasis added)

An important reason for Stevick's practice with text memorisation is that he was able to use what had been memorised flexibly (in his words, 'adaptations of things I had learned by heart') rather than '*sheng ban ying tao*' [a Chinese idiom literally meaning 'enforced move and inappropriate borrow'], a rote use or imitation regardless of practical situations or circumstantial surroundings. With respect to the relationship of (text) memorisation and creativity (to be discussed in 2.2.3), this personal experience may lend a modest support to the argument that the memorisation of texts is not a pointless practice and it does not necessarily fail to lead to productive, original language use .

1.2.3.2 The Cook (1994) study

Stevick does not represent the only voice among western scholars who has attempted to restore a good name to learning by heart. Notably, in his conceptual study, Cook provided unambiguous support for repetition and learning by heart, which, are normally discouraged in modern western education:

I wish to argue the opposite... from a strong conviction based on experience as a language learner, and shared I believe by many others, that repetition and learning by heart, though condemned by pedagogic and acquisition theorists, are two of the most pleasurable, valuable, and efficient of language learning activities, and that they can bring with them sensations of those indefinable, overused yet still valuable goals for the language learner: being involved in the authentic and communicative use of language (1994: 133; emphasis added).

This strong feeling has led to his assertion that ‘repetition and learning by heart should again form a substantial part of the language learning process’ (1994: 139). He continued to argue that this practice should not be confined to child learners:

Sometimes there is a place in the discourse of the adult second language acquirer, just as there is within the discourse of the child and the native speaker, for learning by heart and repeating, even without understanding. Knowing by heart makes it possible to enjoy speech without the burden of production. (1994: 139; emphasis added)

The argument that learning by heart and repetition can afford pleasure or enjoyment to even adult second language learners is apparently ingrained in his view that, language, apart from for the purpose of communication, is ‘a source of comfort and an outlet for joy and exuberance’ (1994: 138).

Cook’s pronounced endorsement of learning by heart was in effect associated with a political educational movement in Britain advocating a ‘returning to basics’ which, in his case, happened to be ‘rote learning of the English literary classics³³’ (1994: 134) in first language literacy education. According to Cook, the neglect of the importance of repetition in first language discourse can be attributed to four distorting factors in contemporary discourse analysis:

- 1 emphasis on creativity in language rather than memory
- 2 unrepresentative data
- 3 cultural bias against any apparently ‘useless’ language
- 4 a narrow view of language (and discourse) function

(for detailed argumentation, see 1994: 135-139) which has in turn led to the outlawing of repetition and learning by heart in the second language classroom.

To extract implications for TESOL from his discussion about ‘intimate discourse’, Cook stated:

³³ Yet Cook’s advocacy has remained controversial as it is considered to be associated with the furthering of discipline and conservative values (see 1994: 140 for more discussion).

1346 Repetition of substantial stretches of language which are known by heart, whether or
1347 not fully understood or used to communicate, gives the mind something to work on,
1348 so that gradually, if one wishes, they may yield up both their grammar and their
1349 meaning. (1994: 138)

1351 ... as the known-by-heart is repeated many times, it may begin to make sense. Its
1352 native-like structures and vocabulary, analysed and separated out, become available
1353 for creative and original use. (1994: 139; emphasis added)

1355 Albeit basing his argument on speculation and experience rather than on formal empirical
1356 investigation, Cook offered insights on the possibility of using learning by heart as a tool for
1357 implicit learning, which, though interesting, is well beyond the scope of the current
1358 discussion (for psycholinguistic analysis of memorised utterances and implicit learning, see
1359 N. Ellis, 2002; Williams, 1999). Interestingly, Cook's speculation seems to be in agreement
1360 with the house-hold Chinese saying – 'Master 300 Tang poems, and you become a poet
1361 yourself'³⁴ – what Gu (2003: 97) has called 'a folk theory of implicit learning'.

1363 1.3 Rationale for the current study

1365 Over the years, text memorisation – in its own right – has been under-investigated especially
1366 given the widespread use of the learning practice in China. To date, there has been no
1367 systematic investigation into the practice and beliefs of Chinese learners regarding learning
1368 texts by heart. Previous studies (see, e.g., Ding & Y. Qi, 2001; Ding, 2004; Ding, 2007) on
1369 learning texts by heart took as informants a small number of relatively successful learners and
1370 English majors at tertiary level with a focus more on the psychological processes involved
1371 than on perceptions of the practice. A gap left by the existing studies is that, even if there are
1372 reports on learners' beliefs about this practice, there is:

- 1374 1 no consideration given to distinctions among different groups of learners (i.e. from
1375 different educational levels and with differential English proficiency); and
- 1376 2 no attempt to investigate the opinions of non-English-majors who constitute an
1377 overwhelming majority of college students; and

127 ³⁴ Translation from Gu (2003).

3 no formal study of the views of language teachers in regard to text memorisation as a teaching device.

The present study, therefore, addresses this gap in previous empirical studies by examining the practices and beliefs of a group of Chinese learners and teachers regarding the use of text memorisation in foreign language learning and teaching with an attempt to compare the commonalities and diversity across groups from three educational levels which constitute the main part of the English language education system and represent the largest number of English language learners in China.

More broadly, this thesis is intended as a contribution to the literature on text memorisation in modern China, which, in its own right, has not yet been systematically explored in relation to foreign language education and the understanding of Chinese learners.

1.4 Aims of the study

A general overview of the research project has been given above (see P2). To be specific, aims of the study are to:

- 1 further the understanding of the values of traditional Chinese education practices and Chinese perception of learning through the lens of text memorisation;
- 2 provide a potential reinterpretation of the Confucian philosophy of learning and traditional language teaching practices in China in order to query to what extent they are relevant to modern language education;
- 3 move beyond stereotyped and superficial interpretation of Chinese ways of learning by conducting in-depth interviews with a group of Chinese learners and teachers from different educational levels;
- 4 offer heuristics that can yield guidance to domestic foreign language teachers as well as western-origin EFL/ESL teachers/researchers who are or will be working with Chinese learners in an intercultural communication contexts.

The overall aims and issues reviewed above underpin the motivation for the present study.

The research questions to be addressed are:

1 What are Chinese learners/teachers' perceptions of the use of text memorisation in foreign language learning/teaching?

2 How can the emerged features of the learners/teachers' perceptions be explained?

To be specific,

- What are the most common views or beliefs of Chinese EFL learners/teachers on text memorisation?
- What are the problems perceived or difficulties experienced by Chinese EFL learners/teachers with regard to the use of text memorisation?
- What are the students/teachers' attitudes towards the potential problems that might be brought about by extensive use of text memorisation?
- Are there any commonalities and diversity across groups at different educational levels regarding the learners/teachers' use and beliefs on learning texts by heart?

1.5 An outline of the thesis

This thesis is an attempt at investigating text memorisation in China. The goal is two-fold: to explore relevant literature to push ahead current understanding of Chinese learners and their learning practice through the lens of learning texts by heart and, to investigate Chinese conceptions of foreign language learning by accessing individual voices of Chinese learners/teachers.

Unifying the macroscopic and microscopic perspective on the discussion of memorisation constitutes a major goal of this thesis. This can be understood on two levels. First, substantial conceptual analyses and empirical evidence are to be provided to complement each other; second, an inquiry into the notion of the 'Chinese learner' in a broad context of general (language) education is interwoven with a specific investigation of the practice of text memorisation in foreign language learning and teaching. To that end, I begin in Chapter 2 to pose a challenge to western constructs on (text) memorisation and Chinese learners by elaborating on a number of issues central to the understanding of Confucian education theory and Chinese learners. It is argued that memorisation can lead to high level of understanding and acquisition of knowledge if used properly; moreover, memorisation is not necessarily

incompatible with critical thinking, as perceived by modern western education theorists. In further pursuit of this line of argumentation, in Chapter 3, a more focused analysis is conducted of memorisation in language learning and teaching, the major thrust of which is to seek an understanding of Audiolingualism – the most important contemporary epistemology underlying text memorisation – in relation to ELT in China. Chapter 4 describes the rationale and design for an interview-based, survey-complemented empirical study. I make an attempt in this chapter to show how the paradigm of interpretivism fits into the nature of the current study. In addition, general background information about the participants as well as data collection and analysis are presented in the rest of the chapter. Chapter 5 reports on the learners' perceptions of the use of text memorisation in foreign language learning. Chapter 6 then moves on to examine how teachers view the practice of text memorisation from the perspective of teaching. Together with the findings in Chapter 5 and 6, Chapter 7 presents a holistic picture of the participants' beliefs and practice of text memorisation by looking into the similarities and diversities across three educational groups on the basis of both qualitative and quantitative analyses of the data. Chapter 8 concludes the dissertation. It summarises the whole study and highlights the findings vis-à-vis the research questions set at the outset. Pedagogical implications and proposed directions for further research are also discussed.

CHAPTER TWO

A MACROSCOPIC VIEW: MEMORISATION IN CONFUCIAN HERITAGE LEARNING

In the previous chapter we have seen that (text) memorisation was not necessarily stamped with a Chinese birthmark. There is a considerable bulk of evidence leading to the conclusion that (text) memorisation had been widely practiced in other parts of the world including the Anglophone West up to the recent past. The demarcation became apparent only when the fact was taken into consideration that the practice has survived in contemporary China and persisted up to now while it has been largely abandoned in western education. This chapter aims to offer possible explanations by showing how memorisation is understood in a Confucian culture of learning as opposed to a Western contemporary construct. A major argument to be advanced is: in the Confucian philosophy of education, memorisation is viewed not only as a significant part of learning, but memorised knowledge serves as the foundation for the development of creative thinking. First, posing a challenge to the widely-held belief that the Confucian tradition values surface learning which is characterised by memorisation, I will put under scrutiny two key issues: (1) Is memorisation legitimate in learning? (2) Is memorisation doomed to be incompatible with critical thinking? Then, I will move on to address the paradox of the Chinese learner by examining how memorisation is practiced and perceived by Confucian predecessors in relation to its relationship with understanding, repetition and creativity. Finally, I will discuss the relevance of the Confucian tradition to contemporary education by demonstrating the inclusion of elements of critical thinking in Confucius's theory of learning.

2.1 Memorisation and learning: A positive re-examination

As is clear from the historical review of text memorisation in Chapter 1, memorisation had been a central practice in literacy, literature, and religious education up to the recent past in the Anglophone West, notwithstanding the fact that it has fallen out of favour in contemporary western education. Condemnation of memorisation has become a salient feature in the most progressive theories in contemporary education. One of the benefits of education is considered to be a reduction in less stress on a

good memory (Lips, 1949). It seems that good memory is no longer an admired or welcome feat, and even worse, memorisation is reduced to an ‘outlaw’ and ‘unforgivable sin’ (Cook, 1994: 133). Any educational theories acknowledging or highlighting the role of memorisation (Confucius’ theory of learning, for instance) are regarded as irrelevant to modern situations. This position seems to have stemmed from the following assumptions: (1) Learning through memorisation does not lead to knowledge or wisdom; (2) Memorisation is intrinsically incompatible with critical thinking, which is an integral component of modern education. My proceeding discussion will be on examining these conjectures.

2.1.1 Is memorisation legitimate in learning?

A useful point of departure for answering the question may be examining what the dissenters to memorisation have to say. In attacking narrative education³⁵, Paolo Freire, the radical Latin American education theorist (1921-1997) made the following statement:

Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorise, and repeat. This is the ‘banking’ concept of education, in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only as far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits. (Freire, 1972: 58)

Although memorisation was not exceptionally singled out here, the connotation of memorisation is negative:

Narration (with the teacher as narrator) leads the students to memorise mechanically the narrated content. Worse yet, it turns them into ‘containers,’ into ‘receptacles’ to be filled by the teacher. (ibid)

³⁵ By ‘narrative’, Freire means that in traditional education, the teacher-student relationship at any level reveals its fundamentally narrative character, which involves a narrating Subject (the teacher) and patient, listening objects (the students). (Freire, 1972: 57).

The banking model of education fails in the eyes of Freire because men are ‘filed away through the lack of ... knowledge in this misguided system’ (1972: 58). In other words, memorisation of the ‘narrated content’ does not lead to any knowledge. The most fundamental problem with this model, according to Freire, seems to be the misunderstanding of knowledge. For him, knowledge can never be obtained through transmission or memorisation, ‘[K]nowledge emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry ...’. For many kinds of important knowledge, Freire is certainly correct, however, I concur with other scholars such as Kim (2003), who point out that not all the things we know are known only after and because of critical inquiry and the active transformation of data. For example, ‘Four times four is sixteen; the capital of Para is Belem.’³⁶ (Freire, 1972: 57) This established knowledge or even *fact* (as I call it), apparently requires no such process of critical inquiry as Freire describes. At least, the type of knowledge like ‘the capital of Para is Belem’ requires little active engagement on the part of the learner compared to knowing ‘why or how Belem becomes the capital of Para’.

This sort of ‘mundane knowledge’, as Kim (2003: 87) call it, is vividly referred to in Chinese as ‘*si zhi shi*’ [this literally means ‘dead knowledge’ – ‘inflexible knowledge’ would be a better translation]. Negative though it may appear, the word ‘dead’ here has nothing to do with being obsolete or out-dated, but simply conveys the notion that there is almost no chance for us to challenge the truthfulness or correctness of this knowledge³⁷(unless the capital of Para is changed later). Recognition of the significance of critical inquiry should not lead us to go the extreme to deny the existence of ‘dead’ knowledge simply because it is as basic as common sense or because it involves no reasoning or leaves little room for critique on the part of the

³⁶ These are exactly the two examples Freire cited to show the outstanding characteristic of narrative education, namely, the sonority of words, not their transforming power. He asserts, ‘[T]he student records, memorises, and repeats these phrases without perceiving what four times four really means, or realizing the true significance of ‘capital’ in the affirmation ‘the capital of Para is Belem,’ that is, what Belem means for Para and what Para means for Brazil.’ For this ‘what means for what’ question, memorising with understanding is the answer (see the discussion in 2.1).

³⁷ This may partly explain why memorisation is used as the most effective and efficient way to deal with this sort of knowledge in Chinese culture of learning. Memorisation, or let us assume it is what some people call ‘rote-learning’ – ‘*si ji yin bei*’ [literally means ‘dead and inflexible memorisation’] in Chinese, may be considered a suitable way to learn ‘dead’ knowledge: it seems logical to learn inflexible knowledge using an inflexible method.

learner. Although I strongly reject the idea that learning is the mere banking or storing of information or opinion, I also refuse to accept that memorising the essence of the antiquity or scientific basics which have been attested through thousands of years of human experiences does not constitute learning or lead to knowledge or wisdom. I am not oblivious of Dewey's notion of two senses of the word 'learning':

On the one hand learning is the sum total of what is known, as that is handed down by books and learned men. It is something external, an accumulation of cognitions as one might store material commodities in a warehouse. **Truth exists ready-made somewhere.** Study is then the process by which an individual draws on what is in storage. On the other hand, learning means something which the individual does when he studies. ... (Dewey, 1903: 2037-2038; emphasis [bold] added)

It has thus been conceived that accumulation and storage of what is transmitted from 'books and learned men' does constitute part of learning inasmuch as truth can exist in a 'ready-made' form. Viewed in this light, memorisation and retention of the ready-made 'body of truth' is not only legitimate in but an indispensable component of learning. To quote Thompson, 'It is difficult to think of any educational goal for which the ability to retain information is unimportant. Human memory is crucial to the concept of learning' (I. Thompson, 1987: 43).

2.1.2 Is memorisation doomed to be incompatible with critical thinking?

The rejection of memorisation in learning for some critical thinking theorists represented by Freire (1972, 1975, 1976, 1993) might have originated from the presumption that memorisation is doomed to be counteractive or detrimental to critical thinking. Given the near unanimity of contemporary acceptance of the importance of critical thinking, memorisation seems to be an element which should be minimised or even eliminated in learning.

Before commenting on the inaccuracies in this argument, though, I would like to point out that I am not intending to challenge the importance of critical thinking in education. I endorse the view that the ultimate goal of education is to produce critical

1585 thinkers. However, I am hesitant to embrace assumptions based on either incomplete
1586 understanding of or overemphasis on critical thinking.

1587
1588 Prior to proceeding further, I have to add two caveats in understanding Freire's
1589 education philosophy. First, the Freirean method might be much more concerned with
1590 human need, namely the development of a just society than with education per se (cf.
1591 Taylor, 1993). The Freirean sense of education has always been intertwined with
1592 freedom and understood as a means of 'freeing people from the bondage of the culture
1593 of silence' (Reimer, 1970: 69). If the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* should not be read as
1594 a 'revolutionary pedagogy' but as a 'pedagogy for revolution' (Harman, 1971),
1595 caution may need to be taken in assessing its relevance to modern education or
1596 transferability to the context where the efficacy of education is a more central matter
1597 than liberating the oppressed. Second, Freire (1972) starkly contrasts two forms of
1598 education: Banking – Digestive Education vs. Dialogue – Liberating Education. If we
1599 simply accept Freire's (1972) dichotomy, the temptation, according to Taylor, is that
1600 'we attempt to combat banking education by creating a new model from those
1601 elements which lie on the opposing poles' (Taylor, 1993: 54). In doing so, we arrive
1602 logically at the concept of 'education for freedom', it remains, however, a question
1603 'whether, ontologically, this new, proposed polarity can actually exist' (ibid).

1604
1605 An implicit argument in Freire's education theory appears to be that the solitary goal
1606 of memorisation is to blindly repeat other's views like a parrot³⁸, which is in principle
1607 incompatible with, or banishes critical thinking. He states, 'The more students work at
1608 storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness
1609 ...'. What is alluded to here more than anything else is that, the more one memorises
1610 (or stores the 'deposits'), the less critical one would become. While this view is not
1611 without its rationality in the sense that the knowledge one already knows may
1612 sometimes constrain the scope of one's imagination, it is obviously an exaggeration in
1613 most cases. The problem with the argument is that the learning process is likened to a
1614 closed space in which memorisation of knowledge and critical consciousness are
1615 competing with each for the occupation of a limited area. If memorised knowledge is
1616 allowed more space, less room would be left for critical consciousness. Does the

143 38 Describing the banking model of education, Freire (1972) writes, '...the students patiently
144 receive, memorise, and repeat.' (See also the quotation in last section)

1617 augmentation of memorised knowledge necessarily impede or inhibit the development
1618 of critical consciousness?

1619
1620 To address this question, we need first to develop an understanding of the role of the
1621 accumulation of existing knowledge. It is not only that knowledge can be ready-made
1622 either from books or learned men, but also according to Dewey (1903: 2079), this
1623 knowledge ‘furnishes the means of understanding or giving meaning to what is still
1624 going on and what is to be done’. Taking the example of a physician, Dewey notes,
1625 ‘what he [physician] has found out by personal acquaintance and by study of what
1626 others have ascertained and recorded’ is knowledge to him because

1627
1628 it supplies the resources by which he interprets the unknown things which
1629 confront him, fills out the partial obvious facts with connected suggested
1630 phenomena, foresees their probable future, and makes plans accordingly.
1631 (Dewey, 1903: 2079-2080)

1632
1633 In this view, knowledge learned through mastery of past experience or others’
1634 opinions to achieve an acquaintanceship with existing information serves to lay a
1635 foundation or forge a source on which more creative work can build.

1636
1637 Dewey (1903: 1808-1809) continues to argue that men could not ‘really throw away
1638 all transmitted beliefs concerning the realities of existence, and start afresh upon the
1639 basis of their private, exclusive sensations and ideas’, because the only outcome of
1640 doing so would be ‘general imbecility’. Instead, human history is the one of revision
1641 and reorganisation of beliefs:

1642
1643 Men set out from what had passed as knowledge, and critically investigated
1644 the grounds upon which it rested; they noted exceptions; they used new
1645 mechanical appliances to bring to light data inconsistent with what had been
1646 believed; they used their imaginations to conceive a world different from that
1647 in which their forefathers had put their trust. (Dewey, 1903: 1808-1810)

1648
1649 Thus viewed, knowledge that is passed or transmitted can serve as a starting point for
1650 critical investigation. It is this transmitted knowledge that lays the ground for people

to examine its hidden assumptions and arguments, so as to detect and correct any inconsistency in the old knowledge.

Adopting an open-ended perspective on the learning process, Dewey sees the acquisition of existing knowledge as a facilitation rather than impairment to the configuration of ‘what is to be done’, or, in Freire’s (1972: 56) words, ‘a task of re-creating that knowledge’. It seems that memorising transmitted knowledge and the development of creative consciousness do not necessarily pose an either-or choice, as is indicated by Freire’s theory; it would be more rational to view the two as virtuously complementary to each other.

One may argue that, however, acquisition of existing knowledge may not be the same thing as the memorisation of this knowledge (Rosamond Mitchell, October 28, 2010, personal communication). The issue of the approach to knowledge naturally arises. Rejecting the notion that bodies of knowledge were self-contained entities, Dewey insists that an approach to knowledge has to be rooted in the concept of the social origin of learning in order to ‘avoid the pitfalls of isolated abstraction’ (Wirth, 1966: 136). If Dewey’s theory of knowledge and learning was rooted in the reality of the human situation or experience (see Wirth, 1966: 135-147 for detailed discussion), the Confucian approach to knowledge is not categorically different in this sense inasmuch as Confucius does not value learning or inquiry that is not anchored in and responsive to the lived daily experience of men (see Kim, 2003 for a detailed argumentation).

What is distinctive to the Confucian tradition of education might be that memorisation is seen as one possible – perhaps significant – means of attaining knowledge.

Although some educationalists may take the view that memorisation is not the best way to acquire a knowledge store, it might be a pragmatic or efficient way for Chinese learners to establish information in their mind. While contemporary education in China is still being criticised for focusing on the acquisition of a vast store of knowledge at the expense of creativity (S. Chan, 1999), this is not to deny that this mode of education does enable the students to lay a solid foundation in knowledge accumulation. It is further argued here that storing a large amount of language samples through memorisation may play a more important part in foreign language education than in other disciplines, especially in the Chinese context (see Chapter 3 for relevant discussion).

Prior to furthering my inquiry about memorisation in relation to critical thinking, it is important to be aware that the controversy over the relationship between memorisation and critical thinking cannot be put to an end without proper understanding of the two concepts. The crux of the debate is in essence pointing to two fundamental questions: (1) Does memorisation amount to rote-learning devoid of understanding? (2) What does critical thinking mean?

To answer these two questions, the discrepancy over cultural tradition or educational values seems unavoidable. Similar to the understanding of memorisation, what critical thinking means to Eastern learners (Confucian learners in particular) may be contrasted to the perception of their Western counterparts. Although we are repeatedly reminded of the hazard of cultural stereotyping (Ha, 2004; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Littlewood, 2001), critical discussion of cultural differences, in my opinion, can considerably enhance our understanding of certain issues. Indeed, a teaching or learning approach (as well as the underlying conception of learning) that is taken for granted and regarded as universal and common sense by people from one culture may be seen as idiosyncratic and ineffective in the eyes of people from a different culture (Q. Gu, 2006). Conflicts or deficit interpretations (if seen from a supposedly superior culture to other cultures) are unavoidable when others' behaviours are judged based on one's own cultural backgrounds and stereotypes.

I will develop my discussion of these two issues with the examination of the notions of the 'Chinese Learner' and 'Chinese Learning Styles' as well as an inquiry into the relevance of the Confucian philosophy of learning to modern education in sections 2.2 and 2.3 below.

2.2 Memorisation and Chinese learners

It is commonly reported that memorisation is a popular, if not the most important, learning strategy for Chinese learners (e.g. J. Biggs, 1991; Dekert, 1993; Harvey, 1985; Hu, 2002b; Jiang & Smith, 2009; Maley, 1983). What is debated heatedly is the explanation for such a proverbial behavioural trait. In addition to the cultural

connections, educational contexts (or learning contexts)³⁹ are proposed as alternative attributions (e.g., Gao, 2005; Holliday, 1994; Jiang & Smith, 2009; Littlewood, 2000; Pierson, 1996). It is argued that students' learning approaches are more likely to be 'a consequence of the educational contexts that have been or are now provided for them, than of any inherent dispositions of the students themselves' (Littlewood, 2000). We should also not be oblivious of the fact that any educational context or environment is ingrained in history and cultural tradition which shape the particular context.

Discussion under the umbrella term of 'the Chinese learner' may be insufficiently sensitive to the age, learning context, or geographical location of the learners in question, and therefore probably suppresses the reality of existence of many different sub-groups of individual learners and sets of divergent sub-values (Kumaravadivelu, 2003) and the changing context and nature of education in China (cf. C. K. K. Chan & Rao, 2010; Coverdale-Jones & Rastall, 2006, 2009; Jin & Cortazzi, 2008; Ryan & Slethaug, 2010). However, methodical analysis of cultural differences, as stated out earlier, is essential for our understanding of such learning practices as text memorisation which is claimed to be unique to a 'Chinese culture of learning' (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). It has to be pointed out that neglecting or negating cultural differences can be as detrimental as the persistence of cultural stereotypes in understanding 'Chinese learners'.

In the remaining part of this section, a brief review of Western disparaging attitudes towards Chinese learners is followed by a tentative resolution of the paradox of Chinese learners from a cultural perspective.

2.2.1 Deficit views on the Chinese learner

Memorisation is, from the contemporary western point of view, a traditional but outmoded pedagogical practice. In early western documentation, Chinese learners, were usually portrayed as passive, imitative memorizers, as is described below:

³⁹ Pierson (1996) contended that the characteristics of Chinese learners' learning behaviours are mainly the product of 'the present colonial education system with its excessive workloads, centralized curricula, didactic and expository teaching styles, concentration on knowledge acquisition, examinations emphasizing reproductive knowledge over genuine thinking, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequately trained teachers' (1996: 55).

1748

1749 ... they memorate[sic], they hear the Chinese explanation, and this goes on

1750 from morning to night for years, and they get the classics into them. (1882

1751 Education Commission's interview with the Bishop of Victoria, cited in

1752 Pennycook, 1996)

1753

1754 Western teachers in China have more often than not responded to memorisation by

1755 Chinese students with derision and scorn (Sampson, 1984). For instance, dating back

1756 to the 19th century, a western educator named Frederick Steward (1865 cited in

1757 Pennycook, 1996) thought that 'the Chinese have no *education* in the real sense of the

1758 word', because the development of mental powers were 'all sacrificed to the

1759 cultivation of memory'. From this viewpoint, memorisation seems to be seriously

1760 irreconcilable with modern education. As we have seen, Lips (1949) stated that,

1761 without the benefits of education, our civilisation would be reduced to laying more

1762 stress on a good memory. This implies that the most progressive forms of education

1763 may involve little memorisation while emphasis on memory is considered as primitive

1764 or backward. Echoing this perception, some Western scholars equate memorisation

1765 with rote learning. For instance, statements are found such as: 'Rote learning is

1766 memorisation' (P. R. Cohen & Feigenbaum, 1982). In this sense, Chinese education

1767 relying heavily on memorisation and Chinese learners cast as rote-memorizers need to

1768 be enlightened by the ideas of the creative West because the Chinese way of learning

1769 is inferior to the Western way, a corollary resulting from the stereotyping view that the

1770 Chinese are rote learners (Wen, 1997).

1771

1772 While overuse or misuse of memorisation can admittedly be detrimental to the

1773 cultivation of mind to some extent, some contemporary researchers (e.g. J Biggs,

1774 1996; Sampson, 1984) have argued that memorisation should be carefully re-

1775 examined. According to Pennycook, there is a need to seek different possibilities in

1776 'how language, texts, and memorisation may be understood' (1996: 222).

1777

1778 Watkins & Biggs's (1996) work, may represent a first attempt to explore such

1779 possibilities. This book supports a more positive reading of Chinese learning styles

1780 and cultures of learning, despite approximately 70% of the chapter authors being

1781 Westerners. Based on sound empirical evidence and forceful arguments, the editors

concluded that the Chinese learners are commonly misunderstood by Westerners. This finding was in all intents and purposes driven by the discovery of the paradox of Chinese learners, an issue to which I now turn.

2.2.2 The paradox of Chinese learners

What some western researchers (e.g. J. Biggs, 1991; Cooper, 2004; Watkins & Biggs, 2001) consider to be the so-called paradox of Chinese learners is that Chinese learners achieve their equally often reported academic success apparently by using rote strategies and surface learning approaches. On the one hand, they are held up as paragons of educational excellence, while on the other hand, they are derided as rote learners (J. Biggs, 1991). How is it possible that students with an orientation to rote learning, which is negatively correlated with achievement (cf. J. B. Biggs, 1979), achieve so highly? In the case of foreign language learning, the paradox becomes this: Chinese students were learning ‘rather more effectively than they “should” have been, given what Western research predicted to be counter-productive teaching/learning environments’ (Watkins & Biggs, 2001: preface; see also Watkins & Biggs, 1996). This paradox can only be solved by exploring what Chinese learners actually do when they memorise. In the remaining part of this section I shall explore the Chinese conception of memorisation in relation to understanding, repetition and creativity.

2.2.2.1 Memorisation and understanding

One particular aspect of the ‘paradox of the Chinese learner’ is the relationship between memorisation and understanding. Chinese students are perceived as passive rote learners, yet show high levels of understanding (Watkins & Biggs, 2001: 3).

Two opposing findings emerged from the considerable bulk of documents discussing this issue. While earlier documentation often describes Chinese learners as rote learners who learn mechanically without meaningful understanding (Ballard & Clanchy, 1984; Politzer & McGroarty, 1985; Samuelowicz, 1987), literature in the last decade or so has seen numerous expressions of a contrary argument, namely, ‘what from the outside looks like mere rote learning is then in reality a combination of both memorization and understanding’ (Dahlin & Watkins, 2000: 67; see also Cooper,

2004; Kennedy, 2002; Marton, Dall'Alba, et al., 1996; Marton, Wen, et al., 1996; Marton et al., 2005). Tweed and Lehman refute what they describe as the western instructor's belief that Chinese students adopt a shallow, rote-learning approach on the ground that 'Chinese students often use memorisation not as an end in itself but as a path to understanding' (2002: 93). Similarly, Lee (1996) argues that memorisation may be the best way to become familiar with a text for Chinese learners in the sense that it is just a stage in the learning process, preceding understanding rather than stopping at rote learning.

Thus viewed, it is argued that memorization is seldom separated from understanding for learners of Confucian heritage culture (CHC)⁴⁰, hence the conception of 'meaningful understanding' (Marton, Wen, & Nagle, 1996). The two subcomponents identified under this label are 'memorising what is understood' and 'understanding through memorisation' (Marton, Dall'Alba, & Tse, 1996: 77). Summing up, different from the common Western thinking that memorisation and understanding are antithetical, Chinese students consider memorisation and understanding to be closely related and it is normal practice for them to try to understand and memorise simultaneously. The fact that many Chinese students are able to combine the processes of memorisation and understanding in a way that Western students seldom do (cf. Kember, 1996; F. Marton, et al., 1996; Marton, Watkins, & Tang, 1997; Wen & Marton, 1993) may help explain another aspect of the 'paradox' of Chinese learners: they report in both qualitative and quantitative investigations that they are trying to understand what they are learning while their Western teachers consider them as mere learners by rote (Dahlin & Watkins, 2000).

2.2.2.2 Memorisation and repetition

An activity seen as inseparably related to learning by heart is verbatim repetition, because learning by heart necessarily involves repetition many times over and 'repetition is the beginning of learning by heart' (Cook, 1994: 133). Repetition is

⁴⁰ In their in-depth interviews with 20 students, Marton et al. (2005) also reported, apart from 'memorisation that succeeds understanding', there also exists the type of 'memorisation that precedes understanding' which means, the learner rote-memorise in the first instance in order to understand later.

defined by learning strategists as ‘saying or doing something over and over: listening to something several times; rehearsing; imitating a native speaker’ (Oxford, 1990: 45). This seemingly mechanical activity has long been considered to be out of fashion in language education (N. Ellis & Beaton, 1993) probably due to it being ‘regarded as a typical form of rote memorisation’⁴¹ (X.-P. Li, 2005: 11). Biggs, however, challenged this conception by emphasising a difference between them: *repetitive* learning uses repetition as a means of ensuring accurate recall while *rote* learning is ‘the mere exercise of memory without proper understanding’ (Shorter Oxford Dictionary quoted in J. Biggs, 1998: 726).

Holding repetition to be the necessary means to acquire knowledge (Hu, 2002b) or ‘the route to understanding’ (J. Biggs, 1999: 2), Chinese students are found to use repetition for two different purposes: first, to create a ‘deep impression’ and thence commit to memorization; second, to deepen or develop understanding by discovering new meaning (Dahlin & Watkins, 2000). It is argued that the process of repetition is not a simple process of repeating in order to memorise, but a prelude to understanding, or a form of understanding; it is a way to grasp the meaning of a text more fully (F. Marton, et al., 1996). This said, Chinese students tend to use repetition as a technical tool for enhancing both memorization and understanding. In addition to assisting students to accurately recall information, repetitive learning enables the learner to attach meaning to the materials learned. Western students, on the other hand, tend to use repetition only to check that they have really remembered something (Watkins & Biggs, 2001: 6). For these authors, the best explication of ‘understanding through memorisation’ which may puzzle Westerners lies in the fact that ‘Chinese students typically think of understanding as usually a process that requires considerable mental effort’ (repetitive learning, for instance) whereas ‘Western students see understanding as usually a process of sudden insight’ (ibid). Clearly, the Western notion of rote learning does not seem to capture adequately practices associated with memorisation and repetition in the Chinese learning culture (F. Marton, et al., 1996). Emphasising the difference between *rote* learning and *repetitive* learning, Biggs (1996) argues that Chinese learners may be repetitive

⁴¹ Viewed historically, however, the decline of repetition is thought to be related to the fall from favour of behaviourist learning theory (Rosamond Mitchell, June 11, 2009, personal communication).

learners rather than rote learners. For Biggs, understanding complexity requires repetition, in any culture, but it is forgotten in the West; repetitive learning tends to be perceived as mindless rote learning (J. Biggs, 1997). For instance, rote learning is even defined as ‘a method involving repetition and memorisation’ (Moore 2000; cited in X.-P. Li, 2005).

Another reason why repetition is poured scorn on in Western culture may be that language form is valued less highly than the meaning it intends to convey. As Cook (1994: 137) put it:

Contemporary Western culture is perhaps unusual in the lack of importance it attaches to the form of words. What matters in discourse, it appears, is its meaning or intention, and the purpose of discourse is seen only as the ‘transmission’ of meanings and intentions.

While acknowledging the legitimacy of priority placed on meaning, we should not deny any positive aspect of focusing on form. In addition to performing the function of communication of meaning, language is also ‘a source of comfort and an outlet for joy and exuberance’ (Cook, 1994:138). In a sense, repetition may serve to satisfy this human need to a certain extent. Moreover, repetition can afford a conduit to savour or enjoy the aesthetic subtlety created by manoeuvring forms of words.

In terms of language learning, repetition may still have a motivational role to play:

In the early stages of language learning, repetition gives the students the opportunity to manipulate the oral and written forms of language items, and many learners derive a strong sense of progress and achievement from this type of activity. For this reason it can be very valuable. (Gairns & Redman, 1986: 93)

Thus, repetition is contributive to acquisition in two aspects: being a drilling of language forms and obtaining a positive psychological feeling.

2.2.2.3 Memorisation and creativity

1911

1912 In 2.1.2, I posed a challenge to the Western conception of the inhibiting effect of
1913 memorisation on creative thinking in the broad setting of general education. Moving
1914 to a narrower context of language education, I, too, ask: Does the use of text
1915 memorisation impair creative use of language? A useful point of departure for my
1916 discussion can be found in the narrative by Pennycook (1996: 202-203):

1917

1918 I recall ... talking to some of my Chinese colleagues about memorisation and
1919 language learning. I was arguing that although memorisation of texts might be
1920 a useful learning technique, it could never lead to productive, original
1921 language use (this, we have been taught to believe, is one of those ‘facts’ of
1922 second language acquisition). I gave as an example one of our colleagues who
1923 was acknowledged as one of the most eloquent and fluent speaker in the
1924 department, suggesting that he could never have become so if he had been a
1925 mere memorizer. The others smiled, for this other colleague was **known not**
1926 **only as an excellent user of English but also as someone with a fine talent**
1927 **for memorising texts.** ... I knew that when we sat and drank beer and talked
1928 philosophy, he wasn’t speaking texts to me. How had he come to own the
1929 language as he did, when that had apparently been done by borrowing others’
1930 language? (emphasis [bold] added)

1931

1932 Pennycook’s puzzle represents many western scholars’ misconception which is based
1933 on the following premises: (1) rote learning (memorising without understanding) is
1934 known to lead to poor learning outcomes; most Chinese students are rote learners
1935 (Watkins & Biggs, 2001: 5); (2) memorisation, notably text memorisation, is meant
1936 as a tool for copying or equal to ‘*si ji yin bei*’ [literally meaning ‘dead and inflexible
1937 memorisation’⁴², which can serve as a perfect Chinese version for ‘rote learning’], a
1938 notoriously deficient and backward learning method condemned in Chinese
1939 education.

1940

1941 I shall focus my discussion here on the second premise since the first one has been
1942 dealt with above. In sharp contrast with ‘*si ji yin bei*’, ‘*huo xue huo yong*’ [literally

157 42 Translation from D.-L. Liu (2005).

meaning flexible learning and creative use] is a highly valued practice that ‘memorisation is meant to support’ (Di-Lin. Liu, 2005: 237). That is to say, good memorising practice aims to help the learner to use what is memorised for creative construction in his/her own production; on the contrary, to memorise for the mere sake of memorisation is considered as a bad practice, if not pointless altogether. As the Chinese scholar Liu (2005: 237) aptly put it:

In fact, memorizing good writing to improve writing is very similar to the memorization of the multiplication tables, a practice meant to help one to do multiplication more efficiently.

Liu also made a comment on the traditional practice of memorising Chinese texts:

... a major role of memorising good writing in Chinese is to help the learner to appreciate and become familiar with effective rhetorical styles and useful writing techniques that the memorised writing uses so the learner can use them in his/her own writing in the future. (Di-Lin. Liu, 2005: 237; emphasis added)

If English text memorisation is understood in this way, Pennycook’s puzzle is solved. First, his Chinese colleague ‘with a fine talent for memorising texts’ is by no means ‘a mere memorizer’; Second, he must be an example of ‘*huo xue huo yong*’, otherwise he could never become ‘an excellent user of English’.

This idea of flexible use of memorised writing, in effect, is also precisely alluded to in the Chinese proverb ‘*shou du tang shi san bai shou, bu hui xie shi ye hui yin*’ [this literally means ‘Memorise 300 Tang poems and one can at least recite them if unable to compose a poem himself’]. It seems to me that a large amount of text memorisation may lead to two levels of achievement: the lower level is to accurately recall what is memorised, the higher one is to take advantage of the ‘useful writing techniques that the memorised writing uses’ (Di-Lin. Liu, 2005: see the quotation one paragraph back) for one’s own disposal. Therefore, the learner’s initiative plays an essential role in determining how much s/he will benefit from the practice of text memorisation and that is why many Chinese ancient scholars place great value on cultivating the students’ independent thinking (see 3.4 for more discussion on this issue). Thus

1977 viewed, text memorisation – for the purpose of language learning – is not the potential
1978 menace to creativity that it is often painted to be.

1979

1980 Similarly, learning through conscious memorisation is not predestined to end up being
1981 less creative. There is no evidence that high achievers in memorisation, either those
1982 who commit more facts to memory in a broad sense of learning or those who learn
1983 more texts by heart in language learning, are inferior to their low-achieving
1984 counterparts in terms of creative thinking. My near-decade teaching experiences in
1985 China have informed me that the most creative students are likely to be those who
1986 have stored more information in their mind whatever they are learning. In the case of
1987 language learning, it is very unlikely that the learner who has developed an
1988 extraordinary flair in memorising texts is less capable of creative use of language than
1989 those who have not.

1990

1991 Although increasingly challenged in the literature in recent years, the stereotypical
1992 perception of the Chinese rote learner is still common among western teachers.
1993 Uncritically forcing western concepts and methods upon an eastern setting like China
1994 can be unfruitful and misleading. In Watkins & Biggs' (1996) view,

1995

1996 When Confucian heritage culture people are viewed through the lenses of
1997 familiar western polarities, such as memorising versus meaningful learning,
1998 the focus becomes blurred and even distorted.

1999

2000 The learning styles of Chinese students – who actually prefer 'high-level' or 'deep-
2001 learning strategies' over the commonly misperceived rote learning (J. Biggs, 1994) –
2002 have been misinterpreted as rote and superficial. The astigmatic paradox of Chinese
2003 learners positioned by Western spectacles is thus solved.

2004

2005 **2.3 Is Confucius' theory of learning relevant today?**

2006

2007 Confucius' theory of learning is generally understood in the West as one which
2008 emphasises learning through rote-memorisation and the mastery of essential
2009 knowledge as well as behavioural norms preserved in the culture of antiquity. It is
2010 assumed by Western scholars that the Confucian definition of knowledge is as

2011 something which can be directly ‘taken out [from the book] and put inside the
2012 students’ heads’ (Maley, 1983: 98). It is also supposed that Confucius takes learning
2013 as a process of blind accumulation, memorisation and retention of beliefs in the
2014 classics, which is identical with the ‘banking’ concept of education. Is Confucius truly
2015 an advocate of a banking model of education? Or in other words, is Confucius’
2016 conception of learning at odds with critical thinking?

2017

2018 Recent studies of Chinese philosophy lead to increasing recognition of the rationality
2019 of many ancient thinkers represented by Confucius. Graham (1989), an influential
2020 commentator, even regards Confucius as himself a rational, critical thinker. However,
2021 he still holds that Confucius’ conception of learning places very a low premium on
2022 thinking when compared to learning⁴³. Such an interpretation is really unfair for
2023 Confucius as he explicitly states in *The Analects*: ‘He who just studies but does not
2024 think will be puzzled. He who just thinks but does not study will be perilous.’
2025 (Confucius, 2006b: 13) This quotation shows that Confucius takes thinking as
2026 important as learning⁴⁴, and views them as a two-part integrated system the lack of
2027 either of which would be dangerous. For him, learning cannot be separated from
2028 thinking: only learning with thinking or thinking with learning can be counted as the
2029 full sense of learning that Confucius is intending to promote. This is demonstrated in
2030 the following episode:

2031

2032 Si, you think of me as one who studies many things and remembers them,
2033 don’t you?

2034 He replied: Yes, is it not the case?

2035 He said: It is not. There is one thing I use to string them together. (Confucius,
2036 2000; 15:3)

2037

158 43 The conclusion might be based on the fact that ‘learning’ is more often than not mentioned in
159 Confucian Classics. Here are two examples: ‘*sui you zhi dao, fu xue, bu zhi qi shan ye.*’ [meaning
160 ‘Although there are perfect ideas and principles, one will not detect their subtleties without
161 studying them.] (Confucius, 2006a: 35); ‘*bo wen qiang shi, wei zhi jun zhi*’ [meaning ‘A man
162 of virtue possesses wide learning and strong memory.’] (Confucius, 2006a: 7)

163 44 Learning here can be understood as the more mundane sense of the term, the ‘memorising
164 basic arithmetical facts’ sense of the term - seeing, hearing, and remembering, amassing data (Kim
165 2003). That’s why learning is contrasted with thinking in the quotation.

Clearly, Confucius does not limit his learning to memorisation or ‘filling the deposits’. ‘Study[ing] many things and remember[ing] them’ is one of the two means⁴⁵ for the accumulation of raw materials of knowledge, out of which wisdom is constructed or extracted. There is ‘one thing’ in addition that he uses as a tool to transform the raw material into wisdom or knowledge in the full Confucian sense, and that distinguishes himself from the rote-learner and the blind accumulator of knowledge. Needless to say, the ‘one thing’ required to string together the many things that he studies and remembers is thinking, or, to be specific, synthesis, systemisation and integration of raw materials. In essence, what Confucius meant, in C. Chang’s (1954) understanding, was that knowledge is based on both data and method of thinking:

If one has no data to work with, and merely plays with the phantasms of one’s imagination, thought will be unreliable or adventurous. If one collects many data, scattered, piecemeal, and unrelated, no principle will run like a thread through the congeries to organise them into a system. (C. Chang, 1954: 99)

Thus, Confucian thought on education is by no means a Chinese version of the ‘banking concept of education’ (Freire, 1972: 58), meaning only that the students are supposed to receive, memorise, and repeat what is deposited in the classics without understanding or active engagement.

A fundamental problem with the banking model of education, according to Freire, is that it misunderstands knowledge itself. The Freirean sense of knowledge ‘emerges only through invention and reinvention, through restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry’ (Freire, 1993: 208). For him, the banking model fails because it precludes such invention, reinvention and inquiry. An important question to ask is what Confucius had in mind when he thought of ‘knowledge’. Confucius states,

Surely there are people who achieve something without knowledge, but I for my part lack this characteristic. To hear much and select the good points from

⁴⁵ The other means of accumulating materials of knowledge is from first-hand experience-observing, listening and paying attention to life (Kim, 2003).

2069 it and copy them, to see much and remember it constitutes an inferior variety
2070 of knowledge. (Confucius, 2000; 7: 27)

2071

2072 Clearly, although the importance of seeing, hearing and remembering the wisdom of
2073 others is acknowledged, what one hears, sees and memorises makes only an ‘inferior
2074 variety of knowledge’. This is because the acquisition of important facts through
2075 experience, through listening to others and observing them is not sufficient. This style
2076 of learning deprived of thinking is, as mentioned earlier, considered by Confucius
2077 hazardous and not leading to the full Confucian sense of knowledge. The facts one
2078 memorises through hearing and seeing, though passing for knowledge, constitute only
2079 the raw material out of which superior knowledge or wisdom is constructed.
2080 Obviously, there is something that is needed to make the raw material wisdom or a
2081 superior kind of knowledge.

2082

2083 Critical thinking theorists, nevertheless, may argue that thinking in a Confucian sense
2084 is not equivalent to the critical thinking they refer to. A Confucian version of critical
2085 thinking might better be defined as ‘rationally reflective thinking which is concerned
2086 with what to do or believe’ (Ennis, 1985; cited in Kim, 2003). I call this a weak form
2087 of critical thinking as opposed to Freire’s strong form. In contrast with active
2088 transformation of raw material on the part of the learners (in order to prepare them to
2089 become ‘transformers of that world’⁴⁶ (Freire, 1993: 209), Confucius’ reflective
2090 thinking ‘presupposes and reinforces the learners’ examining underlying principles,
2091 being open-minded in listening and considering the views of others, being fair-minded
2092 in balancing and assessing evidence, and thinking autonomously in judging and
2093 assuming responsibility for one’s beliefs’ (Kim 2003:72). Such reflective thinking
2094 includes (1) reflection on the materials of knowledge in order to synthesise and
2095 systemise the raw materials into a whole, and to integrate them into oneself as
2096 wisdom; and (2) reflection on oneself in order to ensure that such synthesis,

168 46 Freire proposed his education theory in the context of seeking ‘*Pedagogy of the oppressed*’ (the
169 name of his highly influential book), which may partially explain his radical position in defining
170 critical thinking. The banking concept of education, according to Freire (1972), is well suited to
171 the purpose of and serves the interests of the oppressors. Confucian advocacy of the ‘mastery of
172 the classics’ was also interpreted as an instrument for its political utilitarianism that permeates
173 Confucian educational contents and method (cf. Zhu, 1992). My discussion here, however, is from
174 a purely educational perspective although the possibility of separation between politics and
175 education is another matter.

systemisation, and integration proceed in an open-minded, fair and autonomous way. (For a full argument, see Kim, 2003). To elaborate on this would be off the track of the present discussion, but it needs to be pointed out that these reflections are indeed one of the basic features of ‘problem-posing education’ which, in Freire’s (1972: 71) words, ‘bases itself on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality’.

That Confucius has seen as a believer in the banking model of education may be related to his claim that ‘[B]eing fond of the truth, I am an admirer of antiquity’ (*The Analects*, 7.1)(Confucius, 2000). What Confucius means is that truth – what we today would call wisdom – was attained in antiquity and that his task in learning and teaching is to make sure truth of such a kind is not lost. Although he made no active effort to transform the content of what he considers true knowledge, Confucius does emphasise the need for active engagement on the part of learners in the form of analysing, reconstructing, synthesising and evaluating what is transmitted. For Confucius, fully mastering or internalising traditional propriety (out of admiration for antiquity) not only does not preclude but also requires the learner’s active engagement, and conceptualising learning as storing and transmitting does not necessarily rule out critical thinking, even if wisdom is one and the same for both the ancients and the moderns. In essence, Confucius’ ‘admiration of antiquity’ is more a result of constructive criticism and honest evaluation than blind worship for, he declares, ‘I am the one who through my admiration of antiquity is keen to discover things’. Confucius’ admiration of antiquity and stress on the memorisation of the wisdom of ancestors do not prevent him from attaching value to critical thinking, which is evident from the following quote: ‘[A gentleman should] study extensively, inquire prudently, think carefully, distinguish clearly’ (Confucius, 2006a: 71) Evidently, extensive study and intentional memorisation is only one aspect of what Confucius has in his mind for learning, and an equally, if not more, important part is inquiry. He even talked about how thinking should be carried out: ‘... asks sincerely and thinks about what is at hand and then expands’ [... *qie wen er jin si*] (Confucius, 2006b: 99)

It thus appears that critical thinking is not only allowed but emphasised in a Confucian view of learning. Different from the banking model of education where

2131 'the students are not called upon to know, but to memorise the contents narrated by
2132 the teacher' (Freire, 1972: 68), a Confucian version of education insists that the
2133 students truly 'know' the content through their meaningful cognitive involvement
2134 prior to memorisation of the content. Instead of advocating accumulating or
2135 memorising uncritically and therefore ending up becoming what Freire (1972: 58)
2136 calls 'collectors or cataloguers of things they store', Confucius encourages critical
2137 thinking through active engagement in open-minded self-reflection or responding to
2138 the wisdom of antiquity and the lived daily experience of men. In fact, Confucian
2139 education places a great emphasis on the balance 'between book knowledge and the
2140 capacity to act and think independently' (X.-Z. Yao, 2000: 282). Interesting evidence
2141 may be found in the Chinese term (*xuewen*) for 'knowledge' which is made up of two
2142 characters: One is *xue* (to learn) and the other is '*wen*' (to ask). This implies that the
2143 action of enquiring and questioning is central to the quest for knowledge (Cheng,
2144 2000; N.-F. Liu & Littlewood, 1997).

2146 What is pivotal to the understanding of Confucian learning philosophy, it has to be
2147 pointed out, is that one must be deeply steeped in the material through successive
2148 repetitions, iterations and memorisation, each of which drills deeper and deeper in to
2149 the grasp of the meaning before one wins the right to depart from the material (Pratt,
2150 1992). Learners from Confucian heritage are by no means dissenters from critical
2151 thinking; they simply cast doubt on the possibility of questioning or challenging when
2152 one does not command considerable basics and profound comprehension of a given
2153 topic, especially in the early stages of learning. A fundamental question which puzzles
2154 them might be that: 'how can understanding result from free-for-all questioning
2155 rooted in ignorance?' (Greenholtz, 2003: 124) while Westerners are wondering how
2156 memorisation does not hamper creative thinking.

2158 Summing up my discussion thus far of the question I posed at the onset, i.e., 'Is
2159 Confucius' theory of learning relevant today?' the response therefore is a resounding
2160 'Yes!'. Confucian learning is not merely the uncritical rote memorisation of whatever
2161 is in the textbook as stereotypically understood by westerners. The Confucian sense of
2162 memorisation is far from being 'an easy cop-out or a release from thinking'
2163 (Sampson, 1984: 29) for, as Lee (1996: 34) interprets, 'the purpose of [Confucian]
2164 learning is to cultivate oneself as an intelligent, creative, independent, autonomous

being'. On the contrary, Confucius' thought on education rejects the banking education which 'anesthetizes and inhibits creative power' (Freire, 1972: 68). Therefore, Confucius' learning theory does not preclude critical thinking and can be of high relevance to education today. Traditional wisdom can be useful in tackling modern problems if we take a balanced attitude towards them, as is conveyed in a Chinese idiom – '*Qu qi zaopo, qu qi jinghua*' [meaning 'discarding the dross, selecting the essence']. What goes wrong with Confucian education may be more concerned with the fact that tradition and classical texts may be made an unchallengeable authority for learners to treasure up (which is not to deny that many of the values conveyed by ancient classics have been respected for centuries in Chinese society even up to today as they deserve) than the way it engages learners in learning. Confucian emphasis on the importance of transmission of values (especially those which have withstood the test of time and human experiences) may give a new momentum to the establishment of a comprehensive education system and make Confucianism a living tradition for the twenty-first century (X.-Z. Yao, 2000; see also D. A. Bell, 2008; D. A. Bell & Chaibong, 2003; Berthrong, 1998; Berthrong & Berthrong, 2000; Makeham, 2008; Neville, 2000)

2.4 Conclusion

To summarise the picture I have attempted to unfold in this chapter, understanding of the persistent practice of text memorisation as well as Chinese learners involves interpretations of a number of key issues not limited to language education. I delved into two of them: (1) Is memorisation legitimate in learning? (2) Is memorisation doomed to be incompatible with critical thinking? I made the point that memorisation or memorised knowledge is not only legitimate in but constitutes an important part of learning. More importantly, memorisation is not incompatible with critical thinking; on the contrary, it lays the basis or supplies the resources for critical thinking. Re-examination of Confucius' theory of learning reveals the coexistence of emphasis on critical thinking and memorisation. In assuming that rote-memorisation is pervasive in Confucian learning, Western views tend to seriously underestimate the levels of creativity that may result from Confucian learning processes. I have argued that the Confucian philosophy of education can be pertinent in the twenty-first century even though it is inclined to put the stress on memorisation.

2199

2200 The next chapter is an attempt to look at how a Confucian philosophy of education
2201 has been displayed in foreign language teaching and learning in China with a focus on
2202 examining Audiolingualism and the strength of traditional Chinese teaching.

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CHAPTER 3

ELT IN CHINA: MEMORISATION, AUDIOLINGUALISM AND CHINESE CULTURE OF LEARNING

Through examining the relationship between memorisation and learning we have reached the conclusion that memorisation as an approach to learning does not necessarily presuppose a concomitant lack of understanding and critical thinking especially viewed from a Confucian perspective. In fact, an increasing number of contemporary Western researchers (e.g., Pennycook, 1996; Sowden, 2005; Watkins & Biggs, 1996) have recognised that memorisation, a highly valued way of learning in the Far East, can lead to high levels of understanding if applied appropriately. However, scepticism among Western teachers and methodologists on the purpose of extensive use of memorisation in foreign language learning and teaching (as is the case in China) has not ceased. The Chinese mastery of English through memorisation is commonly characterised as ‘rather quaint, a misguided use of effort and a barrier to communication’⁴⁷ (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996: 185). When Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) failed to make the expected impact on ELT in the Chinese context (Hu, 2002a; Rao, 1996), memorisation, the most salient feature in the Chinese way of learning English, has become a convenient practice to blame for its suppression of Chinese students’ communicative competence. Thus it is rarely mentioned in English textbooks or discussed in foreign language education journals as if it is the causal factor of the current situation of ELT in China – which a Chinese education official has described as ‘time-consuming but of low efficiency’⁴⁸ (L.-Q. Li, 2003). Is memorisation the major culprit which bears responsibility for any unsatisfactory

⁴⁷ It needs to be pointed out that this is not the opinion of Cortazzi & Jin who just quoted commonly held Western interpretations of Chinese way of English learning. The context of this quotation is this: ‘Chinese students’ undoubted achievement in acquiring an advance knowledge of grammar or memorising many English words is seen by Western teachers as being primarily a negative factor: ...’ (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996: 185).

⁴⁸ Li LanQing, the former vice premier who was then in charge of education in China stated:

... foreign language teaching and learning has been *time consuming but of low efficiency*. Chinese students start learning English when they are in the junior secondary school in the countryside and those in the cities are required to learn from grade 3 in primary schools. However, many schools in the cities begin teaching English from grade one in primary schools. *English is the only subject that lasts for so long while achieving so little in China*. (L.-Q. Li, 2003: 1; Chinese original, emphasis [italics] added)

outcome of ELT in China, a country with an enormous population and a very short history of English teaching? Prior to answering this question, I will delve into audiolingualism into which text memorisation methodologically fits (cf. Hu, 2005) and explore why it is not inimical to the Chinese culture of learning while CLT seems to have encountered cultural resistance (Hu, 2002a) although both approaches are of foreign origin. An in-depth analysis of traditional Chinese language teaching in which text memorisation had been a long-term tradition, then, follows with a focus on its potential strength.

3.1 Memorisation and Audiolingualism

In foreign language education, repetition and memorisation has long been imprinted with the mark of language learning with Chinese characteristics. Consequently, these features are being indiscriminately interpreted as primitive and obsolete according to current Western notions of English language teaching. Learning or teaching methods adopted by ‘cultural Others’ (Pennycook, 1996: 218) are seen as deficient rather than different. Memorisation has long been derided as outmoded or inferior pedagogical practice along with its assumed Chinese birthmark. It could be argued that this is a kind of cultural imperialism (Phillipson, 1992) as ‘there is no reason to suppose that one culture of learning is superior to another’ (Kennedy, 2002: 442). Imitation and memorisation, as was shown in 1.2, is by no means unique to Chinese language learners. In other words, heavy use of memorisation is not non-existent in pedagogies of Western origin. A pertinent example is Audiolingual Method (ALM⁴⁹) (Lado, 1948, 1964) which flourished in the mid-19th century .

Before proceeding further, a few words may be needed to address the apparent paradox as to why, against a backdrop in Western 20th education where memorisation was falling out of favour, ALM, a language teaching methodology heavily based in memorisation, was introduced in the 1950s. Two principal factors were thought to be relevant: first, as a result of the emergence of linguistics as the controlling discipline for language teaching, a particular brand of linguistics happened to be in its prime time – e.g. preoccupation with linguistic forms, the view of fluency as automatic

⁴⁹ An early version of ALM came to be known as the ‘Army method’ because of its birth in a military context.

manipulation of those forms as responses to verbal or nonverbal stimuli; second, there was a shift from focus on the written mode to focus on the spoken mode⁵⁰ (see Scott, 1983 for more discussion). This shift was interestingly contrasted with unwavering insistence on written language in traditional Chinese literacy education, which may still have influence on contemporary foreign language education (see 3.2 and 3.4 for relevant discussion). Historically reviewed, the language teaching revolution of the 1950s was seen to be represented by a methodology (ALM) that was constructed by merging the concepts of a particular version of descriptive linguistics (structuralism) with the concepts of a particular version of a theory of human learning (behaviourism) with a confused notion of the nature of a language system (speech) (cf. Scott, 1983).

Methodologically, the audiolingual method was also seen to have grown partly out of a reaction against the limitations of the grammar-translation method (e.g. relying heavily on teaching grammar and practising translation), and partly out of urgent war-time demands for fluent speakers of other languages (cf. Griffiths & Parr, 2001). During World War II, in order to provide American soldiers with at least basic verbal communication skills in foreign languages, the method was created in the Army Specialised Training Program in which soldier students had to memorize useful dialogues as perfectly as possible, from the materials prepared by linguists. Linguists insisted on the imitation and memorization of basic conversational sentences as spoken by native speakers and the students were drilled until they could rattle off the dialogues with ease (Lado, 1964). This method heavily depended on drills, repetition and substitution exercises, which were justified according to behaviorist theory (Skinner, 1957). The behaviorist epistemology takes the view that language is a system of habits which can be taught and learned on a stimulus-response-reinforcement basis. Thus, imitation, repetition and memorization naturally become the core ingredients of ALM as are indicated by the term ‘mimicry-memorization’, a primary teaching technique adopted in this method. The students are expected to ‘*mimic the dialogue and eventually memorize it*’ (Krashen, 1987: 129-130; emphasis

⁵⁰ What Scott (1983) thought remarkable, and therefore revolutionary about this shift in focus in the 1950s, was the claim that the only proper approach to the learning of a foreign language was one that required the student to achieve first an oral mastery of the basic sound and sentence patterns of the language, and this shift occurred ‘even in the absence of compelling social, cultural, and political needs for learners to become speakers of foreign languages’ (Scott, 1983: 15). This shift may legitimise or be legitimised by the one of the favourite linguistic aphorisms of the day, i.e. ‘Language is speech, not writing’ (Moulton, 1963).

original). The laws of language learning⁵¹ underpinning ALM state that the more frequently and intensely a response is practiced, the longer it is remembered. Taking foreign language learning as basically a mechanical process of the formation and performance of habits (Brooks, 1964; River, 1964), audiolingualists emphasized the importance of reinforcing the ‘habit’ through imitation, repetition and practice. This said, holding certain materials (e.g. sentence patterns) in memory seems to be a tacit goal in the audiolingualist views of language learning. The necessity of memorising certain language instances seems fundamental to the underlying principles of ALM. For its proponents, the only issues under discussion are: what utterances are to be chosen for memorization (e.g. poetry, reading selections or conversational material; isolated sentences or connected dialogue) and how much has to be memorized (cf. Lado, 1964).

Quite obviously, memorisation was so central to a popular methodology half a century ago in the Anglophone West that it was viewed as a necessity rather than a choice. Although since the late 1960s there had been adverse criticism levelled at ALM as well as its proponents, there has been a dearth of informed and unprejudiced discussions of ‘why it was that, for about fifteen years, this Method did in fact gain such recognition and acceptance as to merit the opinion that the era of Audio-Lingual supremacy was indeed the era of a revolutionized approach to foreign language teaching’ (Scott, 1983: 15).

3.2 Audiolingualism and Chinese culture of learning

Recent research on ELT and ELL in China has reached the conclusion that traditional approaches (grammar-translation method and ALM) are still dominant in many a classroom (e.g. Hu, 2001, 2002a, 2005) and memorisation has remained among the most valued learning strategies among English learners (Gao, 2007a; Y.-Q. Gu, 2003; Hu, 2002a; Jiang & Smith, 2009). The traditional approach to ELT in China is considered to be a ‘curious combination of the grammar-translation method and audiolingualism, which is characterised by systematic and detailed study of grammar, extensive use of cross-linguistic comparison and translation, *memorisation of*

⁵¹ The two laws are ‘law of exercise’ and ‘law of intensity’ (cf. Lado, 1964: 37).

2326 *structural patterns* and vocabulary, painstaking effort to *form good verbal habits*, and
2327 emphasis on written language, and a preference for literary classics' (Hu, 2002a: 93;
2328 emphasis added). Although the Chinese version of audolingualism (emphasis attached
2329 to written language and literary classics) is interestingly contrasted with the original
2330 Western version which was developed to enhance conversational proficiency, it is
2331 undoubtedly domesticated in a painless way in the Chinese culture of pedagogy (in
2332 contrast to the cultural resistance to CLT in China (cf. Hu, 2002a)).

2334 The successful integration of ALM into the traditional Chinese approach⁵² was
2335 attributed to the compatibility of some of its practices (e.g. emphasis on memorisation
2336 as a useful learning strategy) with the Chinese culture of learning (cf. Hu, 2002a). My
2337 position is stronger than that. Going beyond the importance attached to memorisation,
2338 we may find that the methodological considerations underlying ALM are strikingly
2339 consistent with Chinese conceptions of learning and teaching. The ensuing discussion
2340 will focus on audiolingualist understanding of three important issues in relation to
2341 memorisation.

2343 3.2.1 Linguistic 'beachheads'

2345 The practice of memorising useful dialogues, according to Lado (1964: 62), gives the
2346 students 'the power to hear, recall, understand, and speak the material' and thus helps
2347 them establish a 'linguistic beachhead'. This is to say, the memorised conversational
2348 basics can enable the students to master the necessary bits of language in order to
2349 move towards a higher grade of dialogues. The incremental memorisation of
2350 dialogues or other materials produces a 'snowball effect', referring to the process that
2351 starts from an initial state of small magnitude or significance and gradually builds
2352 upon itself, becoming larger in space or deeper in degree. Utterances previously
2353 memorized by the students are supposed to contribute to the understanding or mastery
2354 of later introduced ones, thus adding to their 'beachhead' in the target language. It is
2355 hoped that '[A]fter the first few dialogues, the student may know enough of the

199 52 The Audiolingualist influence on Chinese ELT may have started in the early 1960s. It was
200 documented that the English textbook series (cf. *English Book (1-4)*, 1961) contains a number of
201 dialogues and significant amounts of oral practice, having features – superficially at least – akin to
202 those of Audiolingualism, which was emerging internationally as a preferred second language
203 pedagogy at the time (Adamson, 2004: 88).

language to understand new dialogues with the explanation of a few new words in the target language itself” (Lado, 1964: 68). Clearly, memorisation is meant to be functioning as a strategic tool through which learning reinforces itself in a virtuous circle.

The idea that the learner’s prior knowledge offers a starting point for learning what is to be learned is not new. According to Batstone (2002: 221), it is well established (and has a long and distinguished history) that ‘we use what we already know to throw light on what we do not yet know’. As early as in the 1930s, Dewey (1939: 27) recognised the importance of the experience learners already have, and noted that ‘this experience and the capacities that have been developed during its course provide the starting point for all further learning’. Furthermore, the association of prior knowledge with what is being learned is considered a prerequisite for memorisation: ‘It is impossible to remember without associating new information with what you already know’ (Cromley, 2000: 4). While the significance of the facilitative role of prior knowledge in acquiring new knowledge may not be necessarily distinctive to Audiolingualism, it is apparently a salient feature in the structuralist-behaviourist tradition of ALM which encourages habit formation through pattern practice and analogical extension of structural patterns.

This belief is also reflected in a Confucian quote ‘*wen gu er zhi xin*’ [meaning ‘One gains new knowledge by reviewing the old’]. That is to say, constantly reviewing what they have already learned help the students consolidate the old knowledge so as to serve as a scaffold to acquire new knowledge⁵³. Knowledge is usually regarded in Chinese learning culture as inherently divisible into small blocks, one of which leads on to the next – A leads on to B which in turn leads on to C (Brick, 1991). When it comes to learning a language, it is like climbing the ladder – ‘as long as the first rung is firm, the learner can easily climb to the second rung, and so on’ (Brick, 1991: 154). It is believed that things are learned little by little, one after another as the new

⁵³ The aphorism originates from the following: ‘*wen gu er zhi xin, ke yi wei shi yi*’ (from *Wei Zheng*) [meaning ‘The man who reanimates the old and so gets to know the new is fit to be a teacher.’] It also appears in another Confucian writing: ‘*jun zi ..., wen gu er zhi xin, ...*’ (from *The Doctrine of the Mean*) [meaning ‘A gentleman ... reviews what he has learned and then acquires new...’] Another version of understanding of the quote is that when one attains a fuller understanding of what he has already learned through constant reviewing, it becomes newly acquired knowledge.

knowledge is built upon or grows out of the old one. This is noticeably similar to the Audiolingualist position that the new incremental steps of learning were supposed to be very small and controlled so that learners would learn efficiently. That is why in traditional family schools, ‘the class begins with the reviewing of the material learned the day before (recitation), followed by the new material’ (Shu, 1961; Chinese original). In fact, the reviewing of learning is one of the three major principles of Confucian education⁵⁴. At the beginning of Analects, Confucius himself was quoted as saying, ‘*xue er shi xi zhi, bu yi le hu*’ [‘Learning with frequent reviewing, what a pleasure this is!’]. This remark was often used to encourage students to engage in repeated going-over of what is learnt, this is because, through review, a student can not only retain the old, but come to understand the new (cf. Louie, 1986). From the foregoing discussion, it appears that the Confucian education tradition is culturally friendly to the epistemology of the ‘linguistic beachhead’ underlying ALM.

3.2.2 Memorisation and creative use

In addition to penetrating the language, the chief value in memorisation, from an audiolingualist viewpoint, is to provide the student with ‘authentic sentences that he can vary and expand and eventually use in many situations’ (Lado, 1964: 62). On this view, it is not the audiolingualists’ intention to render the students parrot learners who are merely able to imitate and repeat what is memorised. Instead, the ultimate goal of memorisation is to enable the students to use the sentence patterns contained in the dialogues they commit to memory in a creative manner. Taking this logic step further, Lado speculates,

If our students could memorise large amount of the language, say ten plays or a full-length novel, they might be pretty advanced in the language. (Lado, 1964: 62)

A corollary of this is that the quantity of memorisation also counts, namely, how much is memorised. Following this reasoning, the ALM perspective implies that a

⁵⁴ The other two are: The students should have reverence for their teachers and the teacher should know the individual characteristics of the students (Louie, 1986).

considerable amount of language instances learned by heart may significantly increase the possibility of being highly proficient in the target language.

This assumption that substantial memorisation of language examples might contribute to the eventual creative use of that language is also reflected by a well-known Chinese saying, ‘When one memorises 300 Tang poems, he is sure to be able to compose poems of his own even though he is not a poet’ (see section 2.1.2.3 for more relevant discussion). This can be seen as a folk theory of implicit learning (cf. Y.-Q. Gu, 2003). This belief reflects the typical Chinese attitude towards learning and teaching that ‘learners must first master the basics and only when this is accomplished are they in a position to use what they have mastered in a creative manner’ (Brick, 1991: 154). To quote a Chinese idiom – ‘The loftiest towers are built up from the ground.’ – if creative use of language can be figuratively said to be the loftiest tower, it must be building upon the ground of the mastery of basics, either it be language blocks, discourses or written texts, and memorisation may be the most comfortable way for Chinese learners to approach such mastery for certain reasons (e.g. capable of doing this⁵⁵) before easy alternatives to practice of intensive memorisation of materials are available.

3.2.3 Meaning and repetition

When dealing with the issue of putting the meaning across, Lado offers the following view:

No harm will result if the student does not grasp every detail of the meaning of the dialogue as long as he can say it with ease and accuracy. The meaning will be brought out by repeated use of the dialogue’ (Lado, 1964: 68).

Thus, Lado has suggested that accurate reproduction of the dialogue in a proficient mode is paramount. Meaning, if not understood through classroom explanation⁵⁶, may

⁵⁵ There are studies (e.g. Bedell & Oxford, 1996; Shi, 2006) showing that Chinese students give low rankings to memory strategies for learning, yet have strong memories of using them (Parry, 1998; Saville-Troike, 2006).

⁵⁶ A connected dialogue as opposed to isolated sentence, though makes contextual sense, may introduce material that would otherwise be unnecessary at a given point for a systematic

come out as a result of repetitive rehearsal of the dialogue. Similarly, as described in Chapter 2, the Confucian tradition of learning firmly believes in the role of repetition in assistance with bringing out understanding. For instance, Chinese learners may have been convinced that ‘the meaning manifest itself after one reads one hundred times’ (*shu du bai bian, qi yi zi xian*)⁵⁷. The belief may well be traced back to the following annotation by a famous philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200) in Song Dynasty:

... in reading we must first become intimately familiar with the text so that its words seem to come from our own mouth. We should then continue to reflect on it so that its ideas seem to come from our own minds. Only then can there be real understanding. (Translation from Gardner, 1990: 43)

According to Zhu Xi, understanding is deemed to be attainable through repetitive learning leading to memorisation. In other words, memorisation can precede understanding. It is not surprising to find that some Chinese learners memorise in the first instance in order to understand later (Marton, et al., 2005). It is a century-old Chinese approach to learning that texts, or exemplars worthy of imitation are learned by heart, ‘whose words learned now will be cognitively internalised and later understood – perhaps – in a long apprenticeship which will lead to ultimate mastery’ (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996: 184).

As is clear from the preceding discussion, some assumptions underpinning Audiolingualism are analogous to the maxims of Chinese philosophy of learning. As a Western scholar observed, ‘[T]he Chinese attitude to learning and teaching has something in common with traditional Western attitudes’ (Brick, 1991: 154).

3.2.4 The decline of ALM

Recent development in applied linguistics, psycholinguistics and corpus linguistics (see, e.g. Bolinger, 1975; N. Ellis, 1993, 2001, 2002, 2003; Fillmore, 1979; Gleason, progression in the language (Lado, 1964).

⁵⁷ The saying (originally from *the history of the Three Kingdom* [*san guo zhi*] authored by Chen Shou) became the theoretical underpinning of a Chinese learner’s decision to learn by heart all the texts in *New Concept English* (Book 2 & 3). (cf. X. Yu, 2010)

1982; Myles, Hooper, & Mitchell, 1998; Myles, Mitchell, & Hooper, 1999; Sinclair, 1991; Skehan, 1998) has led to increasing recognition of the memory-based aspect of language. Consequently, theory in ALM as well as its pedagogical practice or implications in foreign language learning was recently reappraised from an applied psycholinguistic perspective after 50 years of exile (see Ding & Y. Qi, 2001; Ding, 2004, 2007; N. Ellis, 2002; X. Yu, 2009, 2010, 2011). For instance, both Ding's (2007) qualitative study and Yu's (2009) classroom experimental study produced the result that text memorisation facilitates 'noticing' and learning chunks.

Despite a few researchers' (notably Nick Ellis) intention to restore a good name for ALM, however, it cannot be denied that the era of Audio-Lingual supremacy in foreign language instruction was relatively short-lived and Lado's (1957, 1964) work is of little current influence. ALM fell from favour in FLT in the 1970s following eventual reaction against Lado's implementation of his theory in the ALM, although it is too early to conclude that this teaching method has died out in the Western language classrooms. In an attempt to explain why ALM became unfashionable, N. Ellis (2002: 177) concludes among other things⁵⁸:

Despite his [Lado's] premise of language learning as the learning of patterns of expression, content, and their association, the ALM involved 'mimicry-memorisation' in pattern drills in which the role of understanding was minimised as much as possible.

Given this explication, it would seem that memorisation was extensively utilised at the expense of meaning in ALM as 'the major emphasis was on the mechanical production of the utterance as a language form' (N. Ellis, 2002: 177). One caveat made for ALM is that this method, at its worst, may involve 'mindless repetition and meaningless drills' (ibid). In a word, the fact that ALM failed to have continuing influence in language teaching might be attributable to Lado's operationalization of behaviourist principles (cf. Skinner, 1957) of learning 'at the expense of language and the learner' (N. Ellis, 2002: 177). It was criticised for being 'formulated by linguists

⁵⁸ Another popular explanation is that progress in behaviourist theories of language learning floundered following Chomsky's highly influential critique of Skinner's *Verbal Behaviour* (N. Ellis, 2002).

to satisfy the interests and beliefs of linguists, with little regard for the intellectual and psychological motivations of teachers and learners' (Scott, 1983: 15) and the excessive dependence on manipulation drills of this method 'most certainly resulted in de-humanising the teaching and learning of foreign languages' (Scott, 1983: 17). Thus, a more humanistic way of learning, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), came into being partly as a reaction to the deficiency of ALM.

3.3 ALM and CLT in China

Interestingly, yet not surprisingly, the inhuman elements of ALM seem not to have caused a major problem or aroused resistance in ELT in China. Although convinced of the significance of memorising large amounts of language, audiolingualists realised that to memorise material in a foreign language is much more difficult than memorising it in the native one, therefore taking too much time and effort (Lado, 1964: 62). This task is considered 'hopeless' (ibid) because it is understood that the task of memorisation usually 'requires hours of tiring work, and is not really an easy way out' (Sivell, 1980: 52). However, a seemingly hopeless task is thought not impossible if enormous effort and time is invested in the context of the Chinese culture of learning where effort, determination, steadfastness of purpose, perseverance, and patience, rather than intelligence and ability, are generally viewed as the determinants of educational achievement (J Biggs, 1996; Lee, 1996). The emphasis on effort⁵⁹ is recounted in many vivid Chinese sayings or folk stories. For example, 'A piece of iron can be ground into a needle as long as one perseveres in doing it' (*zi yao gong fu shen, tie bang mo cheng zeng*⁶⁰) is a household aphorism still

⁵⁹ The emphasis on effort (as opposed to innate ability) is again derived from Confucian philosophy. 'Confucian was interested in above all in the moral perfectibility of mankind. He rejected categorisation of human beings as good or bad, and stressed the potential for improving moral conduct through the creation of favourable environmental conditions. His view was gradually extended to all aspects of human behaviour. Human beings were considered to be malleable, and like clay, subject to moulding by events of everyday life. Differences among individuals in innate abilities were recognised, but more important was the degree to which a person was willing to maximise these abilities through hard work. (Source: Stevenson & Stigler, 1992: 97)

⁶⁰ The saying is derived from a famous folk story: Li Po, a poet who lived over a thousand years ago, was walking by a small stream and saw a white-haired old woman sitting beside a rock grinding a piece of iron. Perplexed, he asked her what she was doing. 'Making a needle,' she replied. This answer was even more perplexing, and Li Po asked her how a piece of iron could be ground into a needle. 'All you need is perseverance,' said the old woman. 'If you have a strong will and do not fear hardship, a piece of iron can be ground into a needle.' Li Po thought about her

used to encourage children to strive their hardest. The story of ‘*Yugong yi san*’ (concerning a man called Yugong showed his disbelieving townsfolk that it was possible to move a mountain if one persisted year after year on the project) was more often than not quoted in official slogans going more or less like ‘We can achieve our goal of ... if we uphold the spirit of ‘*Yugong yi san*’’. Mottoes that portray the productive consequences of hard work include: ‘The rock can be transformed into a gem only through daily polishing.’ A summary of the belief in hard work can be found in the writing of the Chinese philosopher Hsun Tzu:

Achievement consists of never giving up. ... If there is no dark and dogged will, there will be no shining accomplishment; if there is no dull and determined effort, there will be no brilliant achievement. (Quoted in Watson, 1967: 18)

The basic precept of the above quotes is that one has to be willing to pay a great deal of time and effort on study, even on apparently boring tasks if one aspires to high academic achievement. Thus, when it comes to foreign language learning, the involvement of tremendous time investment and arduous work are taken as an obligatory price paid for proficiency rather than a deficit inherent in a particular learning or teaching method.

In addition to being over-demanding on time and effort, a major vulnerability in ALM lies in its under-emphasis on getting meaning across. Lado (1964: 67) admits that ‘[I]n most cases putting the meaning across is a minor part of teaching a dialogue’. This flaw is overcome in international models of CLT by proposing a ‘learn by using’ approach in which learners are encouraged to communicate in the target language from the very beginning (cf. H. D. Brown, 2001; J. C. Richards & Rodgers, 1986). However, this idea seems not to arouse the enthusiasm of Chinese English learners and teachers.

answer and became ashamed. He realised that someone like himself would never make progress if he failed to study hard, and from then on he was a diligent student. (source: Ridley, Godwin, & Doolin, 1971: 263)

2561 The potential cultural root of their reluctance to embrace CLT and other meaning-
2562 oriented methods again derives from general Chinese educational culture. Learning
2563 has been traditionally viewed in China more as a process of accumulating knowledge
2564 and reading books than as a practical process of constructing and using knowledge for
2565 immediate purpose (Hu, 2002a; C.-C. Yu, 1984). The accumulation of knowledge and
2566 the use of it are likened to saving money in the bank and spending it later: ‘When you
2567 put your money in the bank it is not important to be sure what you are going to do
2568 with it. But when you do need the money for some emergency, it is there for you to
2569 use’ (C.-C. Yu, 1984: 35). That is say, the knowledge you have learned may not be of
2570 immediate use at the moment, but it is ready at your disposal when you have to use it
2571 at some point. The importance of accumulating knowledge is supported by the
2572 Chinese saying: ‘When it comes for you to use your knowledge, you will regret
2573 reading too little’ (*shu dao yong shi fang hen shao*). Though the importance of the
2574 application of knowledge is commonly recognised by Chinese learners (cf. M. J.
2575 Wang, 2001), using knowledge is hardly thought to be a parallel process to
2576 accumulating knowledge; rather, this is a sequential process with the use of
2577 knowledge preceded by accumulation of knowledge. Moreover, it is considered that
2578 one is unlikely to be able to apply what one has already learned without a reasonable
2579 amount of absorption of knowledge involving a long period. Clearly, the conception
2580 of ‘learn to use’ does not fit very well with the theory of immediate need as the
2581 starting point in learning as is indicated by the principle of ‘learn by use’ in CLT.
2582

2583 If this cultural background explains why Chinese language learners are not daunted by
2584 effort-taking and time-consuming boring tasks, Western language teachers have
2585 always been perplexed by the fact that they are unable to convert the Chinese students
2586 to a communicative way of English learning which is ‘humanistic in nature’ (Hu,
2587 2002a: 95). CLT prides itself in taking the drudgery out of the learning process and
2588 injecting elements of entertainment, such as various language games, so as to make
2589 language learning become a light-hearted and pleasant experience. Many Chinese
2590 learners, however, feel uncomfortable with this imported approach. Brought up in a
2591 context where learning is regarded as a serious undertaking which is least likely to be
2592 associated with light-heartedness, Chinese learners naturally ‘tend to associate games
2593 and communicative activities in class with entertainment exclusively and are sceptical
2594 of their use as learning tool’ (Rao, 1996: 467). This is attested by one of my previous

students who commented: 'It seems to be fun in a classroom full of game-like activities, but you learn little compared to the traditional way of teaching' (Zhanfeng, personal communication, 2006). It is not that Chinese students are genetically different from Western students in terms of being open to enjoyment and pleasure; rather, they are not convinced of the overriding importance of oral interaction in the classroom, especially, among a group of learners and in an entertaining way.

As is clear from the forgoing discussion, what are seen as serious problems associated with ALM approach to language learning or teaching from the Western point of view may not necessarily cause strong reactions or resistance among Chinese learners. Likewise, what makes intuitive sense to many language teaching specialists in the West is likely to encounter scepticism from learners and teachers in a different learning context. With this in mind, we may be in a better position to understand why ALM has been successfully incorporated into ELT in China while it fell from favour in the West classroom and why text memorisation in English classes can be arguably associated with ALM⁶¹ methodologically despite its indigenous origin in the traditional Chinese way of learning classics. This also explains why some Chinese English teachers thought that more humanistic Western approaches to English teaching, though admittedly dynamic and creative, are difficult to apply in Chinese cultural context: 'Chinese don't think in the way most Westerners think' (Burnaby & Sun, 1989: 229). Indeed, a particular methodology, no matter how logical the underlying principles are, 'offers a potential but does not in itself guarantee that a given result will be obtained' (Tudor, 2001: 7-8).

On the other hand, it is questionable whether ELT in China is 'time-consuming and inefficient' (L.-Q. Li, 2003) given the limited English class time (about 4 class hours a week, 18 weeks a term, for 12 terms in high school and 4 terms at university) and the EFL context (where little English is to be encountered outside the classroom). Such an amount of class time may be 'just enough to help students understand how the language works, it does not allow them to practice using it' (Di-Lin. Liu, 1998: 5; see also Q. Li, 1994). Moreover, as a result of stringent controls on access to international media by the Chinese government, the Chinese students have little exposure to up-to-

⁶¹ In investigating ELT practices in secondary-level classrooms in China, Hu (2005: 645) categorises 'Memorization of dialogues & texts' into ALM.

date information directly from English-speaking countries that may provide a language model for them to follow and give them a flavour of the culture of those countries. Other constraining contextual factors, including large class sizes, limited resources and equipment, lack of competent teachers, and particularly the absence of a test of oral English due to a long-term neglect of oral skills, may provide a more reasonable account of Chinese students' insufficiency in communicative competence than their experience of memorising texts.

ELT in China over the past decades is 'undoubtedly successful in its own terms' (Burnaby & Sun, 1989: 229) given that China is culturally and geographically distant from the English-speaking world and that the Chinese language is typologically distant from English language; as we have seen, ELT has a very short history in China, which has been disrupted by political events or upheavals and decades of isolation from western countries. An English major who has only studied within China, as observed by an American expert (Nida, 1984; cited in Ding, 1987), often has a better command of the language than the average American college graduate has of a foreign language which he or she has majored in and studied only in America.

Chinese investment of effort in mastery of English through memorisation, which may give them a sense of progress and achievement, crucial to morale, may not necessarily be in opposition to a change towards a more communicative direction. To explain why extensive use of memorisation inherited from traditional language teaching is not inconsistent with creative use of language, in the following section, I shall conduct a positive evaluation of certain relevant principles salient in traditional language teaching.

3.4 What can we learn from traditional Chinese language teaching?

One caveat I have to mention prior to proceeding further is that my analyses in this section focuses more on the positive aspects of traditional language learning than on the problems. This may make me appear overly enthusiastic about Chinese tradition and blind to modern values in Western language education. Needless to say, there are many problems in traditional language teaching, just as there are obvious virtues and strengths in modern Western pedagogical theories. With no pretense of offering a

balanced assessment of the strong points and weaknesses of traditional Chinese and modern Western language education theory, my goal in this thesis, however, is to explore what essence we can extract from traditional Chinese language teaching which can be drawn on appropriately in our current effort to direct our foreign language teaching towards western approaches.

Traditional language teaching in China, according to Z.-G. Zhang (1983), refers to ‘the sort of language teaching conducted in China between the Song Dynasty (960 A.D.) until the middle of the 19th century’⁶², that is, the literacy-focused teaching of the *wenyan*⁶³ version of Chinese. From fragmentary written records and historical film clips, we are easily imprinted with the impression that traditional language education treated students like machines who had to passively and mechanically accept whatever was instilled without understanding. Indeed, there are many traditional guidelines or practices which are seriously irrelevant to contemporary language teaching especially those connected with the ‘eight-legged’ essay or *baguwen*⁶⁴ (see 1.1.1.2). Recognition of this, however, should not blind us to the fact that there were certainly valuable experience in and sensible precepts underlying traditional Chinese language teaching that are worth inheriting.

First and foremost, traditional Chinese literacy education never failed to emphasise the paramount importance of wide reading. As the Chinese saying goes, ‘He who reads ten thousand books thoroughly can work wonders with his pen.’ [*du shu po wan quan, xia bi ru you shen*] It was believed that only through wide reading could one be capable of good writing. In addition to extensive reading, intensive reading was also highly valued. In order for the students to internalise the language material, traditional language teaching demanded that some classic writings be intensively studied and recited to the extent that they could be recalled effortlessly at any time. Meanwhile, the importance of plenty of practice with language (e.g. constantly composing poems,

⁶² The time span is roughly in line with the period of imperial civil service examination system.

⁶³ *wenyan* is an older version of written Chinese which is drastically different from vernacular and oral-focused *baihua* version used today.

⁶⁴ To quote Kang You-Wei, a reformer in late Qing Dynasty, ‘those who learn *baguwen* read no books published after Qin and Han Dynasty, know nothing about practices in foreign states ...’. (cited in T. Li, 2008: 65)

verses or prose) was not neglected. So ‘read plenty and write plenty’⁶⁵ became an established maxim in traditional language teaching. Quite obviously, the Chinese ancestral scholars’ insistence on the command of a rich linguistic resource through abundant exposure (either through wide reading or intensive memorisation) and on the engagement with output (writing) has considerable justification even examined under modern theories of language and literacy development. More importantly, reading was not simply study and recitation of texts for examinations, rather, understanding should become an integral part of meaningful reading. As Zhu Xi (1130-1200) put it,

In learning we have to read for ourselves, so that the understanding we reach is personally meaningful. Nowadays, however, people read simply for the sake of the civil service examinations ... reading must be an experience personally meaningful to the self ... (translation from Gardner, 1990: 17, 148)

Another prominent value in traditional Chinese language teaching is that it attached great importance to students’ ‘independent thinking as a pre-requisite to reading and writing development’ (Z.-G. Zhang, 1983: 8). This attribute has long been ignored because it was made vague and ambiguous by the unanimous attack on the ‘eight-legged’ essay and imperial civil service examinations as well as overenthusiastic worship of authority which characterised traditional language education. Moreover, presumably people became teachers through an apprenticeship model so that there was a dearth of systematic exposition and coherent theories of language teaching throughout the hundreds of years.

In essence, there are many examples throughout ancient Chinese literature of cultivating independence of mind. Confucius, for example, advised his students to ‘be learned, ask questions, think carefully and discriminate’ [*boxue, shenwen, zhensi, mingbian*]⁶⁶, which is apparently another evidence of his unwavering emphasis on the

⁶⁵ Traditional language teaching takes as its goal of the improvement of only reading and writing (Z.-G. Zhang, 1983), which has a far-reaching impact on language teaching in China, either it being Chinese or foreign language.

⁶⁶ The complete quote goes like, *boxue, shenwen, zhensi, mingbian, duxing* (from *The Doctrine of the Mean*). Zhu Xi (1130-1200) elaborated each phrase as the proper sequence of five steps for learning from any worthwhile text: ‘Study it extensively, question its meaning precisely, ponder it with full vigilance, scrutinize its distinctions with clarity of vision, practice it in all earnestness’

importance of critical thinking in learning (see section 2.1.2 for earlier discussion on creative thinking in Confucian learning theory). The Confucian sense of learning involved continuous effort of fostering independence of mind and a willingness to doubt others' views as well as one's own preconceived ideas: 'In reading don't force your ideas in the text. You must get rid of your own idea ...'; '... the student must first of all know how to doubt' (Gardner, 1990: 46)⁶⁷.

Teachers, on the other hand, were supposed to enable the students to achieve their genuine mastery by guiding the students to sense the elusive meaning implied in the reading materials rather than demanding that they follow parrot-fashion through rote memorisation. The pre-Confucius *Liji* classic famously links 'a good teacher' with guiding students to think for themselves:

In his teaching, the superior man ... opens the way, but does not take them to the place. ... opening the way without leading the students to the place makes them think for themselves. Now if the process of learning is made gentle and easy and the students are encouraged to think for themselves, we may call the man a good teacher. (translation from Lin, 1938: 247)

Historically, up to the Ming and Qing periods, writers heaped scorn on pedants who blindly followed the past (Z.-G. Zhang, 1983). It was the deep understanding and synthesis, systemisation or integration of the material that Chinese scholars meant to achieve through extensive reading or intensive memorisation. This conception is displayed in the expression going like '*ru hu qi nei, chu hu qi wai*' [literally meaning 'going into the material in order to get out of it']. This is to say, punctilious study of the material is aiming to eventually achieve a holistic mastery of it.

Summing up, developing a rich command of language resources through persistent accumulation and constant practice seems to be a positive theme in traditional Chinese language teaching. More importantly, cultivating students' independent or creative thinking in reading was seen as essential to enabling them to take full control

(Plaks, 2003: 42).

⁶⁷ Gardener is quoting Zhuxi (1130-1200) here.

of the material available for their own use. Clearly, amassing large amounts of linguistic resources without neglecting independent thinking or creative reflection is a positive experience which we can learn from.

Unfortunately, over the past hundred years or so, some rational language teaching principles such as I have mentioned above have either not received the attention they deserve in foreign language education or have been misunderstood and therefore misused in transferring them to current foreign language teaching. One example is the traditional practice of memorisation of contextual material, which is often misused in foreign language teaching in China. The students may be forced to memorise verbatim a text designated by the teacher simply for the purpose of reproducing it in examinations, or fulfilling an assignment without being afforded a chance later to use what they have gained from the painstaking task. In addition, little effort may be made on the part of the teacher to guide the students to appreciate or enjoy the beauty of the language per se. Thus, on top of being demotivated in foreign language learning, Chinese students become used to an introverted and conservative approach to learning, unable to use English as an effective communicative tool, reluctant to engage in critical or independent thinking, and happy to be a passive receivers of knowledge (Rao, 1996).

When some prestigious officials in education made reference on how traditional education practices discourage students' creative thinking, text memorisation seems to be among the first factors to be blamed. Worrying about being regarded as old-fashioned, textbook compilers are prudent in assigning texts for students to memorise. For instance, learning texts by heart is rarely mentioned in high school English textbooks and only occasionally required in the exercises following the text in Chinese language textbooks⁶⁸. Language teaching specialists and researchers are cautious in talking about it presumably because they believe it is dismissed in the progressive West as primitive or misguided or because it has not been endowed with a sensible theoretical justification. Facing the predicament of failing to get satisfactory outcome of ELT in China despite enormous investment, especially under the pressure

⁶⁸ The textbook series under examination are those published in 1990 by People's Education Press affiliated with Ministry of Education. They have been used by an overwhelming majority of secondary schools throughout China.

of criticism from government officials, Chinese educators may hasten to stay away from any learning practice imprinted with palpable traditional marks.

Indiscriminately deleting all learning habits inherited from traditional language education can be as injurious as obstinately clinging on to those language teaching traditions which prove seriously irrelevant to modern situation (for example, overemphasis on the teaching of Classical Chinese (Z.-G. Zhang, 1983)). We should not be blind to the fact that a number of recent research studies have documented the use of text memorisation by high-achieving Chinese English learners (Ding, 2004, 2007; Gao, 2007a; Y.-Q. Gu, 2003). Chinese students' inadequacy in oral communication may rather lie in the fact that oral skills have long been neglected and a main emphasis has been placed on the improvement of reading and writing (Z.-G. Zhang, 1983) than in the practice of text memorisation which is assumed to stifle the creative use of language.

Following on the foregoing discussion, the current research is an attempt to provide an interview-based empirical study in which Chinese learners/teachers' views of text memorisation are investigated in the hope of shedding light on the following issues:

- (1) Is the practice of text memorisation which is meant to be used as a way of accumulating and internalising linguistic resources incompatible with creative thinking or critical analysis of the argument in the text?
- (2) If Chinese learners are indeed less creative than their western counterparts, to what extent is text memorisation a main underlying cause?
- (3) To what extent is text memorisation a main cause of Chinese learners' inadequate development of communicative competence in foreign language learning?
- (4) If text memorisation does restrict communicative competence, is it the practice per se or the way of using it which should be addressed?

3.5 Conclusion

To conclude the preceding discussion, the Chinese adoption of ALM, and coolness towards CLT, had deep roots in philosophy, culture and basic concepts of education. Accurate analysis of traditional language teaching is essential for us to identify and

2814 respect the essence of cultural heritage and uniqueness which might be taken
2815 advantage of to tackle modern problems in foreign language teaching.

2816

2817 In light of these insights, in the following chapter, I shall outline the design for a
2818 qualitative study which specifically sets out to investigate the way Chinese
2819 learners/teachers perceive the practice of text memorisation and the extent to which
2820 cultural explanation may prove useful through the lens of text memorisation, the
2821 extreme case of ALM.

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CHAPTER 4

AN EMPIRICAL STUDY: METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the methodological preparations for an empirical investigation of Chinese learners and teachers' beliefs and practices with respect to the use of text memorisation in English learning and teaching. Despite the fact that it is 'still widely practiced in schools throughout the country [China]' (Ding, 2004: 9; see also Rao, 1996), text memorisation, as has been pointed out in section 1.3, is still empirically under-investigated. Probing into the perceptions of Chinese learners and teachers regarding text memorisation as a learning and teaching tool constitutes the major goal of this empirical study. It is hoped that the study furthers our current understanding of Chinese views of foreign language learning through the lens of text memorisation which is not commonly used in other learning cultures.

This chapter is organised as follows: 4.1 formulates research questions for the study; 4.2 deals with methodological considerations; 4.3 is devoted to the discussion of the interpretive nature and the validity of this inquiry; 4.4 details the selection of the participants and their background information; 4.5 and 4.6 are concerned with the procedures of data collection and data analysis respectively. The design of the research instruments is provided in 4.7.

4.1 Research questions

The study focuses on an analysis of Chinese EFL learners/teachers' views of text memorisation as a learning/teaching device. Broadly, it sets out to research two questions:

- 1 What are learners/teachers' perceptions of the use of text memorisation in foreign language learning/teaching?
- 2 How can the emerged features of learners/teachers' perceptions be explained? To what extent are explanations beyond cultural values applicable?

Specifically, the study poses the following research questions, set out in 1.4, and repeated below:

- What are the most common views or beliefs of Chinese learners/teachers on text memorisation?
- What are the problems perceived or difficulties experienced by Chinese learners/teachers with regard to the use of text memorisation?
- What are the learners/teachers' attitudes towards the potential problems that might be brought about by extensive use of text memorisation?
- Are there any commonalities and diversity across groups at different educational levels regarding the learners/teachers' use and beliefs on learning texts by heart?

4.2 Methodological considerations

This research adopted two approaches to investigation: survey and interview. The reasons why these two field procedures were chosen to collect information will be discussed below.

4.2.1 Survey

Administering questionnaires was adopted for two reasons (mainly based on Babbie, 1998; Bryman, 2001; Dornyei, 2003):

- (1) Questionnaires are economic in terms of research time required. They are quick to administer and can be sent out through E-mail.
- (2) Questionnaires provide easier ways to collate and analyse data than many other means of research. Given that questionnaires are normally comprised of closed questions, in which the respondent is asked to select an answer from among a list provided by the researcher, they afford a greater uniformity of responses and are more easily processed for statistical analysis.

In short, a small-scale survey was conducted in the current research primarily for collecting quantitative data. The survey questionnaire (see Appendix 1 & 2, Part II)

consists of a limited number of questions or items (3 for the learner survey and 10 for the teacher survey) intended to collect data supplemental to or triangulating that gained from the qualitative inquiry.

4.2.2 Interview

Although a small-scale questionnaire survey is included, the methodological framework of this empirical inquiry is largely qualitative-interpretative.

Interviewing was initially decided to be used for complementing a large-scale questionnaire survey, which means there would be a balanced mixed design in methodology. It was hoped that interviews accompanying questionnaire results would help gain a better understanding of what the numerical responses actually mean given that interview data can ‘both illustrate and illuminate questionnaire results and can bring your research study to life’ (Gillham, 2000: 82). Thus, interview was adopted initially more as a follow-up to another method than standing on its own.

However, after piloting the painstakingly designed questionnaire, I found that data collected in this way was not informative enough to address my research questions beyond a superficial way, which, may well be attributable to the lack of a model of questionnaire design for an under-theorised/investigated topic (Rosamond Mitchell, personal communication, Aug 04, 2010). Perhaps due to my ineptness in designing the questionnaire, some respondents seemed to fail to treat the questions seriously – they either inadvertently omitted certain items or gave inconsistent answers (for example, one participant indicated in the questionnaire that he thought text memorisation was not helpful at all and extremely boring, but at the same time chose to use it frequently in his future study⁶⁹). I began to realise the biases and limitations of the type of research approach aiming to produce data in the form of numbers, when investigating a new area. On the other hand, the pilot and first stage interview study produced interesting and inspiring data, which led me to be convinced that the major

⁶⁹ More examples like this include a participant who responded that he had not memorised a single text since he started learning English, but he signified that he thought text memorisation was very helpful and interesting, and another who ticked both ‘boring’ and ‘interesting’ in response to the question of ‘How do you see the process of text memorisation?’

2930 strength of the qualitative approach is, ‘the depth to which explorations are conducted
2931 ... , usually resulting in sufficient details for the reader to grasp the idiosyncracies of
2932 the situation’(Myers, 2000).

2934 As a result, it was decided that a qualitative approach (interview) should play a
2935 dominant role in answering the research questions while the quantitative data was
2936 sparingly used to buttress the qualitative findings.

2938 Although interviewing can be ‘costly, time-consuming, and often difficult to
2939 administer’ (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989: 166), it can be more informative and flexible
2940 in the sense that it allows the interviewers to change questions or the way of phrasing
2941 questions as well as asking follow-up questions to probe into further information. On
2942 the other hand, the respondents can answer questions at some length in their own
2943 words, and clarify or expand the answers if necessary. More importantly, interviewing
2944 is usually interactive in nature as is indicated in the term ‘interactive interviewing’
2945 (Neill, 2003).

2947 In positing the purpose of interviewing, Seidman (2006: 9) notes:

2949 The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to get answers to questions, nor to
2950 test hypotheses, and not to ‘evaluate’ as the term is normally used. At the root
2951 of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of
2952 other people and the meaning they make of that experience.

2954 From this point of view, interviewing serves as an ideal instrument in eliciting the rich
2955 and thick data from an ‘emic’ perspective. In view of the nature of the current
2956 research, i.e. to understand the subjective reality of the lived experience of a particular
2957 group of individuals, interviews with informants about their lived learning
2958 experiences seemed to be the most congruent research strategy. Indeed, talking to
2959 learners about language learning in interviews or focus group discussions and
2960 analysing what they say is a typical research strategy in the field of learner beliefs
2961 (Benson & Lor, 1998, 1999; Wenden, 1986). More importantly, given the apparent
2962 cultural bearing on the topic under investigation, interviewing ‘seems to be the most
2963 effective way of bringing the insider’s perspective to the analysis, taking us nearer to

a description of cultural practices in terms of its members' understandings' (Hyland, 2000: 144).

In terms of actual administration, any ambiguities or misunderstandings of the questions can be clarified or corrected on the spot during interview. As a result, the respondents can be expected to provide more accurate information than in questionnaires and they are not given any chance to inadvertently omit any items as might happen in responding questionnaires.

4.2.3 Reasons for a mixed method

According to Mertens (2005), mixed methods have particular value when we want to examine an issue that is embedded in a complex educational or social context. She argues that combining methods in a particular project would broaden the scope of the investigation and enrich the scholar's ability to draw conclusions about the problem under study.

A combined use of interview and questionnaire was adopted in the current study mainly because 'interviews can provide depth of explanation within a particular context, while questionnaires paint a broad though possibly superficial picture' (Drever, 1995: 8). It is hoped that a fuller picture of Chinese conceptions of text memorisation can be gained through in-depth interview that serves to capture the complexity of participants' thinking, propped by a questionnaire survey that tends to give a snapshot of learners' beliefs.

A mixed method can also fulfil the following two functions (cf. Green, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989): Qualitative and quantitative methods are used to measure overlapping but different facets of a phenomenon, yielding an enriched understanding by illustration, clarifying, or elaborating on certain aspects. Results obtained by multiple methods do not always produce corroborating or complementary results; however, divergent results can also be illuminating. Therefore, researchers may intentionally utilise varied methods to generate discrepancies, paradoxes, or contradictions, which are meant to be provocative through the recasting of questions, leading hopefully to new perspectives (ibid). Although the use of mixed methods in my study (interview

preceded by questionnaire survey) was not necessarily aiming to generate discrepancies, it indeed increased the chance for incongruities to happen, which allowed me to improvise meaningful follow-up questions in the interview.

4.3 Interpretivism and questions of validity

As was mentioned earlier, the methodology of this empirical inquiry is mainly qualitative-interpretive. In my deliberation on the inclusion of the term ‘interpretive’ I highlight my position that interpretivistic methodology can hardly be detached from a qualitative one: ‘*Interpretive* research is a term preferred by Erickson when referring to *qualitative* research ...’ (Vrasidas, 2001: 81; emphasis original). The use of the term ‘emphasizes interpretation and suggests a focus on the meanings in action of participants and how the researcher uncovers and interprets those meanings’ (ibid). Holliday offers the following view:

It [qualitative belief] maintains that we can explore, catch glimpses, illuminate and then try to interpret bits of reality. Interpretation is as far as we can go. This places less of a burden of proof on qualitative research, which instead builds gradual pictures. The pictures are themselves only interpretations – approximations – basic attempts to represent what is in fact a much complex reality – paintings that represent our own impressions, rather than photographs of what is ‘really’ there. They are created by collecting a number of instances of social life. (Holliday, 2002: 5-6)

Given the interpretive nature of qualitative research, I assent to Brooks-Lewis (2007: 59-60) that ‘questions of validity can only be addressed with the recognition and acknowledgement of subjectivity through the embodiment of the interpreter, exposing as completely and distinctly as possible that person’s attitude and outlook’. This notion has been amply displayed in my interpretation of related literature in preceding chapters. I am mindful of Holliday’s (2002: 139) allegation that the researcher does not need to ‘pretend to escape subjectivity, and must therefore account for that subjectivity wherever possible’. Within a post-modern qualitative research paradigm, it is recognised that the involvement of the researcher is not only unavoidable, but ‘... a *resource*, which must be capitalised upon’ (Holliday, 2002: 137; emphasis original).

As such a resource, throughout the inquiry I have exploited my familiarity with the topic under investigation as well as the cultural and educational settings that the participants are situated in.

One may argue, however, that although the researcher's familiarity with the given setting makes it easier to provide an insider perspective, it may also cause some difficulties in taking a more objective 'outsider' view (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). As a result, some significant features in the given context are likely to be taken for granted and the researcher is inclined to confine himself/herself to the perspectives given by the participants. While acknowledging the problematization of taking a value-neutral or value-free position when looking into culturally embedded educational practices by researchers who are themselves products of an educational tradition (Q. Gu, 2006), it is argued here that this risk has been offset to some extent in this inquiry. As a student in linguistics and a language teacher, who has for the first time been thrown into a multicultural environment, I have never failed to critically reflect on the learning practices in my home context and discuss relevant issues with people from a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds during my three-year academic study in the UK. Such a self-reflective attitude enables me, as a researcher, to be aware of the development of my own professional position and views and to become more able to 'take an 'external' perspective on oneself as one interacts with others, as well as to analyse and, where desirable, adapt one's behaviour and the underlying values and beliefs' (Byram, 2003: 60). Moreover, early draft chapters on conceptual study and regular reports on the fieldwork research progress were read by and discussed with people⁷⁰ who are alien to the research context, thus obtaining an 'objective' outsider perspective on the research process.

When working from the perspective of qualitative methodology, the construct of validity as defined in quantitative contexts is seriously beside the point inasmuch as '[O]ne cannot talk about the validity of the study, but of the validity of the assertions and inferences one makes during data analysis. ... The richness of description of data collection and analysis will determine the validity of inferences' (Vrasidas, 2001: 94). In other words, it is only by – in Holliday's (2002: 145) term – 'showing the

⁷⁰ They include my supervisor, advisor and the members of the upgrade panel.

workings' that the research is able to communicate the validity of the whole research project. It is my attempt in this thesis to do my utmost to open my mind to the reader with my incentive in undertaking this inquiry and to account for the choice of social settings, research activities and themes and focuses as well as the dedication to and thoroughness of fieldwork, which Holliday (2002: 9) considers the sources of validity of qualitative research.

Although interview data are seen as subjectivity-biased as they are co-constructed by the interviewer and interviewee in interaction (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002), it is argued that the interview data in this research are sufficiently dependable for the intended research purpose. As is demonstrated in the data samples (see Appendix 5), the interviewer constantly invites the interviewees to justify his/her opinions or consider the issues from a different perspective by acting as a challenger. The validity, or what Lincoln & Guba (1985) call 'trustworthiness' of this qualitative inquiry is believed to be further enhanced by a number of factors. These factors include: an extended period of fieldwork (lasting about one year and two months), the interviewer's effort to let the research participant lead the way whenever possible, and the compatible results of an experimental study (X. Yu, 2009) and a case study (X. Yu, 2010) conducted respectively before and in parallel with the current research. My familiarity with the context under investigation and my previous personal engagement with the practice of text memorisation provided me with an insider perspective which, combined with my outsider role as an independent researcher, may constitute a methodological strength of the study.

An important element of validity in qualitative study is 'triangulation' (Denzin, 1970, 1989) insomuch as 'triangulation is not a tool or a strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation' (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998: 4). Of various forms of triangulation⁷¹, I consider that two types of triangulation were applied in the inquiry, namely, data triangulation and methodological triangulation. In the interview study, data were collected from the two parties to the learning and teaching process: the learners and the teachers, whose reports form a type of verification from two perspectives on certain issues. Two participants were interviewed twice, with a gap of

⁷¹ Denzin (1970, 1989) distinguishes four types of triangulation: data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and methodological triangulation.

one year separating the two interviews, and many of their beliefs were iterated in both interviews. And the data elicited from the participants in the current study were checked against that of analogous previous research (e.g. Ding, 2004, 2007; Gao, 2006; Gao, 2007a; Jiang, 2008; Jiang & Smith, 2009) and corresponding theoretical literature (Cook, 1994; Stevick, 1982, 1989, 1990). All this provided an element of data triangulation. The methodological triangulation can be seen in the combined use of questionnaire survey and in-depth interview in the present inquiry as well as other sources of data (e.g. the participants' written narratives) that were used in my previous research (cf. X. Yu, 2010), although not included in this thesis. Moreover, some participants in the study were my previous colleagues/friends and I had actually had a certain degree of knowledge, though in a fragmented manner, of their theory of foreign language learning (including attitudes towards memorisation) through formal or informal discussions on various occasions outside the research (e.g. course planning meeting).

An aspect of interpretivism that makes sense in the current empirical inquiry is that interpretive research allows the researcher 'to *make the familiar strange* and interesting again' (Erickson, 1986: 121; emphasis original). This is the very feeling I had whilst interacting with the participants during a series of interviews and reading up the transcripts. We more often than not take for granted most activities that habitually happen to us and fail to notice and understand the local meanings certain actions have for those involved. It is therefore the researcher's job to uncover those meanings and lift the veils to unravel the multiple layers of meanings represented by human action through attending to and documenting the particulars of the given setting (Vrasidas, 2001).

In a sense, this inquiry bears many features of what some scholars (cf. Marton, 1981; Saljo, 1988) call 'phenomenography' in education research, which is concerned with 'the meanings of situations and the ways in which these meanings are negotiated by actors involved' (L. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). Theoretically, phenomenography is based on the assumption that subjective interpretations of reality are more important in analysing actions than any underlying objective reality (Benson & Lor, 1999) and that conceptions are *relational* rather than inherent qualities in the minds of the thinker or in objects themselves (Saljo, 1988). That is to say, conceptions

can hardly be understood independently of the learning context. Moreover, the objective of phenomenographic research more concerns understanding the nature of the conceptions themselves than understanding individuals in terms of the conceptions they hold. Methodologically, phenomenography typically uses interviews to probe informants' conceptions of learning (Watkins & Biggs, 1996). While these interviews are usually highly focused, the interviewer is not wholly dependent on preset questions, but uses the interviewees' own responses to encourage them to probe further and further into their own conceptions (ibid). Although qualitative research following phenomenological tradition has been criticised for tending to overlook how such meaning negotiations take place in a wider context (Corson, 1997), this concern is not considered relevant to the current inquiry which takes as its underlying epistemology the postmodernist conception of inquiry: 'No longer should we see ourselves as seeking to uncover a pre-existing reality; rather we are involved in an interactive process of knowledge *creation*' (Beck, 1993: emphasis original). Postmodernist insights also insist on a shift in our notion of expertise in that:

So-called "experts" are often heavily dependent on "non-experts" for input if they are to arrive at sound insights; and since each individual or group's needs and circumstances are different, "expert knowledge" cannot be simply *applied*; it must be greatly modified for a particular case. (Beck, 1993)

I have indeed benefited in many ways from the 'non-expert' talk in this inquiry, learning many things, becoming conscious of many others and even being enlightened in one way or another, so to speak. The field work journey I have navigated in this research not only made me enjoy the process of listening people's expression and defence of their attitudes, which provided me with large amounts of fresh information, but also led me to be convinced of the value of personal narratives. Narratives have the strengths that are lacking in what some might call the 'scientific' approaches, because they provide 'the details, the information about contexts, the power of a connected story line, the openness and clarity about meanings, the depth of feeling, and the modesty of theoretical claims' (Rosenblatt, 2001: 112).

4.4 Informants and settings

The participants in the research included both learners and teachers who were learning or teaching English at three different educational levels, i.e. junior high school, senior high school and college (see Table 4.1; see also Appendix 3 for a whole list of the participants). The participants were recruited largely on an opportunistic basis as the criteria for inclusion in the sample were rather loose, i.e. currently a full-time student or a foreign language teacher from any of the above mentioned educational levels that had the experience of memorising texts. The participants were contacted as a result of one of the following: (1) being my acquaintances, friends or previous colleagues (mostly university teachers), (2) being the students of my previous colleagues or friends and (3) being strangers recommended by my friends or those who were interviewed earlier. Thus, this is basically a network sample.

Table 4.1 Overview of the Participants' Educational Background

Group (N)	Educational Level (N)	Numbers of School/University
Learners (42)	Junior High (12)	4
	Senior High (11)	4
	University (19)	4
Teachers (20)	Junior High (7)	5
	Senior High (5)	5
	University (8)	3

4.4.1 Learner informants

All the participants were uniformly from a Chinese ethnic background with Mandarin Chinese as their native language. They were, therefore, monolingual Chinese learners studying English as a foreign language (EFL)⁷². Most of the participants in this study had never been to English-speaking countries and were born and educated in China.

⁷² Exceptions were a college student Deqian (see Appendix 3) who finished her primary schooling in HongKong where English was dealt with as ESL and the small group of participants interviewed in the UK who have sojourned in English speaking environment for a short period (at most three months) at the time when the interviews were conducted.

They were between the ages of 15 to 26, which means that they were born in the 1980s and 1990s. This is around the time when more radical economic reform and a further opening up of China were launched all over the country⁷³. As a result, these learners had experienced the dramatically changing social situation in China since the ‘open door’ policy was enacted in 1978. The impact on the English learning context might be that urban Chinese learners (who constitute the vast majority of the participants) would be able to access more modern educational hardware, more varied learning materials and more creative learning environments than would previously have been available to them.

The city where the study was conducted is a provincial capital city in inland China. The five secondary schools where the high school participants studied were located in two central districts in this city. While the participants from high schools were all residents of the city, the college students were from different provinces or cities from all over China. Therefore, this group of informants are more representative of Chinese learners nationally than their high school counterparts.

The college student participants comprise two groups. Most were four-year-degree course students, aged between 18 and 22. The number of years they had spent learning English ranged from 6 to 12. Thus, they all have learned English for at least 6 years prior to their entry into the university starting from the first year of junior high. Some of them from major cities had started learning English from the third grade or even from the first grade of primary school. With abundant previous learning experience at hand, these learners might have developed their specific learning strategies or beliefs of English learning.

The remaining part of the participants at the tertiary level was made of a group of MA/MSc (with the exception of one first-year PhD) students beginning their studies at a UK university. At the time the interviews were conducted, they had been in the UK for at most no more than 4 months. Although these students had brief experience of studying abroad, they were included not to compare with students studying in

⁷³ In the spring of 1992, Deng Xiaoping made a historic tour of South China, popularly known as Nanxun or ‘southern tour’. This tour has since sparked off dynamic economic growth in China and drastically changed the political and social landscape of the country (Wong & Zheng, 2001: 3).

domestic institutions, but as the result of taking a convenience sample ‘where the researcher takes advantage of an accessible situation which happens to fit the research context and purpose’ (Punch, 1998: 105). The impact of their exposure to the UK academic context on their perception of target topic was considered not great given the short period of their sojourn. Most of these students came to study in the UK immediately after the completion of their undergraduate study in China. The inclusion of this ‘special’ group of college students further increases the diversity of the interviewees’ background.

More detailed information on the student participants can be found in Chapter 5.

4.4.2 Teacher informants

20 foreign language teachers⁷⁴ participated in a semi-structured interview (see 4.5 for details). All the university teachers interviewed may be seen as an ‘opportunistic sample’ (Miles & Huberman, 1994) in that most of them had been my colleagues previously and the rest were my acquaintances. The teachers from secondary schools were mostly approached through ‘snow-balling’, i.e. the teachers I interviewed initially introduced their colleagues or friends as potential interview participants.

All the teachers are native Chinese brought up in Confucian Heritage Culture (CHC). While most of them have never been to English speaking countries, four of them had the experience of studying in foreign countries (US, UK and Russia) for one or two years. They are all full-time language teachers working in public schools or private training institutions, and most of them have at least 5 years’ teaching experience.

Details of the teachers’ background will be presented in Chapter 6 where teacher’s perceptions of text memorisation are reported.

4.5 Data collection

4.5.1 Procedure

⁷⁴ 19 of the 20 teachers are English teachers and the remaining one is a Russian teacher with English as her second foreign language.

3257

3258 The interviews were conducted over a period of more than one year, from 3rd
3259 February 2009 to 8 May 2010, during two fieldwork trips⁷⁵ to China. All interviews
3260 with learner participants were conducted formally at a place convenient to the
3261 informants (for example, in the teacher's office in their school). Each subject was
3262 interviewed individually in Chinese to ensure a full expression of their ideas⁷⁶. Before
3263 each interview, an informal exchange of personal information or pleasantries was
3264 initiated to set the interviewees at ease. Each interview lasted from around 30 minutes
3265 to one hour. With the subjects' permission the interviews were fully recorded and
3266 some notes were taken during and following the interview. As for the teacher
3267 participants, most interviews took in the form of telephone interviews given the
3268 practical difficulties in arranging face-to-face meetings on the part of the
3269 interviewees. Five interviews were made in the actual presence of the interviewees,
3270 either at their homes or working places.

3271

3272 The general questionnaire was filled out by the participants before the interview either
3273 on the spot or through email (by those who were interviewed through telephone).

3274

3275 **4.5.2 Ethical issues**

3276

3277 Throughout this research, I made every effort to avoid potential ethical problems that
3278 might arise from the approach to subjects or the way the research was implemented.

3279

3280 First, I had been honest and open to the subjects about who I was, what I was about to
3281 do and why I developed interest in this topic. Apart from revealing the true purpose
3282 and aims of the study, I made an attempt to assure the subjects of their freedom of
3283 speech.

3284

3285 In addition, I explained clearly in the study why their participation was necessary for
3286 the current study and how it would be used only for academic purposes.

279 ⁷⁵ The first trip lasted about two months (from February 2009 to April 2009) and the second over
280 three months (from February 2010 to May 2010).

281 ⁷⁶ One exception was that one of the participants insisted on speaking English in the interview,
282 but I confirmed his intended meanings by repeating all the questions in Chinese.

3287

3288 Moreover, the field research was conducted overtly with the explicit written consent
3289 (either in a paper version or an electronic one via email) from the participants. All the
3290 participants, especially student participants in high schools were informed of their
3291 right to withdraw from the research for any or no reason and at any time.

3292

3293 Finally, the informants were informed of the high confidentiality of all personal data
3294 as well as any information about their affiliation. They were assured that any public
3295 revelation of the data for academic purposes will be made only behind a shield of
3296 anonymity, i.e. using pseudonyms (See Appendix 7).

3297

3298 **4.6 Data analysis**

3299

3300 Although data analysis is to be detailed in the following results chapters, this section
3301 is dedicated to the description of the overall approach to dealing with the data
3302 collected from an extended period of fieldwork. Since the way in which data are
3303 collected will certainly result in certain kinds of possible analysis, some
3304 methodologists (e.g. Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; K. Richards, 2003) view
3305 consideration of data analysis as part of the research process even in the earliest
3306 stages. With the issue of data analysis borne in mind when entering into field, the
3307 researcher is less likely to go off the rails in case of temporarily losing control of the
3308 direction during interaction with informants.

3309

3310 Tentative analysis of data collected in the pilot study helped me realise the importance
3311 of an early start in data analysis. Analysing while the fieldwork was ongoing not only
3312 reduced the chance of being overwhelmed by data overload at later stages, but helped
3313 identify emerging themes, significant events or areas of interest, as well as areas
3314 which needed fuller investigation or had been neglected (Baker, 2009). Following
3315 Miles & Huberman's (1994) suggestion, I even entered the field with a couple of
3316 preconceived codes related to the research focus which were substantially investigated
3317 in the conceptual study. This proved to speed up the process of describing, structuring
3318 and interpreting the data in later analysis.

3319

3320 The ‘analyse-while-researching’ approach resulted in a second round of fieldwork
3321 which was not originally planned but was later considered to be necessary. The
3322 second-time-around visit proved to be fruitful not only in terms of the increased
3323 volume of data, but in terms of the improved quality of data collected. This was
3324 achieved because the preliminary analysis of early data provided meaningful feedback
3325 to the next round of data collection which was more focused on issues relevant to the
3326 research and could dig deeper into certain subject matter.

3327

3328 Here are the procedures taken in the process of analysis. First of all, I listened to the
3329 recordings repeatedly to get a global understanding of the informants’ opinions before
3330 transcribing them into a computer. I considered this step to be essential because I
3331 translated Chinese into English while doing the transcription⁷⁷, which might limit my
3332 attention to a sentence level instead of discourse level. After that, I went through the
3333 written version of the transcriptions⁷⁸ and separated out those commentaries that were
3334 irrelevant to the participants’ practices, perceptions or opinions of the use of text
3335 memorisation. I found this to have occurred primarily in the transcript of interviews
3336 which lasted longest (usually around one hour). It was because participants in these
3337 interviews were generally talkative and occasionally led the interview to the direction
3338 of their own interest⁷⁹. But this did not by any means affect the quality of the
3339 remaining commentaries they made which were judged relevant to the research
3340 questions, and which formed the majority of the interview transcripts. Following these
3341 preliminary steps I read carefully each of the transcriptions, keeping in mind the
3342 specific research questions I had defined and highlighting commentaries which were
3343 interesting to me intuitively or fitted well with my personal experience. Although such
3344 commentaries were located throughout the transcribed records and those that I chose

283 77 I did the first several transcriptions in Chinese initially and then translated them into English. I
284 gave up this way simply because I couldn’t afford the amount of time it required given the number
285 of interviews (62 in total) I had to work on.

286 78 Prosodic features were not transcribed for two reasons: First, the focus of the research was on
287 the content of the participants’ responses; therefore, the impact of the absence of prosodic feature
288 was not felt to be great. Second, inclusion of the prosodic features in the transcription was not
289 practical as it would certainly lead to the overload of transcribing work. There were a few
290 exceptions in the transcript of interviews with younger learners when fillers like ‘er’ ‘oh’ was
291 considered meaningful enough to reflect their instinctive reaction to the interviewer’s questions.

292 79 For instance, one talked about the differences between eastern and western people in terms of
293 personality.

to quote in my drafts of the result section were indeed typical, I became increasingly uneasy with the feeling that the data were not systematically approached. This feeling was confirmed when my supervisor repeatedly emphasised the importance of handling data in a holistic and methodical way. I realised that basing my analyses on the searching of answers to the issues intriguing to me at that moment could limit the possibilities of identifying the interrelationships that I had not envisaged, therefore increasing the risk of failing to keep an open mind by focusing on justification of my own ideas.

I went back through all the transcriptions again, this time only with a peripheral question – which commentaries are related to the participants' perceptions and which are their narratives of their actual practices. By highlighting the commentaries on the practices with a different colour, I extracted all information pertinent to the participants' perceptions or opinions of text memorisation and began the process of analysis again. It was hoped that with this holistic or 'top-down' procedure of analysis, a more open-ended interpretation would be achieved. I came up with a set of coding categories informed by the research questions and significant issues identified in the conceptual study, including benefits of text memorisation and related issues of understanding, creativity and motivation, and then searched for the participants' references to these preliminary coding categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Although I took as the starting point the categories that arose from the initial set of interview questions, I was also open to recoding whenever new categories manifested themselves. Moreover, an inductive coding analysis was also undertaken to seek sub-themes among interview statements that were initially categorised through constant questioning and comparing (Patton, 1989). As the fieldwork was carried out over an extended period, the analysis was further informed by the newly replenished data as the study moved on. As a result, the process of analysis was the one of constant re-examination and recoding, moving back and forth between deductive and inductive procedure.

Additionally, the software programme SPSS 17 was used to store the quantitative data produced by the survey study and for later statistical analysis. As for qualitative data, a traditional pen-and-paper (highlighting) approach was used to conduct the analysis.

In the end, QSR Nvivo 8 was adopted to store the transcriptions of the recorded data and to enable it to be used for validating the completed qualitative analysis.

Lastly, an overall challenge for me as a researcher in handling qualitative data was how to map the participants' self-report onto the holistic scheme of the presentation and explanation of the data, uncovering an emic perspective understanding of a learning practice that the participants are all familiar with yet seldom reflect on. The way the interview data were organised or presented was subject to such factors as the richness of data in a particular category, the significance of a theme in relation to research questions and the perspective I chose to interpret data. For example, the issue of motivation was taken as a main category in reporting on teachers' perceptions of text memorisation while treated as a sub-category under the theme of the benefits of the practice in presenting learners' views of memorising texts for foreign language learning. In sum, it was through such a process of negotiation between theorising relationships among emerging categories and accommodating the reality of collected data that the interpretative accounts in Chapter 5, 6 and 7 came into being.

4.7 Design of the research instruments

It needs to be pointed out that although both questionnaire and interviewing were adopted as research instruments in the study, much more importance was attached to the latter in view of the research questions and the nature of the study (as was discussed in 4.2). As a result, the majority of the research was interview-based. A substantial series of interviews was aiming to help me gain an in-depth understanding of the informants' opinions on the use of text memorisation in foreign language learning and teaching. 'Interactive interviewing' (Neill, 2003) was expected to offer an opportunity for participants to fully explain and for me as a researcher to truly understand what their responses to the questionnaire really meant.

A semi-structured interview was adopted, which means that I set up a general structure by deciding in advance what ground was to be covered and what main questions were to be asked (Drever, 1995). This form of interview was employed for two reasons: (1) Predetermined questions afford me a degree of power and control over the course or direction of the interview; (2) The nature of its partial

structuredness allows me considerable flexibility regarding follow-up questions
pertinent to the interviewees' particular experiences.

Pilot interviews were conducted with a small number of Chinese learners and teachers
of English in the UK. Reflective thinking on the interviews was summarised and
tentative analysis of the data from the pilot group was performed. This formed an
important source that was used to inform the revision of the interview questions.

As there were only a limited number of items in the questionnaire for learners, and the
questionnaire for teachers was also used as part of the interview guide, the
questionnaires were put in the same sheet with the interview schedules (see Appendix
1 & 2). Such a design also made it convenient that a general questionnaire completion
was requested from the learner participants before the interview.

In the following sections, the research instruments for learners and teachers are
described respectively.

4.7.1 Questionnaire and interview guide for learners

The research schedule for learners (see Appendix 1) consists of three parts. Part I is to
establish the students' personal data, i.e., name, age, sex, years of learning English,
English proficiency compared to peers and so on. Part II is a general questionnaire
aiming to collect quantitative data on learners' beliefs regarding the use of text
memorisation in their English learning. The questionnaire utilises a semantic
differential scale (a seven-point rating scale) to elicit from the informants their general
attitudes towards text memorisation. Part III is an interview guide centring on two
broad categories: practice of text memorisation and beliefs derived from this practice.
More specifically, the guiding questions are supposed to help elicit information as to
(a) how text memorisation is practised; (b) how useful or helpful it is perceived by the
informants; (c) what problems or difficulties are found with this practice and (d) what
factors influenced the use (or non-use) of this practice.

There are three broad questions in the interview guide with each followed by two or
three sub-questions serving as prompts to guide the informants. For example, the

second question goes ‘What is your overall opinion on text memorisation?’ This is subdivided into four more specific questions: (1) What’s your comment on the metaphor ‘good medicine that tastes bitter’ or ‘a thorny rose’. (2) To quote one student, ‘If I recited all the texts, I could get good grades in tests. So reciting was an easy way to get a good grade.’ Do you agree? (3) Does the practice help you with your English learning? Why? (4) Do you see any problems when using the method? It needs to be pointed out that although all the questions in the interview guide were designed by myself, a few of them were inspired by the findings of previous research (e.g. Ding, 2004; Gao, 2006), as has already been indicated in Appendix 1.

4.7.2 Questionnaire and interview guide for teachers

In order to prompt the teacher interviewees to verbalise their beliefs and practices on the target topic in a constructed manner, I designed an interview schedule for teachers (see Appendix 2). The schedule consists of three parts. Part I is about the personal details of the informants (i.e. name, sex, age, educational background, teaching experience, professional title and so on).

Part II is a questionnaire containing 10 statements about text memorisation. In this section, the teacher informants were asked to read the statements and decide if they (1) strongly disagree, (2) disagree, (3) neither agree nor disagree, (4) agree, or (5) strongly agree with each statement. For example, the first statement is ‘Text memorisation is a very useful practice in foreign language teaching and learning.’ The teachers were invited to indicate to what extent they identify with or disapprove the assertion. The design of the five-point Likert scale was for the purpose of subsequent quantitative statistics. These statements were also functioning as an interview guide according to which the informants were asked to specify their reasons for a particular choice on each statement. That is to say, the questionnaire and interview guide were unified into one in this design. It needs to be pointed out that although the questionnaire and interview schedule centred on the use of text memorisation from a teaching perspective, the teachers, who are considered to be advanced EFL learners, were also asked to reflect on their own English learning history pertinent to text memorisation.

Part III consists of five open questions constructed to elicit particular information concerning teachers' practices and their views of using text memorisation as a teaching device.

4.8 Summary

To summarise, this study is an empirical inquiry targeting foreign language learners and teachers nurtured in the Chinese educational context and comprising data produced mainly through semi-structured interviews although questionnaires were also used to a limited extent. For gaining information as to how text memorisation is practiced and perceived in contemporary China, this inquiry will explore the individual voices of a group of Chinese learners and teachers from different educational levels and with a variety of backgrounds.

The following three chapters are dedicated to the presentation of the results of the data analysis with substantial discussions on the principal themes or categories which emerged.

CHAPTER 5

CHINESE LEARNERS' PERCEPTIONS OF TEXT

MEMORISATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

In this chapter, I will report on findings from the in-depth interviews concentrating on the perceptions of text memorisation as a way of learning from the learners' perspective. First, by way of introduction, I will clarify the working definition of text memorisation in the current study and sketchily review previous analogous studies. Then, I will move on to the delineation of the methodological particulars of the current study which were felt to be more reader-friendly if introduced at this point and the detailing of the bio-information of the participants. In the section that follows, I present and discuss at length a number of prominent issues or themes emerging from analyses of the interview data. Finally, I conclude the chapter by summarily stating the primary points interpreted from the participants' perceptions or opinions of text memorisation.

5.1 Defining 'text memorisation' in the present study

Prior to a serious investigation of the traditional learning practice, a clear definition is essential. While different versions of definition of memorisation can be found in various studies and dictionaries, I found the following understanding of memorisation is more fair or neutral: 'Memorising is the process of establishing information in memory. The term 'memorising' usually refers to the conscious process' (J. C. Richards, Platt, & Platt, 1992: 226). Based on this understanding and following Stevick's (1982: 67) definition of 'memorisation' in language education, text memorisation is understood in this thesis as 'working on a body of [textual] material until one is able to reproduce it word for word on demand'. A further understanding of text memorisation can be found in the following statement which distinguishes between 'learning by heart'⁸⁰ and 'learning by rote':

⁸⁰ The ancient Greeks believed that the heart, the most noticeable internal organ, was the seat of intelligence and memory as well as emotion. This belief was passed on down the ages and became the basis for the English expression 'learn by heart', which is used by Chaucer (1374) and must have been proverbial long before that. 'To record' reminds us again of this ancient belief in the heart as the seat of the mind. When writing wasn't a simple act, things had to be memorized; thus

3527

3528 When a student ‘learns by rote’, he or she may be able to recite the words, but
3529 might not necessarily understand what the words mean. A student who learns
3530 something by heart understands the concept of the lesson. The lesson is
3531 internalized and becomes part of the person's working knowledge.
3532 (Hendrickson, 1997: 29)

3533

3534 What is captured more than anything else in this quotation is the relationship of
3535 memorisation and understanding which has already been elaborated in Chapter 2 (see
3536 especially 2.2.2.1). Taking the position of ‘learning by heart’ rather than ‘learning by
3537 rote’, text memorisation is here defined as the attempt to commit a text to memory
3538 through verbatim repetition based on the understanding of the content of the text. In
3539 contemporary school practice in China, text memorisation is usually preceded by
3540 teachers’ detailed explanation of the meaning of and grammar points contained in the
3541 text.

3542

3543 It needs to be pointed out that ‘texts’ learned by heart by Chinese learners are not
3544 confined to texts in the textbook or course book, rather, they may include any short
3545 essays, passages, dialogues, contextual paragraphs and sentence clusters. Moreover,
3546 song lyrics, celebrities’ speeches and scripts of films and TV series in English are all
3547 included, which are indeed being taken as authentic materials for memorisation by
3548 Chinese learners.

3549

3550 **5.2 Prior work on the conceptions of text memorisation**

3551

3552 There is a paucity of research on the conceptions of text memorisation although the
3553 last decade has seen an increasing number of empirical studies on learning texts by
3554 heart published in China (see, e.g. Ding, 2004; Y.-R. Ding & Y. Qi, 2001; Long &
3555 Huang, 2006; S. Yao, 2003). Here I would like to mention two of them.

3556

3557 As was already reviewed in 1.2.3.1, Stevick (1989) performed a interview-based case
3558 study with an L1-English learner of Chinese who had reached ‘an extraordinarily high

299 we have the word ‘record’, formed from the Latin ‘re’, ‘again’, and ‘cor’, ‘heart’, which means
300 exactly the same as ‘learn by heart’. (Hendrickson, 1997)

level of competence both in speaking and in reading Chinese' (1989: 21). The informant reported the use of 'memorisation of texts' as part of his learning practice. This English learner of Chinese, though brought up in Western culture, was not defensive about this practice at all and repeatedly said it was 'within reason'. This practice, as he himself put it, 'gave you an instinct for what is actually said in the language — for how sentences are put together' (1989: 30).

In a more recent study, Ding (2007) reported interviews with three university English majors who had won prizes in nationwide English speaking competitions and debate tournaments in China. The interviewees regarded text memorisation and imitation as the most effective methods of learning English. They said the practice enabled them to attend to collocations and sequences, to borrow these sequences for productive use, to improve pronunciation, and to develop the habit of attending to details of language. Based on these self-reports, the author concludes that such practice enhances noticing and rehearsal and hence facilitates second language acquisition.

Following the tradition of 'good language learner' research⁸¹, both of the above mentioned studies sets out to relate the high achievement of the successful foreign language learners to the use of certain learning strategies (for instance, text memorisation). Although such research does provide insights into the kinds of behaviour associated with successful language learning (R. Ellis, 1994) and offer suggestions as to which strategies are important for language development (R. Ellis, 2000), one problem inherited in this body of study is that we have difficulty in deciding whether successful learners excel because they use particular valued strategies, or whether they use varied strategies including the valued ones because they are already successful learners.

To summarise, a small number of studies (cf. Ding, 2004, 2007; Y.-Q. Gu, 2003; Stevick, 1989) have reported the use of text memorisation by successful learners; the present study, however, makes no attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of text

⁸¹ In order to discover which strategies are important for L2 learning, this body of research aims to investigate how the 'good language learner' tries to learn by 'identifying learners who have been successful in learning an L2 and interviewing them to find out the strategies that worked for them' (R. Ellis, 2000: 77).

memorisation as a learning strategy. Rather, it sets out to learn about how the practice is perceived by Chinese practitioners based on their own experience of using text memorisation in their foreign language learning. Given the cultural specificity of the topic under discussion, interviewing seems to be the most effective way of exploring the insider's perspective on this cultural practice in terms of its members' understandings.

5.3 The current study: methodology, informants and data analysis

5.3.1 Methodology

Taking face-to-face interviewing as the main source of data, I am mindful of the caveat made by Stevick: '... although I tried very hard not to lead the interviewees, they still may have been telling me what they thought I thought they should be saying' (1989: xii). I was especially concerned with learner participants in junior high school who may not be mature enough to accurately express themselves. I made an effort to increase the trustworthiness of my data elicited from this age group especially those in the first year of their junior high by initiating a casual talk about their school life which gradually led to my intended questions. Given the nature of the topic under discussion and my identity as an 'outsider' to them, it is very unlikely that they would show their attitude with hesitation. The reliability of my overall interview data is further enhanced by two factors: First, a number of the interviewees are my acquaintances or associates, with whom I have long-term liaison. My interviews with this group of participants were integrated into natural conversations in an informal atmosphere. Second, many interviews lasted around one hour, which gave the participants sufficient time to fully express their opinions and, in many cases, reiterate their beliefs over the time.

It should be pointed out that the skill of improvising follow-up questions is essential to determining the richness and quality of the data to be elicited. In the pilot study, I rehearsed interview techniques by listening to interviewees' response for clues as to what question to ask next, or whether it was important to probe for additional information (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). I found probing into 'critical episodes' (Rogan & de Kock, 2005: 634) was especially productive by asking informants to

explain things they mentioned. I am also aware of the possible impact of the way of phrasing questions on the responses of the participants so that I became cautious about the language I used. For example, rather than asking the interviewees, ‘Do you think it is a good practice?’, I used, ‘What do you think of the practice?’ or ‘how do you evaluate the practice?’, instead.

Although the interview guide comes with a pre-determined set of questions and question order (see Appendix 1), the wording of questions and the question order was altered according to the need of each interview. The planned questions were also adjusted to the narratives of the participants whenever necessary. A certain amount of flexibility was applied mainly for adapting to the particular situations of different types of interviewees as well as due to natural flowing of interviewing interaction (see Appendix 5 & 6 for examples).

5.3.2 Informants

As described in Chapter 4, participants in the current study were to a large extent ‘opportunistic’ (Holliday, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994) in nature. The first batch of participants was secured by taking advantage of my interpersonal relationship network. They were mainly my colleagues and friends who are language teachers at secondary and tertiary level. I also applied *snowball sampling*, that is, participating teachers introduced me to other willing participants who were either their students or associates. Since there were no quantitative restrictions in this interview-based study, the final number (62) of the participants reflects the availability of the qualified informants. There was no stringent qualification for participants in the current study – only being (1) current full-time foreign language learners or teachers at secondary or tertiary level and (2) having the experience of learning through text memorisation – so that the informants had a wide range of ages (ranging from 12 to 65), affiliations (including public schools and private training institutions), geographical scope (from 12 provinces and municipalities) and learning experiences (including a few who had sojourned in foreign countries as well as those who have never been abroad). In my opinion, the diversity of the background of the participants would be a plus point in terms of obtaining a broader vista in the analysis of the data. More information about the participants is listed in Table 5.1 (see Table 4.1 for participants’ formation in terms

of educational levels and affiliations; see Appendix 3 for original bio-data of the participants).

Table 5.1: Demographics of the Participants (Learners and Teachers)

Group(N)	affiliation type(N)	geographical area ⁸² (N)	experience of studying abroad(N)
Learners (42)	foreign language school /English department ⁸³ (7/3) ordinary school /non-English department (16/16)	coastal province (9) inland province (33)	3-4 months (9) never (33)
Teachers (20)	public school (16) private institution (4)	coastal province (2) inland province (18)	2 years (1) 1 year (2) 3 months (1) never (16)

As was already mentioned in Chapter 4, the learner participants at tertiary level were diversified in terms of their home provinces where they finished their secondary education. Demographic information on this group of participants is presented in Table 5.2. Previous studies (e.g. Hu, 2005) have suggested that Audiolingual-featured practices like reading-aloud or memorisation of dialogues and texts are less used in coastal provinces/cities than inland provinces/cities, and this is the rationale underlying the distinction between coastal province and inland province in Table 5.2. Data from the current study, however, indicates that learners from the two areas showed no difference in terms of perception of memorisation of textual materials.

⁸² Since the coastal provinces have been more developed in the last two decades than the inland provinces, it is said that there is a discrepancy between the two broad regions in terms of instructional and learning practice which ‘can be attributed to a host of policy, economic, social, and cultural factors’ (Hu, 2005: 649). It is not the purpose of the present study to see whether the perception of use of traditional way of learning like text memorisation differs between people from the two regions, the division of informants in terms of geographical origin only serves to show the diversity of the participants.

⁸³ The distinction between foreign language school and ordinary school was made among secondary students and the distinction between English department and non-English department among college students.

3683 It needs to be pointed out that although this chapter is dealing with ‘learner’s
3684 perceptions’, data from interview with teachers is also referred to whenever of
3685 relevance because teachers are here treated as advanced learners.
3686

Table 5.2 Demographics of the Learner Participants at Tertiary Level⁸⁴

	Coastal province		Inland province	
Beijing*	1 (Heysea)		Chongqing*	3 (Tengjing; Eli; Jake)
Shenzhen*	1 (Howard)		Henan	1 (Yunpeng)
Guangdong	2 (Xiaofeng; Zhibiao)		Yunnan	1 (Emma)
Jiangsu	3 (Zhikai; Wanshi; Rock))		Sichuan	2 (Xuying; Xujia)
Shandong	1 (Deqian)		Gansu	1 (Lixia)
Qingdao	1 (Tiantian)		Wuhan	1 (Leila)
			Ningxia	1 (Xiaodong)
Sub-Total	9			10
Total	19			

*Note. 1. Beijing and Chongqing are municipalities rather than provinces; Shenzhen is a special administrative area rather than a province. 2. Those students who are currently studying in the UK are given English pseudonyms.

5.3.3 Data analysis

Data analysis started as the data collection was underway. After each interview, I carefully listened to the recording and made a brief note of the participant's main viewpoints for reference purposes. All interviews were transcribed in English straightaway. I made a special effort to edit the English translation by listening to the Chinese original recording repeatedly in order to reflect as closely as possible the language the informants themselves used.

The English transcripts were analysed by moving back and forth between the data and categories of meaning which roughly followed the interview guidelines. The interpretation of the informant's account was cautiously tested against the context of the whole transcript in addition to being loyal to the meaning residing in the single sentence. The intended meaning was often checked by clarification questions during the interview. In other few cases, whenever inconsistency or ambiguity arose during the process of transcription, I returned to the interviewees for validation after the interview through telephone conversations. Email exchanges were also occasionally

⁸⁴ The demarcation is based on where the participant finished his or her secondary education rather than college education.

used to confirm the accuracy of my interpretation of learners' interview narrative accounts when there was a necessity.

An essential principle followed in the analysis of the data was that the informants' statements are not taken as true or false, but rather as 'displays of their perspectives on the issue at hand' (Silverman, 2001: 112). As already mentioned, the focus of the study is an emic perspective of the evaluation of text memorisation as a learning practice.

5.4 Learners' perceptions of the use of text memorisation in English learning

This section is organised according to significant themes which were either informed by the interview questions or emerged from the analysis of the data with respect to the learner-participants' perceptions of their own experiences of using text memorisation in English learning. In the citations I make of the interview data in this chapter (and throughout the thesis), the coding begins with the participant's name (anonymised in a way I can recognise). The pseudonym is followed by the identity of the participant, i.e. a teacher-participant (*TP*) or learner-participant (*LP*) and the educational level s/he was in (*JH* for Junior High, *SH* for Senior High and *U* for university).

5.4.1 Perceptions of potential problems with text memorisation

As was reviewed in 2.2.2.1 and 2.2.2.3, western scepticism about the role of memorisation in language learning may largely be based on the following assumptions: (1) memorisation is not different from rote-learning or rote-memorisation; (2) memorisation impairs creative thinking. In this section, I examine the Chinese conception of text memorisation vis-à-vis these two issues as reflected in the evidence of statements collected from interview participants.

5.4.1.1 Text memorisation and understanding

The retrospective data regarding the role of memorisation and understanding shows the participants' unanimous emphasis on the need for understanding prior to memorisation. The following comments are rather typical:

3754

3755 *I must understand the meaning before learning text by heart. ... I have to first*
3756 *of all, get to know the meaning. (Huangpu, LP, JH)*

3757

3758 *I have to understand the meaning of what I'll commit to memory before*
3759 *reciting passages. I cannot memorise the text if I don't understand the*
3760 *meaning. (Zhibiao, LP, U, in Appendix 5)*

3761

3762 *How can one rote-memorise many texts without understanding. I think it's*
3763 *impossible. (Hongying, TP, U, in Appendix 6)*

3764

3765 It appears that understanding is regarded as a necessary prelude to memorisation of
3766 text, thus confirming Marton et al.'s (1996: 77) supposition that Chinese students may
3767 be 'memorising what is understood'. The picture of Chinese learners, however, is far
3768 from being this simple. The participants' universal negative attitude towards 'rote
3769 learning' does not mean it does not also exist in their learning practice for certain
3770 reasons. For example, one participant reported:

3771

3772 *It [rote learning] is not a good way, of course. I do look the new words up in*
3773 *the glossary at the beginning. But when I run out of time, I have no choice but*
3774 *rote-memorise [without understanding the meaning of the new word].*
3775 *(Huangpu, LP, JH)*

3776

3777 Another showed his tolerance of the practice that one memorises first and gradually
3778 understands later⁸⁵. He relates it to the traditional Chinese literacy education:

3779

3780 *Think of our ancestors learning Chinese classics like Sanzijing. At the*
3781 *beginning, they surely couldn't understand what they were reciting⁸⁶. But they*
3782 *naturally understand it later and use it flexibly. (Xujia, LP, U)*

317 85 As was already mentioned in Chapter 2 (see 2.2.2.1), apart from 'memorisation that succeeds
318 understanding', there also exists the type of 'memorisation that precedes understanding' which
319 means, the learner rote-memorise in the first instance in order to understand later (Marton, et al.,
320 2005).

321 86 It was said that boys of wealthy families in started their literacy education as early as the age of
322 three using three texts books one of which is *Sanzijing* (see 1.1.1.1).

3783

3784 These accounts suggest that the Chinese conceptions of memorisation in relation to
3785 understanding are complex. One thing that is certain from my data, however, is that
3786 memorisation is never thought meaningful without being connected to understanding,
3787 whether before or after memorisation⁸⁷. Rote learning or ‘*si ji yin bei*’ in the sense of
3788 ‘the mere act of memorising without proper understanding’ (*Oxford English*
3789 *Dictionary*) is never viewed positively by the participants in my study. This finding is
3790 not surprising for anyone who had experience of being educated in China because ‘*si*
3791 *ji yin bei*’ [literally meaning ‘dead and inflexible memorisation’], as was already
3792 mentioned in Chapter 2 (see 2.2.2.3), is a notoriously deficient and backward learning
3793 method unanimously condemned in Chinese education and rejected by high achieving
3794 Chinese students and teacher educators.

3795

3796 Previous studies on Chinese learners, however, have reported the frequent mention of
3797 the use of ‘rote learning’ [*si ji ying bei*] as an important part of memorisation (Jiang &
3798 Smith, 2009) and positive beliefs about rote learning held by Chinese learners (X.-P.
3799 Li, 2005). The discrepancy may be attributable to the fact that the previous studies
3800 focus respectively on the Chinese learners’ overall strategy use and vocabulary
3801 learning strategies in English learning while my study concentrates exclusively on the
3802 practice of text memorisation. Memorising a text may involve quite different
3803 techniques from those required in memorising individual vocabulary items. Perhaps,
3804 deprivation of initial understanding makes text memorisation much more difficult
3805 than vocabulary memorisation. Many participants doubted the possibility of
3806 committing a text to memory without a reasonable degree of prior understanding. For
3807 instance, one interrogated, ‘*How can one learn a text by heart easily without*
3808 *understanding [its meaning]?*’ (*Lijia, LP, JH*) Another simply related his better
3809 performance in memorising texts to his initial understanding: ‘*I can only do this*
3810 *[memorising a text efficiently] after listening very carefully in the class and*
3811 *understanding its meaning and the grammar involved in the text ...*’ (*Yangkun, LP, JH,*
3812 *in Appendix 5*). This also validates the interview data from a previous study: ‘Reciting
3813 a text can be done by firstly looking through the overall structure and internal links of
3814 meaning. This initial understanding makes memorisation much easier’ (Interviewee 2

323 87 The above excerpt expressing permissiveness on understanding after memorisation is the only
324 case in my data.

quoted in Jiang & Smith, 2009: 293). Thus, Marton et al.'s (1996) notion of understanding helping memorization is verified by the data in this study.

5.4.1.2 Text memorisation and creativity

An interesting observation made is learners' perception that text memorisation is not in any way linked with creativity, as in this response: '*Learning texts by heart discourages creativity? Does it have something to do with creativity?*' (Huangpu, LP, JH).

The perception is not uncommon in my data. Creativity seems to be the last thing to be connected to language learning more broadly:

I don't think there is as important an issue of creativity in language learning as in other science disciplines. You have to keep to the rules or idiomatic usage of the language you are learning. You obviously cannot create a new rule yourself, can you? (Hongying, TP, U, in Appendix 6)

Moreover, learners believe that creativity should not be a big concern in learning a foreign language before a considerable amount of memorisation has been achieved. Instead, text memorisation is viewed as the foundation of creativity, which was expressed in the following remarks:

I think creativity can be developed only after you memorise a lot of stuff. If you don't have anything stored in your mind, where does creativity come from? It's just like 'the spring without water'. (Lixia, LP, U)

This may serve as a useful starting point to explore Chinese understanding of creativity in language learning. The Chinese conception, as I interpret it, seems to be that although creativity does not necessarily emerge from a large amount of memorisation of basics, it can never be achieved without the mastery of the latter. Thus, basic skill training is viewed as an important precursor leading to creative use of language. Memorisation of texts, for many Chinese learners, is one such kind of basic training, which means to lay a solid foundation for later flexible use of

language. Responding to my question as to whether text memorisation limits one's creativity, a participant argues:

Text memorisation, in my opinion, will not limit our creative thinking. It may facilitate our creativity instead. Don't we Chinese have an idiom going like 'competent housewife can be baffled by cooking without rice'? How can she cook without rice however competent the housewife is? ... Let me give you an extreme example. Let's suppose there are two people, one has just memorised the basics of English, the other has memorised many passages. Who do you think is more proficient or creative? The latter, of course. Certain stuff becomes subconscious after you memorise many things. He may internalise or systematise all those memorised materials and create his own sentences.

(Rock, LP, U)

Interestingly, learning through memorising texts was felt to be facilitating flexible use of language:

I develop a kind of my own feeling of language through learning texts by heart. As a result, I can use English flexibly and creatively. On the contrary, the latter way [learning grammar and individual words] lacks flexibility.

(Lixia, LP, U)

Another participant rejects the assumption that text memorisation stifles one's creative use of language as the practice implicitly encourages 'language re-use'⁸⁸:

Learning by heart doesn't equate copying other's stuff, but imitating them. ... It should not be considered as discouragement of the students' creativity. I'm not copying all that I've committed to memory - it's obviously impossible - I make use of the phrases and expressions to construct my own sentences.

(Yangkun, LP, JH, in Appendix 5)

⁸⁸ The term 'language re-use' was first adopted by Flowerdew & Li (2007) as an alternative to plagiarism (here exclusively referring to the taking of others' words, not ideas) in scientific writing. Some scholars (e.g. Matalene, 1985) attributed Chinese students' language re-use to conventions of Chinese traditional literacy where memorisation of classic and model texts is strongly emphasized. This issue is, however, beyond the scope of discussion of the thesis.

3879

3880 Further argument for this idea is found in the following comment made by a cheerful
3881 supporter of the use of text memorisation in language learning:

3882

3883 *My experience is that reading or memorising more can, on the contrary,*
3884 *facilitate your creativity. At the beginning, we of course, have to imitate*
3885 *others. How can one be creative at the very beginning? It is true in doing*
3886 *everything. We imitate until we reach a certain degree to allow us to create.*
3887 *(Jake, LP, U, in Appendix 5)*

3888

3889 Therefore, memorising texts is viewed as a process of imitation of praiseworthy
3890 models which, when internalised through repetition, will gradually and eventually add
3891 to the flexibility and creative of language use. The statement, however, is implicitly
3892 based on the prerequisite that the learner memorises with active thinking. This is aptly
3893 summarised by an informant:

3894

3895 *It [the issue of creativity] is not a problem caused by text memorisation itself,*
3896 *but an issue of whether you think or not. My point is that text memorisation is*
3897 *definitely necessary, because you have nothing to build on or have no*
3898 *foundation if you don't memorise. But the result of memorisation can be*
3899 *different between those who know how to 'ju yi fan san' ['get three from one'*
3900 *(literal translation), meaning 'to apply the rule learned from one example in*
3901 *different circumstances'] and those who don't. Again, it has nothing to do with*
3902 *the practice of text memorisation, but to do with your learning habit - thinking*
3903 *or without thinking. (Rock, LP, U)*

3904

3905 Similarly, another participant voiced his opinion from the view of point of 'attitude':

3906

3907 *... it also depends on your own attitude. If you memorise [texts] merely for the*
3908 *purpose of memorisation, it certainly limits your creativity. It becomes a*
3909 *closed process if you only accumulate and absorb without releasing [trying to*
3910 *use] it. The key is that we need to absorb the good stuff of others, imitate them*
3911 *and eventually make use of them in a creative manner. (Zhibiao, LP, U)*

3912

It is thus understood that, in terms of developing creativity in language use, the learner's initiative or approach to learning/memorising counts a great deal. Text memorisation as a learning tool may be much less to blame than its user if any undesirable result occurs. However, text memorisation 'has been made a whipping boy, being punished for wrongs it did not commit' (Ding, 2004: 24). A participant exhibited an intriguing viewpoint by saying: *'I prefer text memorisation to grammar learning because the former makes my use of language more flexible'* (Xuying, LP, U). Another went so far as to claim that *'...learning texts by heart is the most flexible way of learning in our nonflexible education system'* (Shuhan, LP, SH, in Appendix 5).

In addition to the potentially negative influence of textual memorisation on creative use of language, another Western worry may be this: How can one keep his/her independence of thinking since s/he commits a number of texts (written by others) to memory? Here is a relevant comment from an interviewee:

...I almost cannot recall a single text in New Concept English which I memorised before, but I'm sure I still use many structures or expressions I learned from the process of text memorisation. How can I copy the idea since I almost forget the content? Even if I can remember the ideas, I do not necessarily agree with the arguments presented in the article. My purpose is to learn the language rather than the author's ideas. (Jake, LP, U)

This position is repeatedly brought out by other participants. For example, one asserted:

Language is the object we are aiming to learn, and we consider learning by heart as a good means to help us learn. It does not suggest that we have to accept the author's idea when we try to commit a text to memory. (Tangming, TP, JH)

Some Western scholars (e.g. Maley, 1983) argue that many Chinese students wish to learn by heart what books contain because books are thought of as an embodiment of knowledge, wisdom and truth. A participant rejected the idea by saying:

3947 *Learning a text by heart doesn't by any means equate to accepting the ideas*
3948 *conveyed in the text. They are two different issues. The former is to understand*
3949 *how the language is used. Of course, I may accept those ideas that I identify*
3950 *with and quote them in my writing. For those I don't, there is no reason for me*
3951 *to accept them. (Hongying, TP, U, in Appendix 6)*
3952

3953 According to another participant, '*... learning texts by heart is actually a way of*
3954 *internalising language. It does not imply that we have to absorb the ideas or opinions*
3955 *expressed in the text'* (Xila, LP, U). If the texts of Confucius are indeed studied for the
3956 philosophical and moral content rather than for their rhetorical interest (Adamson,
3957 2004) in Chinese literacy education, the foreign language learners' motivation for the
3958 practice of text memorisation in modern situations may thus need to be re-examined.
3959

3960 In sum, for different potential problems with the practice of text memorisation seen
3961 through western spectacles, the attitude of the participants in this study is clear-cut.
3962 First, unlike word memorisation, text memorisation is not by any means rote-learning
3963 as it is viewed as extremely difficult (if possible at all) without preceding
3964 understanding. Second, memorisation of considerable amount of textual materials will
3965 not stifle one's creativity, whether this is understood as the original use of the
3966 language or development of ideas.
3967
3968

3969 **5.4.2 Perceptions of benefits of the practice of text memorisation**

3970

3971 Many of the learners' perceptions mentioned above are apparently tinted with cultural
3972 influence. It should not be surprising that the values and perceptions of learning of the
3973 members of a culture have been influenced to a considerable extent by the values and
3974 perceptions that they have commonly experienced within their sociocultural group
3975 when they enter formal education (Littlewood, 1999). This does not mean, however,
3976 that they have been passively moulded by these values or conceptions and therefore
3977 unable to make their own judgement or reflection.
3978

3979 The overwhelming majority of the participants (see Appendix 4) expressed positive
3980 views on the use of text memorisation in English learning. They offered various

reasons why the practice had been beneficial to their English learning. The first concerns the cultivation of the so-called ‘sense of language’, a pragmatic understanding of which can be found in the participants’ accounts:

One thing that I felt especially beneficial from learning texts by heart is that I could choose the right answer in the multiple-choice section without second thought. I didn’t know why, but I just made the right choice. This is the effect that can never be achieved by applying grammatical analysis. ... I guess it is about what people often call ‘language sense’. (Xujia, LP, U)

‘Language sense’ is a literal translation of its Chinese equivalent ‘yuguan’. ‘Language sense’ or ‘feel for the language’ is not a new term for Chinese learners (cf. Ding, 2007; Jiang & Smith, 2009) although the definition can vary from person to person. It was also mentioned in a recent study that ‘... the participants found them [memorising textbook texts, English essays, speeches and song lyrics] useful because they helped them internalise different ways of expressing themselves and gave them a feel for the English language’ (Gao, 2007a: 100). The concept originates from a German word ‘Sprachgefühl’ whose English explanation is as follows (*Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*):

- (1) sensibility to conformity with or divergence from the established usage of a language
- (2) a feeling for what is linguistically effective or appropriate

Intangible as it may appear, the ‘sense of language’ may be noticed at some point by most language users. It is analogous to intuition invoked in dealing with grammaticality judgment tasks. Although it is largely tacit and inaccessible to consciousness, such sense has to be built on considerable language experiences. In the case of Chinese students who claim that they develop a sense of language through learning texts by heart, the subtle feeling for language might be an implicit abstraction and systematisation of language rules based on a reasonable amount of input (i.e. texts memorised). The gradual development of language sense involves, quoting an informant, ‘*progressing from a quantitative change to a qualitative change*’ (Hongying, TP, U, in Appendix 6). One student offered an interesting analogy: ‘*What*

4015 *we eat is rice, but what is transformed is glucose* (Shuhan, LP, SH, in Appendix 5).

4016 The cultivation of 'language sense' through memorisation, according to a college
4017 student, seems to be a long-term task which should not be omitted even at tertiary
4018 level: *'In college, it is important to learn many texts by heart as this is essential to*
4019 *develop a sense of language'* (Tengjing, LP, U).

4020

4021

4022 The second reason given by the learners is that text memorisation relates to what they
4023 call 'forced learning':

4024

4025 *It [text memorisation] is a forced learning. You have to consciously put all*
4026 *stuff into your mind [when memorising texts]. ... If you just listen [to English]*
4027 *or speak to someone [in English], you may only learn the bits that you can*
4028 *remember and miss out many other useful stuff. When we learn by heart, we*
4029 *force ourselves to memorise all sentences. It's learning with definite purpose.*
4030 *(Eli, LP, U)*

4031

4032 Forced learning, or in academic terms, 'conscious learning' seems to play an
4033 important role in adult learning (Takeuchi, 2003), and this is especially true in an FL
4034 context where linguistic resources do not come as easily as they do in the SL context.
4035 One may wonder why memorisation should be stressed at all, given our experience
4036 that retention comes naturally when we are involved in the right way with enough
4037 samples of the language. Natural retention, however, 'places a limit on how much the
4038 student can get in a course of fixed length' (Stevick, 1982: 68). Moreover, different
4039 from real-time communication, text memorisation frees the learners from the pressure
4040 of spontaneous interaction, which may enable them to notice new forms and
4041 eventually incorporate them into their linguistic system. It has been reported from
4042 prior research (Ding 2007) that the practice of text memorisation enhances noticing
4043 and rehearsal, a viewpoint with which an interviewee showed agreement:

4044

4045 *You can learn the details of the language as the text is ready at any time and it*
4046 *is an off-line process. But listening [to English from radio or TV] can only*
4047 *allow you to know the outline or rough idea of what they are talking about.*

4048 *You have no chance to learn the language per se including the sentence*
4049 *structures they use. After all, we don't have the capacity to snatch all that we*
4050 *need to know in that short time, and even worse, it is unlikely that you know*
4051 *everything they are talking about. (Eli, LP, U)*

4052

4053 The third oft-raised comment concerns the building of confidence or a sense of
4054 achievement owing to being able to learn a text by heart. I found the following
4055 narrative especially interesting:

4056

4057 *I went to an English corner on campus when I was a sophomore. ... One day, I*
4058 *approached the most fluent speaker who always showed impatience in talking*
4059 *with me because of my hesitating English. I offered to discuss with him about*
4060 *such topics as intellectual copyright and laid-off workers. He was shocked by*
4061 *my incessant speaking with sensible arguments while he was at a loss to find*
4062 *appropriate English words to express himself. ... But he never knew that I had*
4063 *just memorised some episodes from China Daily⁸⁹ and poured them out to him.*
4064 *(Xiaodong, LP, U)*

4065

4066 During the interview, this participant used the word ‘*shuang*’ (a Chinese catchword
4067 among young people, meaning ‘feel super-good’) to describe his exaltation upon the
4068 incident. We should not underestimate the psychological impact of this dramatic
4069 episode on the learner in terms of his motivation. Learning to speak a foreign
4070 language is a psychologically challenging process, especially for adult learners who
4071 are conscious of their self-image. This challenge is furthered when the learner is
4072 brought up in a social context where loss of face constitutes a ‘real dread affecting the
4073 nervous system ego more strongly than the physical fear’ (Hu, 1944: 50; see also
4074 Brick and Wen 2003):

4075

4076 They fear looking ridiculous; they fear the frustration coming from a listener’s
4077 blank look, showing that they have failed to communicate; they fear the
4078 danger of not being able to take care of themselves; they fear the alienation of

330 89 An English newspaper published in China.

not being able to communicate and thereby get close to other human being.
(Beebe 1983: 40)

These above-listed fears are probably all down to a feeling of inferiority regarding their linguistic competence. The practice of text memorisation was seen to help the learner to relieve the sense of inadequacy and build self-confidence:

I feel happy after I memorise something because I feel proud of myself being able to do it. I especially possess a sense of achievement when I perform better than my classmates [in classroom interaction]. The feeling that I'm better than others [in speaking English] motivates me to learn more texts by heart. I enjoy the process most of the time because I can get something out of it. (Zhibiao, LP, U, in Appendix 5)

Purposeful memorisation may or may not enable one to speed up his/her progress in leaning, but at least it may help learners to 'sound more confident' (Duong, 2006) or make them feel they are stepping forward whenever they have memorised a bit of material. A sense of attainment or satisfaction is thus achieved. This may be taken as an advantage compared with relying only on natural retention as result of exposure to enough samples of the language, which is theoretically ideal, but for many people, especially adult learners, also means very slow improvement which means discouragement and frustration (Stevick, 1982). What is more, the psychological satisfaction gained from text memorisation can be from external sources, as in the comment made by a younger learner: *'I don't think it's boring. I feel contented when my parents praise me for doing a good job [in recitation]'* (Lijia, LP, JH).

In addition to reporting the general ways in which text memorisation helps, the participants also offered particular reasons why the practice facilitates their language learning. First and foremost, learning by heart helps to learn useful phrases, collocations, sentence structures and grammar. The following comments are typical:

I get to know the sentence patterns through learning texts by heart, therefore, I understand the grammar (Chengcheng, LP, JH, in Appendix 5)

4113 *It helps with fixed collocations, phrases, sentence structures and grammar.*
4114 *(Xiaoqing, LP, SH)*
4115

4116 *It helps me learn phrases and sentence patterns. It also helps with grammar.*
4117 *(Lixia, LP, U)*
4118

4119 It is my personal experience that it is hard to accurately recall the texts which were
4120 memorised the other day, let alone a week ago and this was unanimously confirmed
4121 by the participants in the interview study. It is conceivable that they can usually retain
4122 in their memory sentences or mere phrases and sentence patterns. This is despite the
4123 apparently contradictory fact that learners are initially intended to memorise the
4124 whole text. Realising the fact that text memorisation eventually leads to the retention
4125 of set phrases, one participant raised the following question: *'Why do we bother to*
4126 *memorise the whole text rather than simply committing to memory phrases and*
4127 *expressions if the latter does the same job?'* (Lijia, LP, JH). My speculation is: textual
4128 material may be in a better position than fragmented phrases, borrowing Cook's
4129 (1994: 138) words, to 'give the mind something to work on, so that gradually, if one
4130 wishes, they may yield up both their grammar and their meaning'.
4131

4132 This process is reported by many participants saying *'It [text memorisation] really*
4133 *helps a lot in terms of grammar and sentence structure'* (Yunpeng, LP, U). An early-
4134 stage learner also commented: *'I usually refer the newly-learned grammar back to the*
4135 *sentence in the text I have memorised and try to understand its usage in the context'*
4136 *(Yangkun, LP, JH, in Appendix 5)*. The practice was thought to *'help understand the*
4137 *delicacy of the grammar that has been taught'* (Yangke, TP, SH) because
4138

4139 *Only through text or dialogue can you understand how foreigners express*
4140 *certain ideas. It is useless if you memorise some disorganised stuff like*
4141 *individual words or phrases without knowing how they are actually used.*
4142 *(Yangke, TP, SH)*
4143

4144 As a result, learning texts by heart becomes *'learning the whole contents and system'*
4145 *(Yangkun, LP, JH, in Appendix 5)*, a view shared by a successful Chinese learner who
4146 commented that once textual materials are memorised, '... they become part of you,

the sentence structures, the set phrases, and the new vocabulary' (Chen Hua, quoted in Y.-Q. Gu, 2003: 94). Thus, the learners' perception of text memorisation found in the study confirms analogous interview data in previous research: 'By doing so (trying to memorise texts), vocabulary and grammar would not be a problem' (interviewee 26, quoted in Jiang, 2008: 131).

Moreover, text memorisation was perceived to be especially helpful in terms of speaking and/or writing:

I found my oral English improves after memorising texts. (Yixiao, LP, JH)

It helps with writing besides the sentence structure and the grammar. You can construct a sentence by imitating the sentence structure in the texts. (Jingyu, LP, JH)

Learning texts by heart especially helps with speaking and writing. (Xiaofeng, LP, U)

The more texts I learn by heart, the more comfortable I feel with speaking and writing. (Yangkun, LP, JH, in Appendix 5)

I found my English greatly improved after the process [of text memorisation], especially writing and speaking. (Jake, LP, U, in Appendix 5)

It seems that the practice of text memorisation helps the learners most with the 'productive' skills as far as the 'four skills' are concerned. A similar perception was also reported by other Chinese students in previous research. For instance, commenting on the role of 'reading aloud' – an accompanying practice with memorising texts among Chinese learners, a student states:

Reading aloud from model essays ... familiarises students with the rules for combining words into sentences and at last into whole essays The aesthetic patterns absorbed from a lot of reading will work their way naturally into students' writing. (Wang Kui, quoted in Parry, 1998: 87-88)

4181

4182 Two different ways in which text memorisation contributes to language production
4183 were mentioned in my data. The first is about efficiency in writing and speaking.
4184 Memorised texts are perceived to be serving as a source from which the ready-made
4185 materials are available for prompt use:

4186

4187 *When I'm translating or writing an article, the sentences just automatically*
4188 *come out of my mind. (Lixia, LP, U)*

4189

4190 *If you memorise a lot of stuff, you may find some expressions flow out of your*
4191 *mouth. (Rock, LP, U)*

4192

4193 The feeling resonates with that reported by the interviewee in Stevick's study: 'I just
4194 have countless patterns sort of swimming around in my head' (Bert, quoted in
4195 Stevick, 1989: 30).

4196

4197 A participant further remarked:

4198

4199 *... they [memorised texts] are stored in your mind and can be accessible*
4200 *immediately in need. There are many ready-made sentences or expressions*
4201 *there for your use. ... We can take advantage of the memorised stuff without*
4202 *starting from scratch. (Hongying, TP, U, in Appendix 6)*

4203

4204 Thus, prior storage of language samples through text memorisation is considered to
4205 make for 'economy of effort' and to speed up language processing in real-time
4206 communication (see Sinclair, 1991; Skehan, 1998 for more discussion from a
4207 psycholinguistic perspective). One may argue that many sentences in memorised
4208 material are much less likely to come up in real-life conversation, but, according to
4209 speculation by Stevick (1982: 68), they 'may still serve as handy models for what
4210 students may want to say in later years':

4211

4212 A student whose memory places at his disposal 'Can you tell me where the
4213 snack bar is?' will be less likely in real life to say the incorrect 'Can you tell
4214 me where is the post office?' or the correct but abrupt 'Where is the post

4215 office?’ And he’ll probably come out with ‘Can you tell me where the post
4216 office is?’ a lot more smoothly than he could have otherwise. (Stevick, 1982:
4217 68)

4218

4219 The second way in which text memorisation benefits production is thought to be the
4220 increased accuracy in output: ‘... *borrowing memorised structures or expressions*
4221 *[means one] is less likely to make grammatical errors, especially in real-time oral*
4222 *communication*’ (Hongying, TP, U, in Appendix 6). This notion had been implicitly
4223 included in Stevick’s (1982: 68) justifications for the use of textual memorisation (as
4224 opposed to retention that comes naturally) in language teaching and learning:
4225 ‘Naturally, ... means in the short run at least that the degree of correctness in speaking
4226 and writing will be reduced’.

4227

4228 Another reason deals with being able to ‘*memorise new words more firmly*’ (Yixiao,
4229 LP, JH). This is because memorising texts enables one to understand the meaning of a
4230 word in a particular context:

4231

4232 *A word usually has several meanings. You can easily memorise the particular*
4233 *meaning of that word in that particular context and keep it for a long time. If*
4234 *you memorise the word and its meanings in an isolated way, you forget it the*
4235 *next day. (Huangpu, LP, JH)*

4236

4237 Moreover, the usage of the new word is incorporated in the text:

4238

4239 *If you only memorise isolated words, you don’t know how to use them. There is*
4240 *situation for you to understand where and how words are used if you learn*
4241 *them through text memorisation. (Jake, LP, U, in Appendix 5)*

4242

4243 This may best explain the perceived benefit of memorising texts as opposed to
4244 vocabulary lists. Text memorisation seemed to be more favoured as the overall
4245 meaning of the text and the way words are used in particular sentences helped sustain
4246 the memory of the vocabulary. It also accords with the data collected from another
4247 Chinese learner in a previous interview-based study: ‘In fact, remembering words in
4248 the text makes them difficult to forget’ (Interviewee 8, quoted in Jiang & Smith, 2009:

292). This idea chimes in with a Chinese linguist's remark, cited in 1.1.2.2, and repeated below:

Learning texts by heart is extremely helpful to me. It works much better than memorising individual words in the sense that memorising on the basis of whole passage or at least whole sentence enables us to better understand word meaning, ... (Zhao, 2002: 11; Chinese original)

It is thus agreed that memorising textual materials, whether dialogues or monologues, affords the learner an opportunity to retain a word or phrase along with the context in which it is used so that s/he may obtain a deeper understanding of the vocabulary item, rather than memorising it in an isolated way.

Summing up the reasons offered by the participants why they considered that learning texts by heart had been helpful with their foreign language learning, they centred around two vantage grounds. The first is concerned with the broad ways in which learning texts by heart benefits foreign language learning. Notably, the participants mentioned the cultivation of 'language sense', the facilitation of conscious learning and promotion of self-confidence and a sense of achievement. The second vantage ground around which the discussion was carried out is on specific reasons why text memorisation contributes to language development. These reasons were related to three aspects: (1) Linguistically, it improves the learning of phrases, sentence structures and grammar; (2) In terms of language skills, it especially helps with writing and speaking; and (3) It assists vocabulary learning by enhancing the understanding of new words.

5.4.3 General perception

Of all the participants, only two expressed disbelief or uncertainty about the usefulness of text memorisation in foreign language learning. One showed her aversion to this practice by saying, *'It's definitely rote-learning, nothing different from the ancient system of imperial examination'* (Yuting, LP, JH). Part of the reason of her distaste can be found in the following account:

4283 *I feel it [text memorisation] really troublesome because I don't know where I*
4284 *should start to ask questions. Even worse, some words are so long that I'm*
4285 *unable to pronounce them properly, let alone learning them by heart.*

4286

4287 It seems that the difficulties she experienced in memorising text made her resistant to
4288 the practice. The other one hesitated to sanction this practice simply because it was
4289 one of many methods she had tried briefly but which proved fruitless: *'It [text*
4290 *memorisation] seems not working for me. ... I tried many other methods, but they did*
4291 *not work better.'* (Ema, LP, U)

4292

4293 Despite the very few negative voices, the participants' perceptions of the use of text
4294 memorisation in English learning are overwhelmingly positive. The feeling at times
4295 appears to be so strong that it has led some participants to go so far as to claim:

4296

4297 *It [text memorisation] should be more or less helpful in every aspect of*
4298 *English learning. I cannot think of any way in which it does not help. It's*
4299 *simply a matter of degree.* (Chengcheng, LP, JH, in Appendix 5)

4300

4301 *It is such a good method that it benefits me in every aspect.* (Yangkun, LP, JH,
4302 *in Appendix 5)*

4303

4304

4305 Exaggerated as these comments may appear, they suggest that the identification with
4306 the practice might be prevalent among Chinese learners, even though the data were
4307 collected from a relatively small opportunistic sample. I noticed in a recent study
4308 (Gao, 2007a) on Chinese learners⁹⁰ strategy use in learning English that many
4309 participants mentioned the use of textual memorisation and found it useful. For
4310 instance, one reported:

4311

331 90 This is a group of relatively successful learners who were pursuing their first degree in a
332 leading English-medium university in Hongkong after finishing their secondary education in
333 mainland China.

4312 We had to memorise and recite every text to him [the teacher]. ... I think that
4313 memorisation was good because it kept you speaking English and reading
4314 English to maintain the feel of English. (Liu, quoted in Gao, 2007a: 123)
4315

4316 Quite a few participants in my study expressed their conviction of the overall
4317 helpfulness of text memorisation to English learning. Take the following extract, for
4318 example:
4319

4320 *Sometimes I think I need someone to push me to do some memorisation. I*
4321 *believe if I learn by heart a bit every day, I can improve my English quickly. I*
4322 *really regret that I didn't keep on learning by heart in senior high. (Xiaofeng,*
4323 *LP, U)*
4324

4325 This belief was even held by those who do not like this practice:
4326

4327 *I'd like to use 'bitter melon' to describe this method [text memorisation]. I*
4328 *didn't like bitter melon at all when I was a kid because of its bitter taste. My*
4329 *grandma told me that this stuff can cool one's body. I forced myself to eat*
4330 *bitter melon every day because my body easily got hot and I often had a nose*
4331 *bleeding. It did miracle eventually – I found myself no longer suffer from nose*
4332 *bleeding. I prefer to liken learning texts by heart to bitter melon. I personally*
4333 *don't like learning texts by heart, but I never doubt its usefulness to English*
4334 *learning. (Xujia, LP, U)*
4335

4336 A more emotional description was provided by a participant, who said,
4337

4338 *I felt unhappy when the teachers in high school forced us to memorise texts.*
4339 *But now I am really grateful to them. ... My Mom hired a private English*
4340 *teacher for me and she required me to learn texts by heart. She checked*
4341 *regularly. I really hated her at that time. But now I should thank her for doing*
4342 *so. I found many of the articles she forced me to recite were very helpful to my*
4343 *later study, especially when I was taking part in some English speaking*
4344 *contests. (Lixia, LP, U)*
4345

These participants gave a positive rating to the practice although they also emphasised the painful process they had to endure in memorising text. The mixed feeling about the ‘bitter melon’ experience has confirmed the result produced by an analogous prior research (Ding, 2004) which targeted a group of advanced learners of English from a top university in China. Similarly, text memorisation was compared by a participant in Ding’s study to ‘good medicine that tastes bitter’, a Chinese idiom referring to hard, painful experience that brings a desirable outcome. Having been convinced of the value of text memorisation as a ‘good medicine’, albeit not tasty, a teacher made the following comments which are consonant with the student’s account mentioned above:

*Sometimes we have to compel them to do this [learning texts by heart]. ...
Some students told me later, ‘If you had not forced us to do this, we could not have made the progress we have now. In retrospect, you were doing the right thing’. (Jiean, TP, U)*

Many other participants, however, see their psychological experience with text memorisation as being changing or dynamic rather than static. Take the following extract for example:

Interviewer: Isn’t it a boring and painful experience?

Suhan (LP, SH): ... The process is painful for some people, but not for others. For me it was painful at the beginning because I don’t have a good memory. And at the initial stage, it is mostly mechanical memorisation as you lack for basic knowledge of how that language is used. But it gradually takes less time to memorise as you find a sort of feeling ... memorisation is thus made much easier.

Interviewer: So it is ‘thorny’ anyway?

Suhan: Not exactly. It is a process of evolving from struggle to relaxation. It is not painful all the way.

Perhaps the most important factor in determining whether people succeed in this task is their attitude toward the undertaking (Stevick, 1982), as in this comment:

4380 *It [persistence in text memorisation] depends on individual choice. If it is a*
4381 *painful thing for you and you don't think it's worth doing, how can you invest*
4382 *so much of your spare time doing this? And you have to persevere in for three*
4383 *years. It's obviously impossible. If you see the value of this activity and think it*
4384 *makes sense to you, you can do this. Otherwise, I bet you cannot persevere at*
4385 *this for three months, let alone three years. (Zhikai, LP, U)*

4386

4387 This participant is an enthusiast of text memorisation who had been persevering at
4388 learning by heart the texts in *New Concept English* for three years and eventually
4389 excelled over his peers⁹¹. He probably speaks for those who 'consider memorisation to
4390 be hard work, mildly onerous, but something they can do if they have sufficient
4391 reason to' (Stevick, 1982: 69).

4392

4393 Although a big part of the data in my study project a metaphor of the practice of text
4394 memorisation as 'bitter melon', implying the unenjoyable process they have to
4395 endure, some participants expressed a different feeling about the practice. Text
4396 memorisation did not bother them at all:

4397

4398 *I do lots of [text] memorisation even at college. I never feel the process of text*
4399 *memorisation 'painful'. I like English very much. It's not painful for me at all.*
4400 *... No one forced me to do so. (Jake, LP, U, in Appendix 5)*

4401

4402 *I don't think learning texts by heart is boring. On the contrary, it's very*
4403 *interesting for me. (Yankun, LP, JH, in Appendix 5)*

4404

4405 *I don't see it a painful process. Maybe I'm majoring in art and I have good*
4406 *memory. (Xiaofeng, LP, U)*

4407

4408 *[Although grammar learning has its advantage,] I still prefer text*
4409 *memorisation which is more interesting and effective to me. (Lixia, LP, U)*

334 91 As a major in Forensic Science, he approved himself more capable than many English majors
335 in terms of English language ability. By the time he was at the end of his junior year, he had the
336 experience of working as an interpreter for an international business exhibition show, an education
337 assistant in the education section of British Council, a part-time English teacher in a famous
338 private language training institution and recently in a foreign educational corporate.

4410

4411 *I'd like to memorise more good articles even now if I don't have so many*
4412 *trivial things to deal with. I find it an enjoyable job. (Wenna, TP, JH, in*
4413 *Appendix 6)*

4414

4415 It appeared that text memorisation not only has not bothered these participants at all,
4416 but makes a pleasant experience for them. Recitation sometimes becomes the
4417 realisation of the need for satisfying personal desire: '*Some texts are really beautiful*
4418 *and connect to me so that I just want to memorise them. That's it.*' (Jiean, TP, U). This
4419 would confirm the observation made by Stevick (1982: 69): 'Some people find
4420 memorizing easy, and may even do it just for fun'. Indeed, some people 'memorise
4421 things *inadvertently* after hearing them a few times' (ibid; emphasis original):

4422

4423 *The easier it feels the more articles I memorise. I naturally memorise it after*
4424 *reading aloud a few times if it is a short paragraph. (Jake, LP, U, in Appendix*
4425 *5)*

4426

4427 My interpretation of the facility with textual memorisation felt by this type of learners
4428 is that they are usually intrinsically motivated, that is to say, they have a love affair
4429 with English. In the words of a successful Chinese learner in a previous study, "Not
4430 that I wanted to recite them; they get memorised after you read them a few times"
4431 (Chen Hua, quoted in Y.-Q. Gu, 2003: 94).

4432

4433 Another participant just felt that text memorisation was a way of learning she was
4434 comfortable with:

4435

4436 *It [text memorisation] makes my English learning easier. If I intend to merely*
4437 *memorise words in a list, they cannot get memorised even after much time is*
4438 *spent. If I learn the text by heart, the new words are naturally memorised as*
4439 *they are all contained in the text. ... I felt it more interesting because it*
4440 *involves your reading aloud and you hear your own pronunciation. (Xuying,*
4441 *LP, U)*

4442

This comment also lends support to the finding by Marton et al (1996) that Chinese memorisation practices were integrated with understanding and enjoyment. Although these enthusiastic practitioners of text memorisation perhaps represent only a small minority of Chinese learners who are keen in English and/or endowed with talent in learning a foreign language, their passionate comments may lead us to reconsider the issue of whether text memorisation is necessarily an anti-humanistic practice, as it has been portrayed by some Western scholars. A more important question to ask is: If it indeed makes sense to Chinese learners in particular contexts, how can the practice be made less psychologically challenging from a humanistic view of learning? I found the following comment made by a participant rather inspiring and insightful:

Students need to be guided to appreciate the beauty of language so that the process of memorisation becomes that of enjoying the delicateness of language rather than being forced to endure what they may think is pointless.
(Eli, LP, U)

Perhaps in addition to communication, language or speaking functions as ‘a source of comfort and an outlet for joy and exuberance’ (Cook, 1994: 138) which I have a strong conviction in and I believe has been experienced by many others. This perspective may help encourage us (learners and teachers) to consider how we can incorporate the pleasurable aspect of speaking into the practice of text memorisation as a learning device.

5.4.4 Particular perceptions

Realising the limited memory capacity of our human brain, I have been wondering what the point is of verbatim memorisation of textual materials since they will be soon forgotten. Most informants believe that the memorisation work is by no means meaningless even if it is impossible for the texts to be permanently retained in the brain. This attitude was reflected in what a participant reported:

I admit I’ve already forgotten what has been memorised so far, but I still don’t think it’s a waste of time. Instead, it really helps me a lot. I learned my English mostly from learning texts by heart, as it were. ... Yes, I cannot recall the

4477 *intact sentences, but those sentence patterns and expressions are retained in*
4478 *my brain. (Yangkun, LP, JH, in Appendix 5)*

4479

4480 Another informant explained more:

4481

4482 *Lijia (LP, JH): I cannot recall what I have memorised so far. There are only*
4483 *some fragments scattering in my mind.*

4484 Interviewer: Is it a waste of time, then?

4485 *Lijia: It helps at least with examinations in the short term.*

4486 Interviewer: How about in the long term?

4487 *Lijia: It should be helpful as well. Although you cannot recall the text*
4488 *verbatim, there should be something retained in your mind.*

4489 Interviewer: What is it?

4490 *Lijia: To quote a Chinese saying, 'A trail is left when a wild goose flies*
4491 *through'. This is also true of learning texts by heart. There should be certain*
4492 *trails. If I go over it, I'm sure I can pick it up again quickly.*

4493

4494 A more advanced learner who was an enthusiastic practitioner of text memorisation
4495 made it clear that forgetting what is memorised does not cause any problem for him at
4496 all:

4497

4498 *It's possible for me to forget the content, the exact sentence in the text, but the*
4499 *'inside stuff' has insinuated in my mind. Text memorisation is a process*
4500 *through which I feel I have improved my English. It has done its function or*
4501 *fulfilled its mission – I have learned what I was supposed to learn through text*
4502 *memorisation. I found my English greatly improved after the process,*
4503 *especially writing and speaking. I enlarged my vocabulary, learned*
4504 *many sentence structures and developed a sense of language. It is in fact a*
4505 *gradual process of accumulation. Retaining the texts in our memory is not our*
4506 *final purpose, improving our overall English competence is. (Jake, LP, U, in*
4507 *Appendix 5)*

4508

4509 This can be said to be one of the many interesting expressions of learning theories
4510 which benefited me in one way or another during the process of analysing data. What

4511 strikes me is not only the insightful idea conveyed in the account but his striking way
4512 of explaining the ‘mission’ and ‘purpose’ of the practice of text memorisation.

4513

4514 Another problem with text memorisation I identified through my own practice and
4515 many participants’ reports is that of its being ‘time-consuming’. However, some
4516 participants do not see it a problem because ‘*you also need to spend time if you learn*
4517 *[English] using other ways*’ (Xuying, LP, U). The following account is especially
4518 arresting for me:

4519

4520 *I would not see it as a problem. You have to invest time in doing everything.*
4521 *You can take advantage of a brief time slot in the morning and persevere at*
4522 *doing it every day. You cannot do the recitation and memorisation all day long*
4523 *as you apparently have many other things to do. You should not do recitation*
4524 *for eight hours on one particular day and fail to do it on other weekdays. The*
4525 *time should be evenly distributed to every day in small amount. So I do not see*
4526 *this practice ‘time-consuming’. It’s not about the problem of the activity of text*
4527 *memorisation, but about how to arrange time. (Jake, LP, U, in Appendix 5)*

4528

4529 The reading of the participants’ accounts enabled me to learn many things and
4530 become conscious of many others, be it cheerful acclaim or critical understanding.
4531 This participant’s reflection was also particularly impressive for me:

4532

4533 *[The limitation of text memorisation is that] the ratio of quality and price is*
4534 *not very high. You may find only several sentences are useful for you after*
4535 *memorising a whole text. (Lixia, LP, U)*

4536

4537 I was interested in this learner’s figurative manner of explaining things. This was a
4538 relatively successful⁹² learner who claimed that text memorisation had contributed a
4539 lot to her achievement in English learning and she preferred this practice to other
4540 ways of learning. Her preference for the practice did not prevent her identifying its
4541 limitations. This episode along with many other intriguing comments in this inquiry
4542 made me realise that Chinese learners, apart from being ‘pragmatic learners’ (Y.-Q.

339 92 She got 125 out of 150 in English matriculation examination and mentioned her success in
340 English speaking contests.

4543 Gu, 2003), are reflective beings with critical thinking. In addition to commenting on
4544 the strengths of the traditional practice, they also pointed out its shortfalls. For
4545 example, one learner – while commending the practice – also cast doubt on the
4546 necessity of verbatim memorisation of each sentence in a text:

4547

4548 *I'm against that some students mechanically memorise each sentence of a*
4549 *passage, including those useless or meaningless to them*⁹³. (Rock, LP, U)

4550

4551 Echoing this critique, another participant suggested:

4552

4553 *In order to maximise the benefit of text memorisation, we'd better invest more*
4554 *time and energy on those sentences that are intuitively appealing to us or the*
4555 *structures of which are worth learning.* (Xila, TP, U)

4556

4557 The participants here are drawing attention to the importance of choosing the right
4558 materials to memorise, the discussion of which can be found in Chapter 7.

4559

4560 Another result of the learners' critical reflection is that the practice was found not to
4561 be able to contribute much to fluency in real-time communication even though many
4562 learners claimed the practice of text memorisation improves their oral English (see
4563 5.4.2). These are two learners' comments on this aspect:

4564

4565 *Text memorisation may be facilitative to one's communicative competence in*
4566 *certain aspect, but it cannot be too helpful.* (Xuying, LP, U)

4567

4568 *I don't think it helps a lot with natural communication. ...You need to be put*
4569 *into practical situations to learn how to communicate.* (Shuhan, LP, SH, in
4570 *Appendix 5)*

4571

4572 It is thus realised that the practice is not a panacea in spite of its numerous reported
4573 benefits. Although many consider text memorisation as '*an indispensable way of*

341 93 By 'meaningless', according to the transcription of the interview, the informant refers to the
342 sentences whose structures and vocabulary contained are repetitive to the ones that have already
343 been memorised or are very unlikely to be used later.

learning English in Chinese context, at least now' (Jake, LP, U, in Appendix 5), some
'do not consider it the only way of learning English well' (Lixia, LP, U), and
'deliberately combine it with other learning activities that have proved useful'
(Xiaofeng, LP, U) while others emphasised the importance of creating opportunities to
'use what has been memorised' (Emma, LP, U). The key point is, according to a
participant,

... we need to smartly or efficiently use this method. ... Every method has its
strong points and weak points. It's all down to the issue of taking advantage of
the strengths and avoiding its weaknesses. (Rock, LP, U)

It seems that Chinese learners are carefully weighing up the advantages and
drawbacks of the practice and expect to make wise use of it.

5.5 Conclusion

If the most widely accepted view of learning in China is indeed that 'it is memory-
based' (Maley, 1983: 99), it is far from being 'old-fashioned', 'misguided' or even
'stupid' - at least concerning the practice of text memorisation. While many of the
perceptions emerging from the inquiry are indeed culturally-rooted and context-
bound, the benefits the learners feel text memorisation has brought to their English
learning may have contributed much to their positive rating of the practice. The study
suggests the need to pay attention to what the 'insiders' (in this case, the practitioners
of text memorisation) actually do and say before allowing us to be led by our own
preconceptions. Such initiative is expected to – especially when talking about a
practice of Chinese cultural heritage – help us to move from excessive emphasis on
culture which may, to some extent, 'result in a dismissive attitude towards Chinese
learning practice' (Q. Gu & Brookes, 2008: 338).

As is clear from the preceding discussion, many of the contributions offered by the
learners were thoughtful and well-reasoned. The Chinese learners have their own
opinions and judgment about whether and why the use of text memorisation had been
beneficial to their foreign language learning in a Chinese context. While it was
viewed by many Western scholars as 'unrewarding in learning terms' (Maley, 1983:

4608 102) if not harmful, participants' perceptions of the use of text memorisation in
4609 foreign language learning were decidedly positive. The participants perceive text
4610 memorisation as being beneficial to foreign language learning not only because it
4611 linguistically facilitates and expedites foreign language learning in a number of ways
4612 but also because this practice psychologically builds their confidence and a sense of
4613 achievement. It seems that the practice of text memorisation probably will not be
4614 eliminated in years to come, nor will it be denied by Chinese learners.

4615

4616 In the next chapter, I shall examine Chinese teachers' perceptions of the use of text
4617 memorisation in foreign language teaching.

CHAPTER 6

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE USE OF TEXT

MEMORISATION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

In this chapter, I will continue the empirical investigation, as proposed in Chapter 4, with a focus on teachers' views on the use of text memorisation as a pedagogical device. There has been a lack of empirical study of how text memorisation is perceived from the perspective of teaching, the present study therefore addresses this gap in literature by accessing the voice of a group of Chinese teachers from three educational levels.

This chapter is structured as follows: 6.1 Participants, instruments and data analysis; 6.2 Findings; and 6.3 Conclusion. Particular information concerning methodology will be briefly introduced or reiterated in section 6.1 given that the approaches to eliciting data from the teacher participants are somewhat different from that from learner participants (see Appendices 1 & 2).

6.1 Participants, interview and analysis

This section will provide detailed accounts of methodology in terms of participants, approaches to interviews and data analysis.

6.1.1 Participants

The participants in the teacher interview survey were 20 language teachers from three educational levels, i.e. junior high school, senior high school and college/university. They ranged from 24 to 65 years in age with the majority in their twenties and thirties; the average age was 35. Their experience in teaching English varied from 1 to 43 years, with an average of 11 years. At the time of the study, 7 participants were teaching in junior high schools, 5 in senior high schools and the remaining 8 were from universities. The 7 teachers at the junior high level were scattered in 6 different schools and the 5 teachers in senior high were all from different schools, while university teachers came from three institutions. All institutions which the teacher

participants worked for are located in the municipality in southwest China where the study was conducted, with the exception of three situated in three other cities⁹⁴. Among all the teachers, the vast majority were working in public (state-owned) schools or universities and only 4 were teaching in private language training schools at different educational levels. Almost all the schoolteachers came from general public schools where students are prepared to pursue a higher level of education with only one teaching in vocational school in which the students are supposed to work after graduation. Two university teachers had received their MA in foreign countries (one from Russia, the other from the UK). Another two had been studying in the US and UK respectively as a visiting scholar for one year. More detailed background information on the participants gathered by questionnaire is presented in Table 6.1.

Table 6.1 Background Information of Teacher Participants

Participants ⁹⁵	Educational	Age	Sex	<u>Teaching experience and qualification</u>		
	Level/Grades			Years	Type of school	final degree
Yuli	Junior High-3	35	F	14	Public	two-year college
Jiajie	Junior High-1	29	F	4	Public	BA
Wenna	Junior High-1	26	F	4	Public	BA
Liuxia	Junior High-1,2	24	F	3	Private	BA
Yaoqing	Junior High-2	27	F	5	Public	BA
Liangying	Junior High-3	38	F	15	Public	BA
Tangming	Junior High-2	36	F	13	Public	BA
Wangting	Senior High-1	33	F	11	Public	BA
Zhengping	Senior High-2	38	F	15	Public(vocational)	BA
Yangke	Senior High-3	38	F	15	Public	BA
Liangqing	Senior High-2	37	F	13	Public	MA
Yeli	Senior High-1,2	30	F	3	Private	BA
Hongying	university-1,3	39	F	5	Public	MA(Russia)
Peisheng ⁹⁶	university-1	65	M	38/5	Public/Private	BA
Shuqiong	university-2	37	F	15	Public	MA
Wangshu	university-2	35	F	7	Public	MA
Qingxin	university-2	35	F	6	Public	MA(UK)

⁹⁴ They are: Beihai in Guangxi Province, Zhangjiagang in Jiangsu Province and Lanzhou in Gansu Province.

⁹⁵ All names of the participants are pseudonyms.

⁹⁶ This participant had been teaching in a public university for 38 years and then moved to teach in a private university immediately after his retirement.

4683	Xiaohong	university-1	40	F	17	Public	BA
4684	Jiean	university-1,2	35	F	13	Public	MA
4685	Luyi ⁹⁷	university	24	M	1	Private	BA

4686

4687 **6.1.2 Instruments**

4688

4689 This subsection describes two instruments employed in the study on teacher group,
4690 i.e. questionnaire and interview.

4691

4692 **6.1.2.1 General Questionnaire**

4693

4694 After the teachers agreed to take part in the research, they were asked to complete the
4695 questionnaire described in Chapter 4 (see Appendix 2, Part I and II) in electronic
4696 version and return it via email. This questionnaire was designed to collect factual data
4697 on the teachers and their overall attitude towards a number of issues that I considered
4698 to be of high relevance to the target topic. It therefore constitutes an essential part of
4699 the framework set for the subsequent in-depth interview. The data from the
4700 questionnaire helped me get a rough idea of the participants' attitude before
4701 conducting individual interviews. It also allowed the participants to spend time on the
4702 more attitudinal dimensions of the issues at hand during interviews (J. Flowerdew, Li,
4703 & Miller, 1998). The questionnaire was carefully designed so that it did not bias the
4704 participants' responses in subsequent interviews (see 4.7.2.2).

4705

4706 The completion of the above-mentioned general questionnaire ahead of the actual
4707 interview also serves as a validation for participants' subsequent illustration of their
4708 position.

4709

4710 **6.1.2.2 Interviews**

4711

4712 The main method used in eliciting teacher data was the in-depth interview. The
4713 interview data were collected during two fieldwork trips to China, respectively
4714 between February to April in 2009 and February to May in 2010. The interviews were

349 ⁹⁷ This participant has been teaching English to staff working in joint-venture companies. Given
350 that the learners are all university graduates, the participant is considered to be teaching at
351 university level.

4715 conducted either through face-to-face communication or by telephone. The language
4716 used in the interviews was Standard Chinese (*Putonghua*) or the local dialect spoken
4717 in the city where the field work was carried out. The time length ranged from 30
4718 minutes to an hour or so, with one participant being interviewed twice⁹⁸. All the
4719 interviews except one⁹⁹ were recorded with high quality recorders and transcribed
4720 straightaway.

4721
4722 The interviews can be described as partially structured. I prepared a number of
4723 predetermined questions I was interested in, but the participants were also allowed
4724 considerable freedom in leading the discussion in directions which they thought were
4725 relevant, thus providing a ‘reflective’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) element of the
4726 interviews. The questions preset in the interview guide (see Appendix 5) and the way
4727 they (and the follow-up questions) were asked were designed to elicit as rich
4728 responses as possible (see Appendix 6 for data samples demonstrating the interaction
4729 between the interviewer and the interviewees). Participants were encouraged to
4730 respond to the questions at length by being invited to justify their opinions whenever
4731 appropriate. During the interviews, I posed follow-up questions by listening to the
4732 participants’ response carefully for clues as to what questions to ask next, or whether
4733 it was important to probe for additional information (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). In
4734 this regard, I greatly benefited from my own previous experience of working as a
4735 language teacher in both high school and university. As the interviewer, I played the
4736 role of providing some structure and controlling the direction of the ongoing
4737 conversation so that the interviewees covered certain key areas identified in my
4738 reading of the literature and my reflection on my personal learning and teaching
4739 experience related to current topic. Throughout all interviews, I tried not to influence
4740 what the interviewees said by cautiously phrasing my questions, but offered
4741 clarification in instances of ambiguity (Spradley, 1979)

4743 6.1.3 Analysis

352 98 The participant was interviewed for the second time because the author felt when transcribing
353 the first-round of interview that a few clarifications need to be made with the participant who
354 happened to be available.

355 99 This interviewee refused to have the interview recorded and I made notes during and
356 immediately after the interview.

4744

4745 Although the present study is essentially ‘interpretive’, the definitive themes and
4746 coding categories in qualitative study can emerge only from an examination of the
4747 data rather than being fully determined beforehand and imposed on the data (Bogdan
4748 & Biklen, 1992). In the spirit of analytic induction (ibid), I repeatedly read through
4749 the interview transcripts during and after the field work in order to identify recurrent
4750 themes and salient comments. I started from the categories that arose from the group
4751 of questions set out in the interview guide (see Appendix 5). However, as the
4752 interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee developed, new themes or
4753 sub-categories manifested themselves, hence the emergence of a large set of possible
4754 categories. Judged on their relevance to the research questions and the recurrent
4755 frequency, five main categories were finalised and became the framework for the
4756 ‘findings’ section of this chapter (see Table 6.2).

4757

4758 Table 6.2 Framework for Analysis on Interview Data

4759

- | | |
|------|---|
| 4760 | 1. Overall attitudes towards the practice of text memorisation |
| 4761 | 2. Perceived strong points of text memorisation as a teaching device |
| 4762 | 3. Attitudes towards the impact of text memorisation on creativity |
| 4763 | 4. Attitudes towards the impact of text memorisation on understanding |
| 4764 | 5. Attitudes towards the impact of text memorisation on motivation |

4765

4766

4767 6.2 Findings

4768

4769 Before elaborating on the particulars of the identified themes, it would be useful to
4770 have an overview of the teachers’ opinions by way of sketchy summary and this is
4771 shown in Table 6.3:

4772

4773 Table 6.3 Teachers’ Overall Opinions of Text Memorisation

4774 Name	opinion (using the participants’ own words)
-----------	---

4775 Yuli (TP, JH)	
--------------------	--

4776 *very effective; improve one's creative thinking rather than restraining*
4777 *it; their [the students'] interest can be increased as they are accumulating*
4778 *more and more stuff [through memorising texts]; must be used in primary and*
4779 *high school; still applicable in university, but requirements may be lowered*

4780 Jiajie (TP, JH)

4781 *essential and indispensable for beginners; will not restrain students' idea*
4782 *development; should be used even in tertiary level; keeping students' interest*
4783 *is very important*

4784 Wenna (TP, JH)

4785 *couldn't agree any more [that text memorisation is a good practice];*
4786 *extremely useful if one tries to think more and get his/her understanding*
4787 *involved; [the impact on students' interest and motivation] depends on the*
4788 *individual students; whether one is 'using his/her brain' while memorising*
4789 *really matters; should be used in college as well*

4790 Liuxia (TP, JH)

4791 *very good method; suggest my students recite as many passages as possible*
4792 *[on the condition that it does not pose a psychological burden for them]; don't*
4793 *think it will exert much influence on the students' creativity [if we teacher*
4794 *guide properly]; usable whether you are in college or in middle-ages*

4795 Yaoqing (TP, JH)

4796 *useful practice; they [students] may be motivated and have a sense of*
4797 *achievement [through memorising texts]; it is not a waste of time; we need to*
4798 *memorise more [texts] the older we become*

4799 Liangying (TP, JH)

4800 *necessary in context like Chinese where there is no language environment;*
4801 *can develop a sense of fulfilment through recitation; should not restrain*
4802 *students' idea development or creativity; should be helpful to English learning*
4803 *even in tertiary level*

4804 Tangming (TP, JH)

4805 *certainly be useful; a good means to help us learn [language]; might be more*
4806 *interesting for them [younger learners] as it [recitation] involves the*
4807 *functioning of several organs –eyes, mouth, ears and brain; don't think it is*
4808 *necessarily a good way of learning for adults*

4809 Wangting (TP, SH)

4810 *does not have much to do with exams; can be helpful to some extent in terms*
 4811 *of developing language sense; useless if one rote-memorises [the text] and*
 4812 *doesn't know how to make use of it*

4813 Zhengping (TP, SH)

4814 *good practice; encourage my students to recite more passages, but be*
 4815 *selective in materials used for memorisation; overuse may have negative*
 4816 *impact on students' interest, especially for poor students; impact on creative*
 4817 *thinking depends on the specific condition of the individual student who may*
 4818 *or may not be able to properly use what was memorised; use in college should*
 4819 *depend on personal interest*

4820 Yangke (TP, SH)

4821 *good practice; encourage my students to memorise more texts, at least read*
 4822 *aloud fluently; will not cause a problem in terms of creativity for students who*
 4823 *can learn flexibly; don't think it will kill students' interest; maybe necessary*
 4824 *for foreign language majors at tertiary level*

4825 Liangqing (TP, SH)

4826 *indispensable for students either in test-oriented education or use-oriented*
 4827 *education; probably raises their [students'] interest; facilitate their*
 4828 *[students'] creativity; necessary to continue the practice at tertiary level*

4829 Yeli (TP, SH)

4830 *rational existence in China; especially helpful at beginning stage; will not*
 4831 *restrain the students' idea development or creativity; may not necessarily*
 4832 *damage students' interest if properly used; whether to use in tertiary level*
 4833 *depends on individual students and their purposes*

4834 Hongying (TP, U)

4835 *certainly an effective way of learning foreign language; don't think it limits*
 4836 *one's creativity; excessive use might kill students' interest; of course necessary*
 4837 *to use at tertiary level*

4838 Peisheng (TP, U)

4839 *good practice; necessary at beginning stage; will not necessarily kill*
 4840 *students' interest if memorise a text selectively; does not have much to do with*
 4841 *creativity - if has, can only be facilitative to creativity; necessary practice for*
 4842 *college students in fresh year*

4843 Shuqiong (TP, U)

4844 *beginners need to start from recitation; suggest my students memorise as*
 4845 *many texts as possible; unselective or inappropriate memorisation of text*
 4846 *might kill students' interest; should continue to be used at tertiary stage*
 4847 Wangshu (TP, U)
 4848 *not sure that it is necessarily a good practice; may be necessary for*
 4849 *beginners, but not at tertiary level*
 4850 Qingxin (TP, U)
 4851 *basic training in foreign language learning; suggest my students memorise as*
 4852 *many texts as possible; should not affect their [students'] creative use of*
 4853 *language;*
 4854 Xiaohong (TP, U)
 4855 *very good learning practice; require my students to memorise paragraphs*
 4856 *stated in the textbook and check regularly; should not impact the students'*
 4857 *creativity and interest if properly used*
 4858 Jiean (TP, U)
 4859 *a very useful practice; the impact on students' creativity varies from person to*
 4860 *person; [means of learning] has less to do with students' interest than other*
 4861 *factors [like short-term outcomes]; of course can be used in college,*
 4862 *especially in the junior grades.*
 4863 Luyi (TP, U)
 4864 *very good learning activity; a necessary and first step of learning English [in*
 4865 *China], which gradually leads to creative use of language through lots of*
 4866 *practice; there is no issue concerning killing students' interest as it is*
 4867 *voluntary in university*

4869

4870

4871 **6.2.1 Overall attitudes toward the practice of text memorisation**

4872

4873 Overall, as seen in Table 6.3, almost all participants thought positively of the practice
 4874 of text memorisation and acknowledged its benefit for language learning. Their
 4875 attitudes in this regard differ only in terms of degree of endorsement, ranging from
 4876 'extremely useful' (Wenna, TP, JH, in Appendix 6) to 'at least not detrimental'

4877 (Yaoqing, TP, JH). There were, however, a couple of them who hesitated to think
4878 highly of this practice. One talked about the issue simply from a utilitarian point of
4879 view:

4880

4881 *What's the purpose of learning texts by heart? It doesn't have much to do with*
4882 *exams. (Wangting, TP, SH)*

4883

4884 The other expressed her dissent from another perspective:

4885

4886 *I would hesitate to say that it [text memorisation] is necessarily a good*
4887 *practice in foreign language learning. It depends on whether the material you*
4888 *choose is valuable or not. It can be useful if you memorise some classic*
4889 *statements or utterances by master writers and try to quote them*
4890 *appropriately in your own speech or writing. (Wangshu, TP, U)*

4891

4892 This teacher's dissent was, as I interpret it, more based on the issue of the choice of
4893 materials used for memorisation than that of text memorisation as a learning practice.
4894 By analysing the complete interview transcript with the teacher, it was revealed that
4895 she was not an uncompromising critic of the practice of textual memorisation. What
4896 was implied in her comments seems to be that the practice can be beneficial if the text
4897 is rightly chosen as she repeatedly emphasised that '*[I]t is useless memorising some*
4898 *textual materials which are not of much value to the students'* (Wangshu, TP, U).

4899

4900 All the other teachers interviewed apart from the two mentioned above, on the other
4901 hand, perceived the practice to be effective in their language teaching:

4902

4903 *Those [students] who do a lot of text memorisation obviously perform better*
4904 *than those who don't either in oral English or grammar. (Hongying, TP, U, in*
4905 *Appendix 6)*

4906

4907 *From my teaching experience, doing textual memorisation and not doing it*
4908 *may lead to drastically different outcome. (Qinxin, TP, U)*

4909

4910 *Those [students] who do well in memorising texts write better composition*
4911 *than those who don't. ... The good students actually have tasted the*
4912 *'sweetness' of memorisation [of texts]. (Liangying, TP, JH)*
4913

4914 *The excellent students are usually those who are fond of reading aloud and*
4915 *memorising [texts]. (Wenna, TP, JH, in Appendix 6)*
4916

4917 Similarly, another made the following comments:
4918

4919 *From my observation, those who have learned texts by heart seriousmindedly*
4920 *really show a big difference in terms of language sense, pronunciation and*
4921 *speaking compared to those who do it remissly. (Jiajie, TP, JH)*
4922

4923 Interestingly, among those who felt strongly about the use of text memorisation in
4924 foreign language teaching in China, there are a few who admitted that they themselves
4925 were not keen on memorising texts for certain reasons when they were English
4926 learners, and consequently they did not feel they benefited noticeably from the
4927 practice:
4928

4929 *I would not say that I myself benefited a lot [from this practice] because our*
4930 *English teachers seldom required us to memorise texts in high school. (Yuli,*
4931 *TP, JH)*
4932

4933 *To tell the truth, I didn't do many text memorisations when I was a student.*
4934 *This is probably because I was lazy. (Liangqing, TP, SH, in Appendix 6)*
4935

4936 However, they now believed that they would have become more proficient in English
4937 if they had memorised more textual materials. The benefits of textual memorisation is,
4938 to quote one of them, 'out of question' (Liangqing, TP, SH, in Appendix 6) so that
4939 many of them (16 out of 20)¹⁰⁰ said that they would suggest to their students to
4940 memorise as many texts as possible 'if it does not pose a psychological burden'
4941 (Liuxia, TP, JH).

357 100 See Appendix 4 for teachers' responses to the item 'I suggest my students learn as many texts
358 by heart as possible.'

4942

4943 Another interesting point I noticed is that almost all participants in their twenties were
4944 those who passionately or unreservedly recommended the practice of text
4945 memorisation (See Appendix 3 & 4 for the teachers' bio-data and the result of the
4946 questionnaire survey). 'Input' theory seems to be fairly typical of what they had to say
4947 to defend their belief:

4948

4949 *For people learning English in China, how can they improve without*
4950 *memorising a certain amount of language materials? Without input, how can*
4951 *you produce output? (Luyi, TP, U)*

4952

4953 Thus far we may arrive at the conclusion that the teacher participants' attitude toward
4954 the use of text memorisation in language teaching was generally positive although
4955 some of them did not perceive themselves as being personal beneficiaries of the
4956 practice as English language learners.

4957

4958 **6.2.2 Perceived strong points of text memorisation as a teaching device**

4959

4960 The teachers offered various reasons why they think it is worthwhile to implement
4961 text memorisation in their language teaching. Here I would like to mention the most
4962 salient four. The first is about enabling the students to internalise language
4963 knowledge: '*Some intricate language rules can gradually seep into the students' mind*
4964 *[through memorising texts]. It is in fact a process of – in academic terms –*
4965 *'internalisation'¹⁰¹* (Jiean, TP, U). This is also mentioned by another teacher to
4966 demonstrate the necessity of using text memorisation as a teaching tool even in multi-
4967 media teaching conditions (see Appendix 2, Part II, Item 4):

4968

4969 *It is not a problem at all for us teachers to use multi-media equipment and we*
4970 *can play English animations or film clips as much as we want to. The key*
4971 *issue is whether the students are able to absorb the information or acquire the*
4972 *language automatically. I do not believe the introduction of multi-media can*

359 101 The act of making (esp. a principle or a pattern of behaviour) a conscious or unconscious part
360 of the self as the result of learning or repeated experience. (adapted from *Longman Dictionary of*
361 *Contemporary English*)

4973 *make a difference to the students' learning results because they are, after all,*
4974 *external conditions. But learning texts by heart involves internal effort from*
4975 *the individual, therefore facilitating the knowledge to be internalised, and*
4976 *eventually becoming your own stuff [after synthesising the memorised*
4977 *materials]. (Yuli, TP, JH)*
4978

4979 While not denying the facilitating role of multi-media system in foreign language
4980 teaching, the teacher participants almost unanimously insist on the irreplaceable role
4981 of textual memorisation as a down-to-earth learning practice: *'It [a multi-media*
4982 *system] ...may make the access to information easier and the way of learning more*
4983 *comfortable or convenient ,but the learners' initiatives can only be truly tapped while*
4984 *they are engaging in such activities as textual memorisation' (Jiean, TP, U).* It is text
4985 memorisation that serves as a feasible way to let some delicacy of language insinuate
4986 into one's mind: *'After reciting many articles, one gradually develops an idea of how*
4987 *that language is used and the intricate language details are internalised into one's*
4988 *own stuff' (Hongying, TP, U, in Appendix 6).*
4989

4990 The idea of enabling students to internalise what has been learned through
4991 memorisation for later use may not be unique to Chinese teachers. A Vietnamese
4992 teacher Duong (2003, 2006) opines that it is ideal for students to memorise as they
4993 may be able to internalise what they have memorised to apply to communication in a
4994 natural way. In my interpretation of what the teacher participants meant by
4995 'internalising into one's own stuff', I relate this term 'internalisation' to Cook's (1994)
4996 conjecture: *'As the know-by-heart is repeated many times, it may begin to make sense*
4997 *Its native-like structures and vocabulary, analysed and separated out, become*
4998 *available for creative and original use'.*
4999

5000 The second deals with automatisisation of the students' production or cultivation of
5001 their language habit:
5002

5003 *You must develop a [new] habit because the format imbedded in your mother*
5004 *language is totally different from that of second language. ... Language habit*
5005 *needs to be developed through purposeful training. Recitation is an important*

5006 way of such training. It is through recitation that certain language forms of
5007 expressions become a habit of communication. (Jiean, TP, U)

5008

5009 Through memorisation of textual materials, it is believed that '[T]he students will find
5010 some sentence patterns and expressions become part of their own language
5011 unconsciously after reciting the text over and over' (Xiaohong, TP, U). This reflects a
5012 typical strategy of the audiolingual system in which the materials are overlearned.
5013 'Overlearning', according to Stevick (1982: 70) 'means not merely memorising; it
5014 means memorising so thoroughly that one is able to recite the whole very rapidly
5015 almost without thinking about it'. 'Overlearning' – in other words – absolute mastery
5016 of some basic language samples aims to make them accessible automatically when in
5017 need in genuine or simulated communication. Real-time communication is always a
5018 stressful situation, especially for less proficient learners who do not have much
5019 linguistic resources at their disposal. For those who have achieved thoroughgoing
5020 memorisation of some basic dialogues, the stress can be relieved to a certain extent if
5021 part of their speech is ready-made and immediately available for their use.

5022

5023 In responding to the statement 'Having learned a text by heart is qualitatively
5024 different from being fluent in reading aloud a text' (see Appendix 2, Part II, Item 9),
5025 most of the teachers showed strong agreement. The argument they came up with in
5026 interviews is that: '*The former obviously imprints much deeper in the mind than the*
5027 *latter*' (Wenna, TP, JH, in Appendix 6) so that '*some stuff may internalise into your*
5028 *own*' (Jiean, TP, U). More importantly, '*thorough memorisation enables the students*
5029 *to have expressions flowing out of their mouth when speaking English, but being*
5030 *fluent in reading aloud cannot secure the effect*' (Luyi, TP, U). Thus, the Chinese way
5031 of intensified memorisation of texts through massed repetition appears to be more in
5032 line with the spirit of Audiolingualism than for the purpose of mere intensive reading
5033 by 'squeezing each text dry' (Maley, 1983: 98). Text memorisation can be said to be
5034 an elaboration of the mimicry-memorisation¹⁰², the most widely used technique in the
5035 Audiolingual approach, in which the students were imitating and memorizing basic
5036 conversational sentences as spoken by native speakers until they could rattle off the

362 102 Stevick (1982: 70-72) offered a detailed elaboration on how the teachers can use the standard
363 audiolingual technique of 'Mimicry-Memorisation' to move new material from STM to LTM.

5037 dialogues with ease (Lado, 1964). Such a process was commented on by a teacher in
5038 the following manner:

5039

5040 *The correct sentence structures or expressions are out there for their*
5041 *immediate use if the students memorize thoroughly enough. It's as*
5042 *straightforward as a 'conditioned reflex' which I think is the highest state of*
5043 *language learning' (Hongying, TP, U, in Appendix 6)*

5044

5045 The third reason brought up by the teachers is that memorisation of textual materials
5046 serves as a comprehensive exercise for the students. For instance, one teacher
5047 commented:

5048

5049 *Engaging the students in memorising texts proves very effective in my*
5050 *teaching as it is in fact a multi-dimensional training for students. They*
5051 *achieve a mastery of almost everything through learning texts by heart*
5052 *including vocabulary, sentences patterns and grammar. (Yuli, TP, JH)*

5053

5054 Echoing this view, another teacher viewed text memorisation as 'jibengong' [a
5055 Chinese phrase meaning 'a basic training that means to lay a foundation for future
5056 learning'] (Qinxin, TP, U) in foreign language learning. Similar comment is not
5057 uncommon in the data: 'One of the ways [of developing basic training] is text
5058 memorisation' (Jiean, TP, U).

5059

5060 The teachers from foreign language schools where English is more emphasised than
5061 ordinary high schools¹⁰³, usually mentioned their concern for helping the students to
5062 establish acceptable pronunciation through recitation:

5063

364 103 English education in foreign language schools is more intensive than ordinary schools. The
365 classes are usually conducted by local and foreign teachers with overseas language textbooks.
366 Students at foreign language schools therefore attain a high level of foreign language skill upon
367 graduation. The first batch of seven foreign language schools in China were established during
368 1963-1964 under the supervision of Premier Zhou Enlai. (source: "List of foreign language
369 schools in China," 2010) The school with which Jiajie (TP, JH) is affiliated was one of them.

5064 *We worry about the students' pronunciation and intonation. I insist on*
5065 *checking the students' recitation one by one in order that their errors in*
5066 *pronunciation can be corrected in time (Jiajie, TP, JH).*

5067

5068 Even in ordinary high schools, the practice of pronunciation and intonation is
5069 sometimes incorporated in recitation of text:

5070

5071 *We ever tried making the students recite the text with the tape-recorder being*
5072 *played on a low volume. This requires them not only to catch up with the*
5073 *speed of the recording but to imitate its prosodic features and so on.*
5074 *(Liangying, TP, JH, in Appendix 6)*

5075

5076 Thus, recitation of text provides the chance of intonation practice which is absent in
5077 reading. Recitation of text can be performed with the aim of raising awareness of
5078 prosodic features and practising them so that 'the words flow in as natural-sounding a
5079 manner as possible' (Gibson, 2008:31).

5080

5081 What the teachers mean by 'comprehensive training' also includes raising the
5082 students' awareness of language use at textual level:

5083

5084 *It may benefit the students in terms of the layout of a discourse. Through*
5085 *textual memorisation, the students can learn how to present an argument in a*
5086 *logical way. They also get to know how cohesive devices should be used to*
5087 *create a natural flow of writing. (Xiaohong, TP, U)*

5088

5089 Construction of language on discourse level can be sensed because at least '*...text*
5090 *provides a language situation for dialogue and a theme for monologue*' (Liangying,
5091 *TP, JH*). The benefit of text memorisation at discourse level is proposed by a
5092 participant to explain her theory of learning in relation to language function:

5093

5094 *Each way of learning represents an interpretation of language function from a*
5095 *unique perspective. ... Learning through text memorisation may be*
5096 *emphasising the writing purpose of language because it enables the learners*
5097 *to know how argumentations are arranged in a discourse. (Yeli, TP, SH)*

5098

5099 Fourthly, many teachers agree that engaging the students in text memorisation in
5100 many ways speeds up learning. Although they acknowledge the dynamic and creative
5101 aspect of Western approaches characterised by interactive oral activities, almost no
5102 one perceives these activities alone as being enough. One participant raised the issue
5103 of cost-effectiveness in terms of time:

5104

5105 *It's all down to the issue of time. ... It is not unacceptable to let the students to*
5106 *master [knowledge] through communicative activities if time permits, but the*
5107 *'amount' is too little. For example, the students in primary can learn only one*
5108 *sentence structure [using communicative activities] during one week. ... The*
5109 *volume capacity is very limited. (Yangke, TP, SH)*

5110

5111 Learning through interactive oral activities is thought to be less efficient compared to
5112 learning texts by heart, the reason being:

5113

5114 *It may take half a class to practice only a couple of sentence structures*
5115 *through performances like role play, but the number doubles or triples if the*
5116 *same amount of time is devoted to prepare the students to commit the text to*
5117 *memory. ...In a sense, text memorisation can quicken the learning process.*
5118 *(Xiaohong, TP, U)*

5119

5120 Conscious memorisation of textual material is thus perceived to be accelerating the
5121 learning process. This is not a novel idea as Stevick (1982) found that the use of
5122 techniques for memorisation of dialogues, paradigms and monologs had been
5123 successful in his classrooms. He realised that one major weakness of natural retention
5124 as opposed to intentional memorisation is this: although 'retention comes naturally
5125 when a student is involved in the right way with enough samples of the language'
5126 (1982: 68), naturally often means 'slowly' which places a limit on how much the
5127 student can get in a course of fixed length. The CLT assumption that 'by bridging a
5128 series of information gaps, learners will 'naturally' develop their linguistic knowledge
5129 and skills' (Corbett, 2003: 1) was rejected by the Chinese teachers:

5130

5131 *The CLT is not a cure-all although it has its advantages. The accuracy of the*
5132 *students' language may become a big problem. How much the students can get*
5133 *from the communicative activities is also a question mark. (Xiaohong, TP, U)*
5134

5135 Such an opinion is conveyed by another participant during the interview:
5136

5137 Interviewer: You said that text memorisation is actually a way of
5138 accumulation. Can't the students accumulate through reading a wide range of
5139 texts, I mean, extensive reading?

5140 *Luyi(TP, U): Extensive reading is of course necessary, but learning by heart is*
5141 *also indispensable as the latter enables the students learn more than they can*
5142 *get from the former.*

5143 Interviewer: Why so?

5144 *Luyi: Extensive reading is usually superficial and limited in terms of language*
5145 *learning because the students have no time or no need to know everything in*
5146 *the text. Learning by heart, however, is in-depth learning. It enables the*
5147 *students to attend to many details of language.*
5148

5149 The point brought up by Luyi is in agreement with the claim by Ding (2007: 277)
5150 stating that 'practice of text memorization ... can help develop a habit of attending to
5151 details of language'.
5152

5153 Finally, the teachers repeatedly referred to 'a sense of achievement' the practice of
5154 text memorisation brings to the students, which echoes the students' report that the
5155 practice has built their confidence (see 5.4.1). The teachers' comments seemed to be
5156 more mature and dispassionate:
5157

5158 *I think the psychological stimulus it [text memorisation] brings to the students*
5159 *constitutes one of the most important aspects in which it benefits English*
5160 *learning. I never believe that one significantly improves his/her English*
5161 *overnight because s/he is able to recite a few English articles. But s/he feels*
5162 *that his/her English improves, which not only builds his/her confidence but*
5163 *maintains his/her enthusiasm in learning. (Luyi, TP, U)*
5164

It has long been recognised that ‘... no successful cognitive or affective activities can be carried out without some degree of self-esteem, self-confidence, knowledge of yourself, and belief in your own capabilities for that activity’ (H. D. Brown, 1987: 101). While self-confidence is crucial in all learning activities, it seems more so in foreign language learning as it ‘has more potential for students to embarrass themselves, to frustrate their self-expression, and to challenge their self-esteem ... than almost any other learning activity’ (MacIntyre, 1999: 33). The cultivation of the learners’ confidence thus axiomatically becomes an inseparable part of language teaching. Text memorisation might be employed for such purpose. Here is a teacher’s testimony:

Liangying (TP, JH): Many of my students have tasted the ‘sweetness’ through memorising texts.

Interviewer: They have increased their scores in exams?

Liangying: Not really. It’s more that they feel they have improved their language ability.

6.2.3 Attitudes towards the impact of text memorisation on creativity

One prominent issue related to text memorisation is creativity, which was substantially discussed in Chapter 2 (see 2.1.2 and 2.2.2.3) in general education and language education respectively. When asked whether the practice of text memorisation may limit the students’ creativity, some participants seemed to be even puzzled by the question being asked:

I don’t think there exists the issue of creativity [in foreign language learning]. (Liangqing, TP, JH, in Appendix 6).

It [text memorisation] doesn’t relate much to creativity. (Peisheng, TP, U)

This is because language learning is thought to be more about imitation than creativity, at least in the early stage:

5198 *Language learning is a process of imitation. We are supposed to imitate*
5199 *other's language rather than creating a language. It's obviously impossible to*
5200 *create other's language. Learning language is conceptually and qualitatively*
5201 *different from learning other science subjects. (Hongying, TP, U, in Appendix*
5202 *6)*

5203

5204 *Language [learning] is not as complex as we imagine because much of it can*
5205 *be achieved through imitation. (Tangming, TP, JH)*

5206

5207 *Imitation must be applied before creativity can be achieved. (Liangying, TP,*
5208 *U)*

5209

5210 I consider the great importance attached to imitation in language learning and the
5211 awareness of the specificity of language learning as being one of the foundations for
5212 much of what participants said about the positive impact of text memorisation on
5213 creativity. A participant put the relationship of memorisation and creativity
5214 figuratively:

5215

5216 *Without initial imitation and memorisation, creativity is like a spring without*
5217 *water. (Yuli, TP, JH)*

5218

5219 She insisted on the facilitative role of memorisation in the development of students'
5220 creativity:

5221

5222 *The more one memorises, the wider horizon s/he has available to him/her.*
5223 *Having a great store of materials in one's mind, as I see it, can only help*
5224 *develop his/her creative thinking rather than restraining it. (Yuli, TP, JH)*

5225

5226 A similar idea was shared by most of the participants, one of whom used an analogy:

5227

5228 *How should one be able to walk without having learned to how to crawl?*
5229 *(Xiaohong, TP, U)*

5230

5231 Another participant made a deeper analysis by relating to learning Chinese language:

5232

5233 *Not different from learning Chinese, only through stockpiling certain amount*
5234 *of materials can one lay the foundation for flexible use later. Language*
5235 *learning is a process of accumulation. If one doesn't memorise the 'dead'*
5236 *stuffs, it would be very difficult for him/her to take command of flexible ones. I*
5237 *remember we had a senior president in college who advocates 'si qu huo lai'*
5238 *[meaning 'inflexibility comes before flexibility'] in foreign language learning.*
5239 *What he means is that the first step is to learn by heart [the language*
5240 *materials], and then learn to use them flexibly. (Jiajie, TP, JH)*

5241

5242 The 'foundation-laying' perspective of text memorisation was indeed a common
5243 reference in my data:

5244

5245 *Language has some basic stuff. ... Without the basic format or platform, you*
5246 *have no way to make creative use [of language]. That is to say, you need to*
5247 *lay a foundation before being able to use language creatively. It [text*
5248 *memorisation] is simply a way of building such a foundation. (Jiean, TP, U)*

5249

5250 These comments perhaps represent the typical Chinese attitude to learning and
5251 teaching: 'Learners must at least master the basics and only when this is accomplished
5252 are they in a position to use what they have mastered in a creative manner' (Brick,
5253 1991: 154). If this line of thinking might not be incomprehensible even from the
5254 Western perspective, a more concrete issue as to how text memorisation can make
5255 possible the creative use of language does cause perplexity among Western scholars
5256 who have been taught to believe that '... it [memorisation of texts] could never lead to
5257 productive, original language use' (Pennycook, 1996: 202). For Chinese teachers,
5258 however, it is not impossible to achieve creative use of language if sufficient quantity
5259 of textual materials is committed to memory:

5260

5261 *Hasn't it been said that 'He who has memorised 300 Tang poems becomes a*
5262 *poet himself'? This implies that one can eventually figure out how that*
5263 *language works on the basis of long-term accumulation through textual*
5264 *memorisation although the time it takes may vary from person to person.*
5265 *(Liangqing, TP, SH, in Appendix 6)*

5266

5267 Here we see that the Chinese use of text memorisation as a way of learning a foreign
5268 language might be traced back to the folk theory of implicit learning implied in the
5269 saying that one may eventually have a command of a language after memorising a
5270 considerable amount of samples (texts) of that language. Even if not convinced that a
5271 large amount of textual memorisation will necessarily lead to original use of a foreign
5272 language, the practice was not seen to limit the potential of using that language in a
5273 creative manner:

5274

5275 *It [text memorisation] is simply a way of building such a foundation, but is not*
5276 *meant to confine you to it. ... Similar to constructing a building, it [text*
5277 *memorisation] just provides you with materials like bricks or stones to allow*
5278 *you to construct [the building], but never means to trap you somewhere to*
5279 *prevent you from creating something. (Jiean, TP, U)*

5280

5281 One participant made a similar point by saying:

5282

5283 *We indeed memorise others' stuff, but it doesn't mean that we mean to copy*
5284 *them or we don't need to reprocess them by adding our own stuff. After all, we*
5285 *just intend to use the bits of good or idiomatic use of language. It also*
5286 *depends on the individual students. For those excellent students, they absorb*
5287 *more as they memorise more so that they become more active in their thinking*
5288 *and more creative in language at a later stage. I mean, they are able to add in*
5289 *their own ideas and express themselves by making use of what they've*
5290 *memorised. (Wenna, TP, JH)*

5291

5292 This view appears to resound with what some Vietnamese teachers and students call
5293 'good memorisation', i.e. memorising in a selective and flexible manner as well as the
5294 capacity to apply what has been learned in real use for communication purpose (cf.
5295 Duong, 2006).

5296

5297 Other participants candidly addressed the issue of creative use of language in relation
5298 to text memorisation in an unaffected manner. One participant realised there is a long
5299 way still to be travelled even if one has committed many texts to memory:

5300

5301 ... it is by no means to say that once you have learned by heart many articles,
5302 you necessarily stand out in terms of free expression of oneself or in other
5303 aspects. There is still a long way to go. There are many things to do
5304 afterwards. (Luyi, TP, U)

5305

5306 Even though this participant recognised that memorisation of texts is not omnipotent,
5307 he never doubts the potential of this practice in preparing the learner to achieve more
5308 by drawing on his own firsthand insight:

5309

5310 *Learning by heart is the first step for us who are learning in a non-English*
5311 *environment. It is a step which cannot be skipped. ... When I was in*
5312 *America¹⁰⁴, many people asked me why I could speak such good English. I*
5313 *would not say it was necessarily because I memorised three books of New*
5314 *Concept English, but it obviously gave me an advantage in achieving what I*
5315 *can do now. (Luyi, TP, U)*

5316

5317 A similar idea was echoed in the following remark by another participant:

5318

5319 *I admit that the language learned through text memorisation may sound*
5320 *somewhat stiff at first. But I believe – if the students lay a very good*
5321 *foundation through large amount of recitation – one day when they go abroad,*
5322 *they can quickly adapt themselves to new language habits or ways of*
5323 *expression. (Jiajie, TP, U)*

5324

5325 It is thus understood that memorisation of texts is generally considered a useful – if
5326 not an indispensable – practice in foreign language learning and teaching in an
5327 adverse context where there is no, in most participants' words, 'language
5328 environment'. Its usefulness includes its provision of the necessary groundwork
5329 which the learners need to prepare them for creativity in language use. While the
5330 Chinese attitude to learning and teaching appears to pay little attention to creativity, it
5331 would be more appropriate to say that greater importance is attached to basic training

370 104 The participant sojourned in the USA in 2009 for three months in an exchange programme.

than to creativity, which is believed to come after and build on the former. In the case of language education, memorisation of textual materials constitutes one of the basic trainings that at least affords the potential to achieve eventual originality in language use. For that reason, the negative impact of text memorisation on students' creativity was generally rejected although many added the prerequisite that '*... we teachers appropriately control the extent to which and the way text memorisation is used*' (Jiajie, TP, JH).

6.2.4 Attitudes towards the impact of text memorisation on understanding

The relationship between memorising and understanding was addressed in the attempt to solve the paradox of Chinese learners in Chapter 2 (see 2.2.2.1). One key aspect of solving the paradox is that Chinese learners tend to memorise what is understood and understand through memorisation (F. Marton, et al., 1996) rather than memorising mechanically without understanding. While this finding was derived from research with Chinese learners in the context of general education, it was verified by the data from interviews with Chinese learners of English conducted in this research (see 5.4.2.1 above). The belief held by learners in understanding as a premise of memorisation of text is also shared by the Chinese teachers:

It is out of question that you have to understand before you memorise [in any subject]. It is the same in foreign language learning – you need to understand [the text] before you are able to memorise it. Clearly, you can not achieve the memorisation [of text] without prior understanding. (Peishen, TP, U)

At the same time, to memorise is considered to be facilitating understanding as '*the process of memorisation is that of understanding*' (Peishen, TP, U). As a result,

When s/he [the student] rereads the text s/he has memorised before, s/he certainly has a deeper understanding of it than if s/he has not. (Liangying, TP, JH)

This idea might be influenced by the traditional practice of 'repeated reading for understanding', as reflected in the following quote from Zhu Xi (1130-1200):

5366

5367 In reading we must first become intimately familiar with the text so that its
5368 words seem to come from our own mouths. We should then continue to reflect
5369 on it so that its ideas seem to come from own minds. Only then can there be
5370 real understanding. (Gardner, 1990: 43)

5371

5372 Thus, the Chinese way of ‘understanding through memorisation’ (F. Marton, et al.,
5373 1996: 77; discussed in 2.2.2.1) was exemplified in my data. Memorisation may be the
5374 best way to become familiar with a text for Chinese learners in the sense that it is just
5375 a stage in the learning process, preceding understanding rather than stopping at rote
5376 learning (Lee, 1996).

5377

5378 The question asked by many students ‘*How can one learn a text by heart easily*
5379 *without understanding [its meaning]?*’ (Lijia, LP, JH) is echoed by teachers:

5380

5381 *Only after you understand the article are you able to commit it to memory.*
5382 *(Qingxin, TP, U)*

5383

5384 *Normally, s/he understands [the content] if s/he is able to recite [the text],*
5385 *especially for longer texts. (Liangying, TP, JH)*

5386

5387 Interestingly, many teachers even believe that the level of understanding can be, to
5388 some extent, judged by how well the student performs the recitation:

5389

5390 Interviewer: Are you assuming that one necessarily has achieved a good
5391 understanding if s/he can memorise a text?

5392 *Liangqing (TP, JH, in Appendix 6): As I see it, if one can recite well and pause*
5393 *appropriately between and in sentences, he/she must have understood the text.*
5394 *A tiny number of students do pause inappropriately in the process of*
5395 *recitation. It’s apparently rote-memorisation.*

5396

5397 The underlying reasoning can be seen in the following account by another participant:

5398

5399 *We often have long sentences in the texts in senior high school. They [the*
5400 *students] come across attributive clauses or something everywhere. Only*
5401 *when s/he understands [the grammar] and learns how to pause correctly in*
5402 *sentence, can s/he recite smoothly. (Yangke, TP, SH)*
5403

5404 This concurs with the assertion by Underhill (1994) when talking about reading aloud,
5405 an accompanying practice normally performed by Chinese students engaging in text
5406 memorisation: Reading aloud can be a powerful tool for diagnosing a student's
5407 comprehension of the text. The intonation the student uses can indicate where
5408 understanding is not complete. Viewed in this light, recitation of text seems to be able
5409 to function as an indicator of the student's understanding of what s/he has memorised. I
5410 would thus suggest that the teacher use it as an assessing tool¹⁰⁵ in addition to a
5411 diagnostic device.
5412

5413 **6.2.5 Attitudes towards the impact of text memorisation on motivation** 5414

5415 An important issue which was explored in interview is the impact of the memorisation
5416 of text on learners' motivation. I was aware that memorisation is a process at which
5417 different people have different degrees of ability and toward which people's attitude
5418 may vary tremendously (Stevick, 1982). I was especially concerned about learners in
5419 secondary schools where text memorisation, if any, is usually mandatory rather than
5420 optional. When I asked whether the practice could dampen down their interest in
5421 learning, many teachers' response was an unequivocal 'No'. One participant rejected
5422 the idea that there is a direct causal relationship between a certain way of learning a
5423 foreign language and the learners' interest, especially for adult learners:
5424

5425 *From my [teaching] experience, most of those students who lose interest in*
5426 *learning a [foreign] language fit in the case that they feel they have not made*
5427 *good progress after learning for a while. ... It is not that a particular means of*
5428 *learning makes them lose interest. It is [that they fail to see] short-term*
5429 *outcomes. (Jiean, TP, U)*

371 105 It needs to be pointed out that reading aloud had been used as an assessing tool in foreign
372 language testing in the UK until early 1980s. It had been surviving for as long as 70 years since
373 reading aloud was introduced in language testing in 1903 (Weir, 2010).

5430

5431 Interestingly, text memorisation was seen as a means which may help the students
5432 easily see the product they produced, therefore stimulating their interest in learning:

5433

5434 *Instead of killing their interest, the practice probably raises their interest. If*
5435 *they find that they can speak out some sentences fluently or write some good*
5436 *expressions in their composition, they will have a sense of achievement. From*
5437 *this point of view, the practice makes them more motivated in learning.*

5438 *(Liangqing, TP, SH, in Appendix 6)*

5439

5440 Similar comments are not uncommon among the teacher participants:

5441

5442 *My feeling is that the more fluently s/he can recite [the text], the more*
5443 *accomplished s/he feels, and the more s/he likes it [English]. (Yangke, TP, SH)*

5444

5445 *The students have actually developed a sense of achievement through*
5446 *recitation. I have some students who can even memorise the text that I haven't*
5447 *taught yet. ... If s/he tastes the sweetness [from the practice], it should not feel*
5448 *distasteful. (Liangying, TP, JH, in Appendix 6)*

5449

5450 *Most students are forced to [memorise texts] at the beginning. But gradually*
5451 *they find this method can help them improve their performance in the exam.*
5452 *Their interest may increase. (Yuli, TP, JH)*

5453

5454 *They become more motivated as they memorise more – so much so that – they*
5455 *begin to enjoy it. (Wenna, TP, JH, in Appendix 6)*

5456

5457 It is also interesting to notice in the above comments that the teachers tend to
5458 approach the issue of learner's motivation from the positive upshot of memorisation
5459 of texts. A common term used in the above quotes is the 'sense of achievement'. More
5460 interestingly, the view echoes that of a college student:

5461

5462 *I believe that interest can be cultivated gradually if you develop a sense of*
5463 *achievement through text memorisation. I feel terrific when I can use what I*

5464 *have memorised. The sense of achievement definitely improves your interest.*
5465 *This is obviously a virtuous circle. (Xujia, LP, U)*

5466

5467 Moreover, it is also believed that it is the teacher (especially those working in
5468 secondary schools) who plays a dominant role in awakening and maintaining the
5469 students' interest:

5470

5471 *It depends on the teacher. I think the teacher should play a very important*
5472 *part in the process. We teachers must play the role of guide since we know it*
5473 *[the practice] is beneficial to them. ... As teachers, we may encourage them*
5474 *by giving them stimulus in order to interest them and give them a sense of*
5475 *achievement. I think this is something we teachers can achieve. (Tangming,*
5476 *TP, JH)*

5477

5478 A similar attitude is manifested in another teacher's comment:

5479

5480 *It's up to the teachers who adopt different ways of stimulus. ... It very much*
5481 *depends on the teacher's adaptation of guiding methods to arouse students'*
5482 *interest [in doing text memorisation]. ... The teacher should give them*
5483 *guidance like teaching them how to memorise more efficiently. ... so that they*
5484 *may feel easier. (Liangying, TP, JH)*

5485

5486 I interpret these commentaries as implying that the learners' interest can be nurtured if
5487 the teacher is skilful enough to create the necessary conditions - making them feel
5488 fulfilled, for instance. Returning to the issue of whether the use of text memorisation
5489 in teaching causes damage to learners' interest, the teachers' answer - according to
5490 their comments - seems to be that the practice may, on the contrary, get the learners to
5491 become motivated if the teacher utilises it appropriately.

5492

5493 Although I felt there is a point in much of what the teachers said, I was still left with
5494 an impression that the teachers were generally not very sensitive to the learners as the
5495 students' attitude towards the practice was shunned by avoiding talking about it
5496 directly, consciously or not. The implied attitude, as I interpret it, might be congruent
5497 with what is conveyed in a participant's remark:

5498

5499 *It [language learning] is similar to children playing musical instruments.*
5500 *They have to do a lot of mechanical exercises at the beginning. Take playing*
5501 *piano as an example, the kids have to do much practice on musical scale*
5502 *which is not fun and even boring. But can you skip this stage? If you omit this*
5503 *stage and move directly to playing musical pieces, the consequence would be*
5504 *obvious. (Tangming, TP, JH)*

5505

5506 What is alluded to in the analogy, I would suggest, is that that interest is not the main
5507 reason for doing a certain practice. When it comes to text memorisation, even if it is
5508 not to some learners' taste, it cannot be left out if the teacher has enough experience
5509 and confidence to assess the value of the practice to learners at a given stage:

5510

5511 *I believe it [text memorisation] is very important for students at the beginning*
5512 *stage. ... I think it is beneficial to children. So why not use it? (Tangming, TP,*
5513 *JH)*

5514

5515 *It [textual memorisation] apparently does good to children. From the first*
5516 *grade in primary school I required my son to memorise some texts both in*
5517 *Chinese and English learning. (Yangke, TP, SH)*

5518

5519 While acknowledging that many adults are in a good position to identify 'educative
5520 experience'¹⁰⁶ for younger students because they have more experience than the latter
5521 (Dewey, 1938), I wondered how the Chinese teachers of English – who are said to be
5522 'more likely to accept new things including some western ideas'¹⁰⁷ – responded to
5523 Western concern about the psychological impact of text memorisation on young
5524 learners. The following is how a teacher made her point:

5525

374 106 Dewey's (1938) criteria for an educative experience include, to name a few : (a) worthwhile;
375 (b) changes the one who acts and undergoes the experience; (c) affects the quality of subsequent
376 experience; (d) forms attitudes that are both emotional and intellectual and (e) the one in which a
377 person feels they are growing intellectually, emotionally, and /or morally.

378 107 This is quoted from a Chinese English teacher interviewed by Wang (2008).

The [Western education] concept itself is good. I think it is good for adults, but not very suitable for children because the children have limited ability to choose. ... They [Westerners] have a different concept of education. They believe in freedom and letting the children choose themselves. When the kids are not equipped with the ability to choose, we adults have the obligation to make a right choice for them. ... They emphasize the fun aspect of learning. The concept of education is reflected in the mode of teaching. In fact, their education also has their deficiencies. First, their kids fail to lay a solid foundation. Second, children's lack of orthodox training may lead to problems in certain aspects in later learning. I think the ideal way is the combination of the two [of Chinese and Western tradition]. (Tangming, TP, JH)

I was impressed with how candidly and incisively this teacher addressed the discrepancy between two ideologically-distant education systems. Although the teacher was speaking about education in general, I think what she said is also applicable to foreign language teaching. It is important for foreign language educators and teachers to understand, respect and learn from, if necessary, the educational conceptions from a different culture. The redefinition of 'Chineseness' – which has been in effect defined in terms of deviance from Western norms, and generally as being interestingly different from the world defined by and constructed within mainstream, that is Western, psychology (W. C. Chang, 2000) – may need to be addressed in both general education and foreign language education.

6.3 Conclusion

The most striking point arising from this interview – based study is that the teachers' comments regarding the use of text memorisation in foreign language seem to be 'over-positive'. It should be noted, according to secondary school teachers, that '*text memorisation was never a practice stated or stipulated in the textbook or curriculum*' (Yangke, TP, SH), but may have been '*a long-standing tradition*' (Jiajie, TP, JH) in foreign language teaching. With only two exceptions (Wangshu (TP, U), Wangting (TP, SH)), the teachers argued that text memorisation as a teaching device has a number of assets (which even the progressive western modern methods cannot replace) and the potential problems with the practice – which may be intuitive to

western scholars – seemed not to be conforming to their way of thinking (in relation to creativity, understanding and learners’ motivation), and as such it should be retained as a part of learners’ practice in foreign language learning.

Moreover, many of the participants (15 out of 20)¹⁰⁸ saw the necessity of using the practice at tertiary level or in adult learning. For example, one commented:

Whether you are in college or in middle age, you may also need to learn by heart some textual materials, which I believe will benefit you a lot in foreign language learning. (Liu Xia, TP, JH)

A major argument offered by these teachers was:

In secondary school, you have a certain degree of limitation in terms of thinking and understanding. You certainly arrive at a higher level in college in this respect. From this perspective, we may benefit more from memorisation of text in college. (Wenna, TP, JH, in Appendix 6)

Two teachers (Hongying(TP, U), Xiaohong(TP, U)) reported that they were still using the practice personally for maintaining or enhancing their foreign language level while one (Wenna, TP, JH, in Appendix 6) expressed her desire to ‘memorise more good articles even now’.

On the other hand, the teachers’ strong feeling about the practice sometimes contradicted the fact that few participants favour test-oriented education which was believed (explicitly expressed by Liangying (TP, JH) and Yangke (TP, SH)) to some extent to have encouraged the practice of text memorisation. This ambivalence may well be related to the dual functions of the practice, as expressed in the following comments:

I think it [text memorisation] is indispensable for students either in test-oriented education or use-oriented education. ... As for the use-oriented

¹⁰⁸ See Appendix 4 for teachers’ responses to the item ‘Learning texts by heart should continue to be used in college.’

5592 *education in which use and speaking is emphasised, it is also beneficial to the*
5593 *students. (Liangqing, TP, SH, in Appendix 6)*

5595 A point made, explicitly or implicitly, by many of the participants is more or less
5596 represented in the following account:

5598 *English can never be learned only through the interesting oral activities or*
5599 *games; instead, it needs painstaking hard work. We must invest real Kungfu*
5600 *(colloquialism). (Jiajie, TP, JH)*

5602 This view echoes that of some Chinese scholars (e.g. Ding, 2007) in the literature who
5603 pointed out that learning a foreign language is hard work and the students may need to
5604 be encouraged to meet the challenge of hardship.

5606 Although it is not possible to present a conclusive summary of the participants' view
5607 given the diversified background of the participants, the following comment made by
5608 a Chinese professor of English teaching reflects the general trend of the teachers'
5609 views in the study:

5611 [I]n the context devoid of language exposure, foreign language can never be
5612 acquired, but only be learned. Hard work is a must. I have always been an
5613 advocate of text memorisation. This practice should not be limited to children,
5614 adults are supposed to do more memorisation. (L. Chen, 1999: 1; Chinese
5615 original)

5617 It was thus hardly surprising that the teachers' response to the question of whether
5618 '*Text memorisation should be abandoned as modern multi-media technology and new*
5619 *teaching methods are introduced in foreign language teaching*' was a resounding 'No'
5620 (see Appendix 2, Part II, Item 4). Most teachers gave answers of similar effect to the
5621 following quote, though varying in tone and expression:

5623 *Why do we have to abandon [text memorisation]? Why cannot we combine it*
5624 *with other methods? ... I cannot see any reason why we need to drop a*

5625 *practice that proves having its advantage and has stood the test of time.*

5626 *(Xiaohong, TP, U)*

5627

5628 Thus, the overall finding of the study seems to be this: most teachers insist on the use
5629 of text memorisation. However, they are critical about exam-oriented education which
5630 may encourage the practice. While cultural influence was acknowledged as a tacit
5631 term, the perceived benefits of the using text memorisation as a teaching device
5632 became a more pronounced explanation given by the teachers. More importantly,
5633 many of the points brought up by the teacher participants either concurs with SLA
5634 learning theories or have considerable justification. Many even support the
5635 continuation of the practice with adult learners at tertiary level and beyond.

CHAPTER 7

PERCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES OF TEXT MEMORISATION ACROSS EDUCATIONAL LEVELS: COMMONALITIES AND DIVERSITIES

In the previous two chapters, I reported on findings from in-depth interviews regarding how text memorisation is perceived by Chinese learners/teachers as a whole. In this chapter, I will present my data with a view to delving into some commonalities and diversities of the Chinese learners/teachers' practices and perceptions of text memorisation across three educational levels in an attempt to address the last specific question set out at the onset of the study (see 1.4 and 4.1).

Data provided in this chapter were drawn from both the interviews and questionnaire surveys. Qualitative narratives from the interview data will be buttressed by quantitative description. I will begin this chapter by examining the learners' perceptions of text memorisation across the different educational levels, and then, continue the discussion with a focus on the teacher group. Finally, by way of conclusion, I will summarise the findings that emerged from the examination of the different educational levels.

7.1 Perceptions across three educational levels: student group

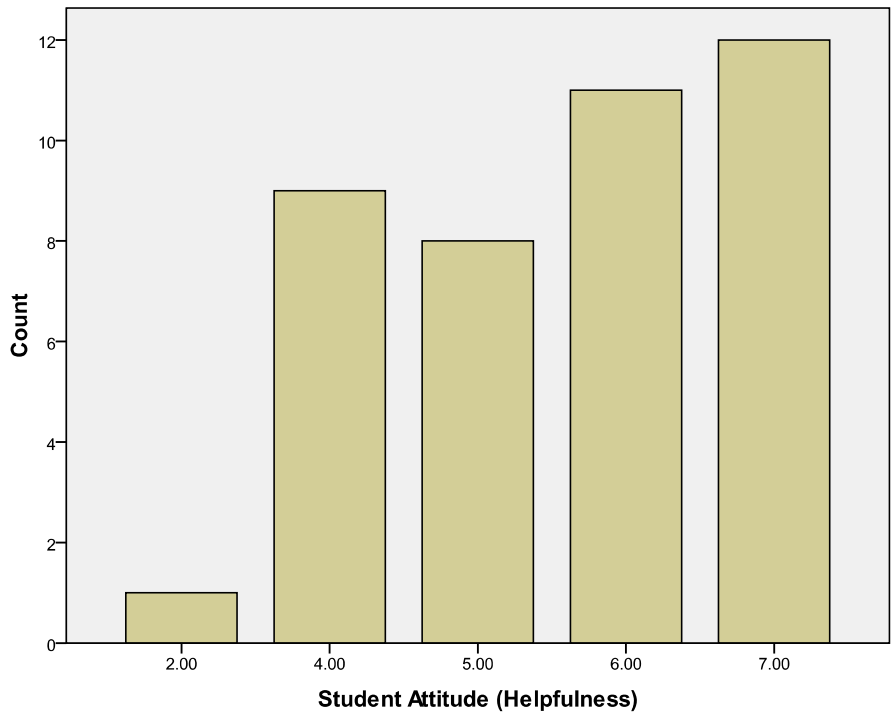
This section reports the results of re-examination of data across three educational levels with a focus on student participants.

7.1.1 Attitudes towards the use of text memorisation in English learning

The learners' overall attitudes towards the use of text memorisation in their English learning, as expressed in responses to questionnaire item No.1 (see Appendix 1, Part II), are presented in Figure 7.1 in the form of bar charts. A breakdown of the learners' attitudes by educational level is displayed in Table 7.1 and Figure 7.2. Given that the whole research is not intended to be quantitative, the quantitative description in this chapter merely serves to give some indication of the pervasiveness of the various

attitudes in order to describe and compare cross-educational group trends as well as facilitating the understanding of the interview data rather than trying to make any generalisation.

Figure 7.1 Students' Attitudes towards the Use of Text Memorisation in English Learning (Responses to Questionnaire Item 1 in Appendix 1, Part II)



Note¹⁰⁹. 7=very helpful; 6 or 5=somewhat helpful; 4=of average help; 2=not too helpful

As shown in Figure 7.1, the learners' overall responses to the seven-point semantic differential scale used for learner questionnaire item 1 (from 'not at all' to 'very much'; see Appendix 1, Part II) tend towards rating text memorisation as a useful learning practice. If there is any difference between the learners' attitudes towards text

¹⁰⁹ The learners' attitudes were converted to the labels listed in the first column of the table according to their responses to the question 'How much does learning text by heart help in your English learning?' (see Appendix 1, Part II, questionnaire item No.1) on a seven-point rating scale ranging from 'Not at all' to 'Very much'(see Appendix 1, Part II). I made the following converting standard in collaboration with the participants' narratives in interview data: 7 = very helpful; 5 or 6 = somewhat helpful; 4=of average help; 2 or 3 = not too helpful; 1= not helpful at all.

memorisation across educational levels, this has to do with the percentage of participants who perceived the practice as being very useful (see Table 7.1). It seems that college students (37%) are more willing to rate text memorisation at this positive extreme than their counterparts in junior high (17%) and senior high (27%). The result resonates to the report (Gao, 2007a)¹¹⁰ on Chinese learners' overall strategy use, mentioning that many participants found the memorisation of textual material (either in the form of English essays, speeches or song lyrics) useful. For example, one of Gao's participant commented: 'I reflect on the fact that I had recited so many English texts. I think that it helps improve my linguistic skills ...' (Zhixuan, quoted in Gao, 2007a: 101). One of the possible reasons why the participants become more favourable with the practice as they grow older might be due to their maturity and learning autonomy (see more discussion in the following section).

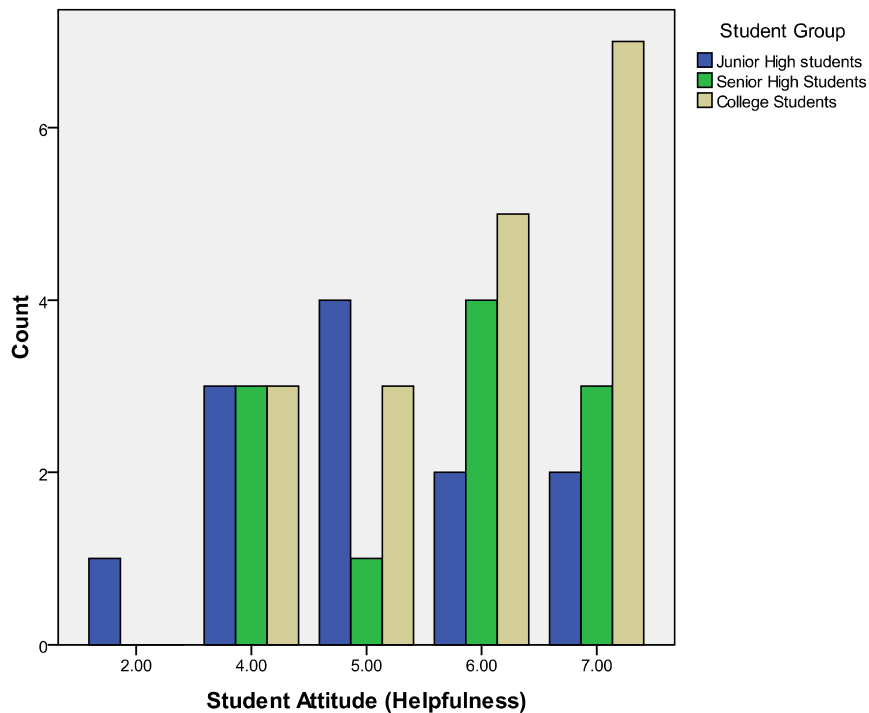
Table 7.1 Students' Attitudes towards the Use of Text Memorisation in English Learning (N=42)

Attitude	Number of learners expressing attitude		
	Junior High(12)	Senior High(11)	College(19)
Very helpful	2	3	7
Somewhat helpful	6	5	8
Of average help	3	3	3
Not too helpful	1	0	0
Not sure ¹¹¹	0	0	1

Figure 7.2 Students' Attitudes towards the Helpfulness of Text Memorisation in English Learning: Across-Educational Level Comparison (Responses to Questionnaire Item No.1 in Appendix 1, Part II)

¹¹⁰ In this longitudinal ethnographic inquiry into mainland Chinese undergraduates' shifting strategic engagement in acquiring English competence on the Chinese mainland and Hongkong, twenty two mainland Chinese students were interviewed about their language learning experiences on the Chinese mainland, immediately after their arrival in Hongkong. The participants were a group of relatively successful or 'elite' Chinese learners from a middle-class family background.

¹¹¹ One participant (*Emma, LP, U*) expressed her indecision on the question, hence the label 'Not sure'. For this reason, this participant was counted in when producing Figure 7.1 and Figure 7.2.



Note. 7=very helpful; 6 or 5=somewhat helpful; 4=of average help; 2=not too helpful

7.1.2 Benefits of the use of text memorisation in English learning

I demonstrated in Chapter 5 (see 5.4.1) that learners offered various reasons why the practice of text memorisation had been beneficial to their English learning. Here, however, I would like to focus on contrasts between student groups across educational levels.

Table 7.2 Learners' Reported Benefits of the Use of Text Memorisation (N=42)

Benefit	Number of learners mentioning reason		
	Junior High(12)	Senior High(11)	College(19)
Examination	12 (100%)	5 (46%)	5 (26%)
Overall language improvement	2 (17%)	4 (36%)	12 (63%)
Building confidence	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	9 (47%)

Table 7.2 lists the numbers and percentages of participants in each group mentioning three categories of benefits as a result of the analysis of interview data. From this table, it can be seen that students in junior high school unanimously (100%) related the benefits of practising text memorisation to exams. One learner in this group reported: *'I learn texts by heart exclusively for the exams' (Hangpu, LP, JH)*. Although the young learners also mentioned the intrinsic value of text memorisation, exams apparently were the most important external motivator for younger learners, as seen in the following extract:

Interviewer: Will you do text memorisation if there are no exams?

Yixiao(LP, JH): No exams? Em... I will do it if the teacher requires us to do this.

Interviewer: Let us suppose, the teacher has no time to check your recitation when in Grade 2 or Grade 3. Will you continue to do this?

Yixiao: I will do it if it is tested in the exam.

It seems that young Chinese learners are indeed 'pragmatic learners' (Y.-Q. Gu, 2003: 97). And learning through memorising texts may work well in exams in early secondary schooling in China, as was verified in the testimony: *'I got higher scores after memorisation [of texts]' (Yixiao, LP, JH)*. This may be related to the fact that *'... some testing items in the exam are cloze tests using texts in the text book. And there are oral examinations part of which is on text memorisation' (Yixiao, LP, JH)*. The memorisation of texts for exams was also reported by a Chinese learner in a previous interview-based study: *'If I recited all the texts, I could get good grades in tests. So reciting was an easy way to get a good grade' (Gao, 2006: 63)*.

However, the percentage of participants mentioning examinations decreases in senior high school (46%) and college (26%). It seems that students at higher levels of education (especially those in college) are less likely to connect the practice to preparing for exams. The most probable reasons may include, though not necessarily be limited to, the fact that exams in senior high school are moving towards measuring the students' integrated linguistic competence and are therefore less connected to the textbook texts, as seen in the comment by a teacher participant in the current study: *'Reading comprehension and cloze tests [in senior high school English exams] test*

5761 *the integrated ability rather than the stuff in the texts*’ (Wangting, TP, SH). This is may
5762 be even more applicable to examinations at tertiary level: ‘*You cannot get high scores*
5763 *merely through learning texts by heart because the original texts are never tested in*
5764 *the exam*’ (Xiaofeng, LP, U).

5765

5766 A surprising finding was that some senior high school students claimed that their
5767 memorisation of texts was not exclusively for utilitarian purposes:

5768

5769 Interviewer: Do you do this mainly for exams?

5770 Suhan(LP, SH): *We are aware that it does not have much to do with exams.*

5771 Interviewer: The memorised stuff doesn’t help in the exams?

5772 Suhan: *Well, it can be more or less helpful. But we do this not mainly for*
5773 *exams.*

5774

5775 This participant, instead, took memorisation of texts as ‘*a process of accumulation by*
5776 *taking advantage of ‘others’ language*’ (Suhan, LP, SH). A similar idea was shared by
5777 another senior high student who reported to have spent more time on memorising
5778 texts in senior high school than junior high although her English teacher had not set
5779 such a requirement¹¹². She explained her choice by saying, ‘*I realise that English*
5780 *learning needs a large amount of accumulation [of language samples]. Only after*
5781 *familiarising with the language can we make better use of it*’ (Shuanglu, LP, SH).

5782

5783 As for the college students, their limited reports of memorising texts for exams may
5784 be related to the fact that they are released from the intensive preparation for the
5785 National College Entrance Examination. More importantly, their growing maturity
5786 makes it possible for them to take responsibility for more of their own learning. As a
5787 result, many of the participants talked about the practice from the perspective of long-
5788 term benefits in a more mature manner, as in this comment:

5789

5790 *I think it [text memorisation] improves one’s all-around language ability. If*
5791 *you only aim to get better scores in the exam, you can achieve it through*

395 112 She was one the students of Wangting (TP, SH) who was not an advocate of text
396 memorisation.

5792 *doing more simulation exercises. ... We shouldn't use learning texts by heart*
5793 *for mere utilitarian purpose. (Xiaofeng, LP, U)*

5794

5795 In contrast, the percentage of participants referring to the benefit of overall language
5796 improvement seems to positively correlate to educational level: 17% in junior high,
5797 36% in senior high and 63% in college. That is to say, the more experienced students
5798 tend to evaluate the practice from the point of view of its intrinsic value rather than its
5799 short-term effect. This resonates with the finding of a previous study (Ding, 2007)
5800 that Chinese learners had been initially forced to memorise textual materials but
5801 gradually came to appreciate the practice. In another study (Gao, 2007a) of Chinese
5802 students' strategy use in English learning, some (12 out of 21) relatively successful
5803 students reported the use of memorising and reciting texts as a way of learning
5804 English as either an obligatory or voluntary practice in their secondary education.
5805 Interestingly, two of them continued to 'memorise lyrics and English essays' (2007a:
5806 100) when exam pressure was lifted and more reported their effort to 'memorise
5807 English texts/lyrics/sentences' (2007a: 159) even when they were studying in a
5808 leading English medium university in Hongkong.

5809

5810 Aside from the mention of overall language improvement, some college students in
5811 this study also referred to the confidence which the practice of text memorisation had
5812 brought them, whereas this was absent in the interviews with students from secondary
5813 school. A college student who reported that he had learned his English primarily
5814 through learning texts by heart and eventually excelled over his peers¹¹³ reflected:

5815

5816 *Looking back on my experience of learning English [through text*
5817 *memorisation], the best benefit I have reaped might be my confidence I have*
5818 *built through this practice. (Zhikai, LP, U)*

5819

5820 Another commented similarly, as follows:

5821

5822 *...it works wonders after keeping doing it [text memorisation] for a long time.*
5823 *You find suddenly one day that you can speak in English without preparation.*

397 113 The participant, though a non-English major, was recruited as a part-time English teacher by a
398 famous private foreign language training school in China when he was still a junior.

5824 *This gives you a sense of achievement and you naturally become confident*
5825 *about your ability. (Xiaofeng, LP, U)*

5826

5827 Therefore, the college students' appreciation of the practice comes not only from
5828 linguistic benefits but from the self-confidence they may derive from a sense of
5829 achievement.

5830

5831 **7.1.3 Learners' problems in using text memorisation in English learning**

5832

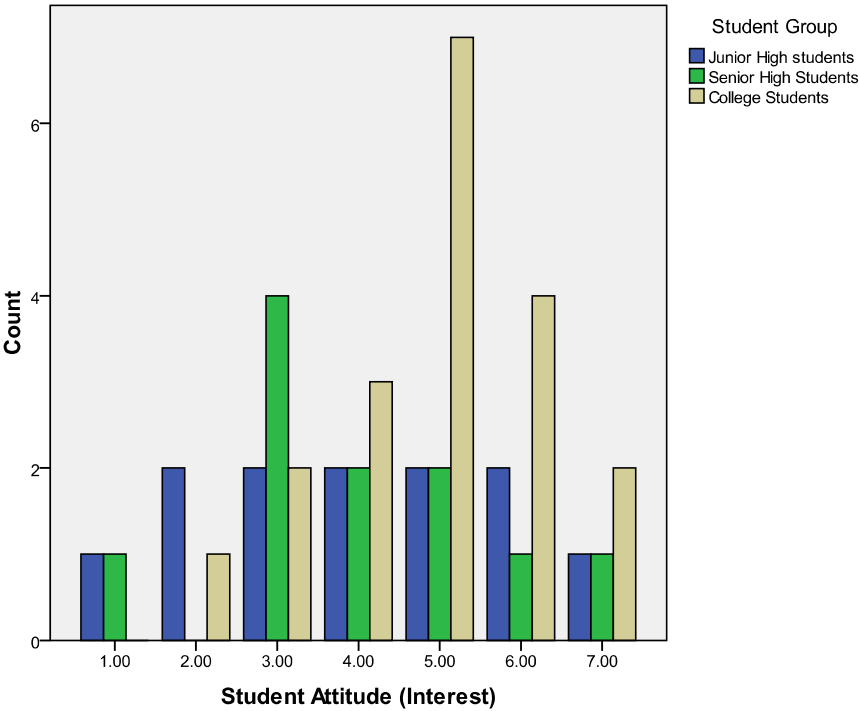
5833 Table 7.3 Learners' Problems in Using Text Memorisation in English Learning
5834 (N=42)

5835	Problem	<u>Number of learners mentioning problem</u>		
5836		<u>Junior High(12)</u>	<u>Senior High(11)</u>	<u>College(19)</u>
5837	Boring	5 (42%)	5 (45%)	3 (16%)
5838	Choice of material	0 (0%)	2 (18%)	12 (63%)
5839	Cost-effectiveness	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	8 (42%)

5840

5841

Figure 7.3 Students' Attitudes towards the Use of Text Memorisation in English Learning: Across-Educational Level Comparison (Responses to Questionnaire Item No.2 in Appendix 1, Part II)



Note¹¹⁴. 7=very interesting; 6 or 5=somewhat interesting; 4=neither interesting nor boring; 3 or 2=somewhat boring; 1=very boring

Although learners generally acknowledged the helpfulness of text memorisation to their English learning, they also expressed the difficulties they encountered in practical learning in interviews (see Table 7.3 for numbers and percentages of participants in three groups mentioning three categories of problems as a result of the analysis of interview data). A problem mentioned by some members of all three

¹¹⁴ The learners' attitudes were converted to the labels listed below according to their responses to the question 'How do you see the process of learning text by heart?' on a seven-point rating scale ranging from 'Boring' to 'Interesting' (see Appendix 1, Part II, item No.2). I made the following converting standard in collaboration with the participants' narratives in interview data: 7 = very interesting; 5 or 6 = somewhat interesting; 4=neither interesting nor boring; 2 or 3 = somewhat boring; 1= not interesting at all.

learner groups is that the practice is not an enjoyable experience. Comparatively, the percentage of college students (16%) mentioning this problem is much lower than that of students in junior high (42%) and senior high (45%). This is also confirmed by questionnaire findings on the students' perceptions of the process of memorising texts (See Figure 7.3 for a graphic display). I consider there are two reasons for this difference. First, memorisation of texts is mandatory in many cases for students in secondary schools and the texts to be memorised are normally chosen from textbooks, whereas in college the practice of textual material is of personal choice and the students are free to choose whatever text they want to commit to memory. For instance, a senior high student complained:

It is indeed boring, very boring. Why do we have to recite texts in the text book? We can memorise some poems, dialogues and even jokes. ... I may enjoy it if I memorise what I love to know. (Chenming, LP, JH)

Second, as was mentioned in the previous section, college students tend to see more intrinsic value in text memorisation so that they may be more tolerant or oblivious to any negative psychological experience the practice has brought to them. This is reflected in the following opinion:

Personally I don't see any problems or obstacles [in doing text memorisation]. ... If I have to say one, I would say it's a boring process. If you cannot concentrate or calm down, you cannot memorise effectively. You'd feel frustrated. (Lixia, LP, U)

The comment that follows suggests college students' ambivalent feelings:

The problem is that it is very boring when we started memorising texts. You cannot use it [what you have memorised] and cannot see any visible effects and therefore you become less motivated. But I'm sure that it benefits us a lot in the long term if we persevere in doing this. It may become less painful as we form a habit of doing this and memorise more texts. (Xujia, LP, U)

5889 Since the practice of textual memorisation is largely operating on voluntary basis at
5890 tertiary level, the choice of material becomes an issue for them. One participant even
5891 asked the interviewer for suggestions at the end of the interview:

5892
5893 *I want to ask a question about learning texts by heart. For people like me*
5894 *whose English is not very good, what kind of texts should I use to recite? New*
5895 *Concept English, texts in the textbook or others? (Xujia, LP, U)*
5896

5897 The textual material chosen to memorise is important because, according to one
5898 participant, it affects how much she can get from such an effortful task:

5900 *In the worst case, you may find only several sentences are useful for you after*
5901 *reciting a whole text. (Lixia, LP, U)*
5902

5903 In such a case, '[T]he ratio of quality and price is not very high' (Lixia, LP, U). The
5904 choice of material thus has direct impact on the efficiency of the practice, another
5905 pragmatic issue mentioned by some college students. Another participant offered an
5906 intriguing viewpoint on this issue:

5908 *We usually choose the food to eat which tastes best for us, but it is not*
5909 *necessarily the most nutritious one. It applies to choosing texts as well. In*
5910 *order to maximise the benefit of text memorisation, we need to choose those*
5911 *[articles] which contains a variety of sentence structures and vocabulary.*
5912 *There might be a conflict. Some articles have many complicated sentences*
5913 *which make the process of memorisation more difficult and frustrating. But*
5914 *sometimes it is these sentences whose structures are exactly what we need to*
5915 *learn. (Eli, LP, U)*
5916

5917 Again, the college students' more mature and dispassionate attitude was reflected in
5918 this comment. Indeed, the aforementioned problems are all down to the choice of
5919 material for memorisation. A participant in the research of Gao (2007a) found the
5920 memorisation of song lyrics helpful with her English learning, a type of text
5921 memorisation which was not mentioned by any of the participants in my study:

5923 I have tried to memorise song lyrics. They were actually quite simple, but they
5924 helped me express deep feelings. ... I learnt to express the same thing in many
5925 different ways. (Jing, quoted in Gao, 2007a: 100)

5926

5927 Realising the benefits of text memorisation for their foreign language learning,
5928 Chinese learners seem to be seriously exploring what should be memorised, as in the
5929 following comment (made by a college student) reported in Gao's (2007a) study:

5930

5931 It is important for me to memorise certain English texts. But I cannot
5932 memorise everything, that is why I need to do some research to know what
5933 should be memorised. (Zhixuan, quoted in Gao, 2007a: 213)

5934

5935 The issue of choosing materials for memorisation also concerns teachers in terms of
5936 how text memorisation should be implemented by in foreign language teaching (see
5937 7.2.3 in the following section for teacher participants' comments).

5938

5939 **7.2 Perceptions across three educational levels: teacher group**

5940

5941 This section moves on to report the results of cross-educational level examination of
5942 data elicited from teacher participants.

5943

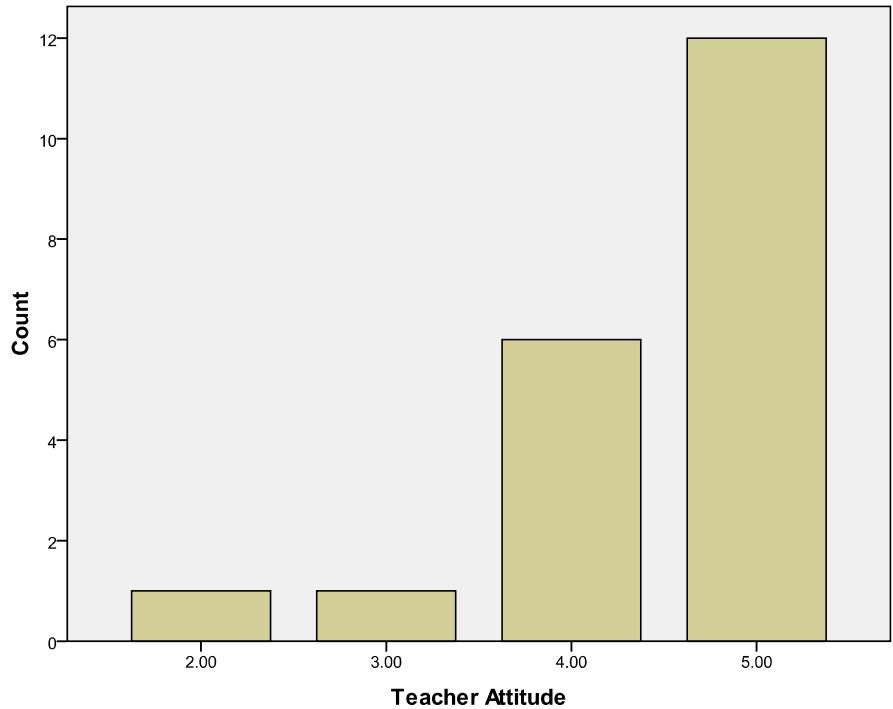
5944 **7.2.1 Attitudes towards the use of text memorisation in foreign language teaching**

5945

5946 The teachers' overall attitudes towards the use of text memorisation in their English
5947 teaching, as expressed in responses to questionnaire item No.1 (see Appendix 2, Part
5948 II), are graphically displayed in Figure 7.4. More detailed categorisation of the
5949 teachers' attitudes by educational level can be found in Table 7.4 and Figure 7.5.

5950

Figure 7.4 Teachers' Attitudes towards the Usefulness of Text Memorisation in teaching (Responses to Questionnaire Item No.1 in Appendix 2, Part II)



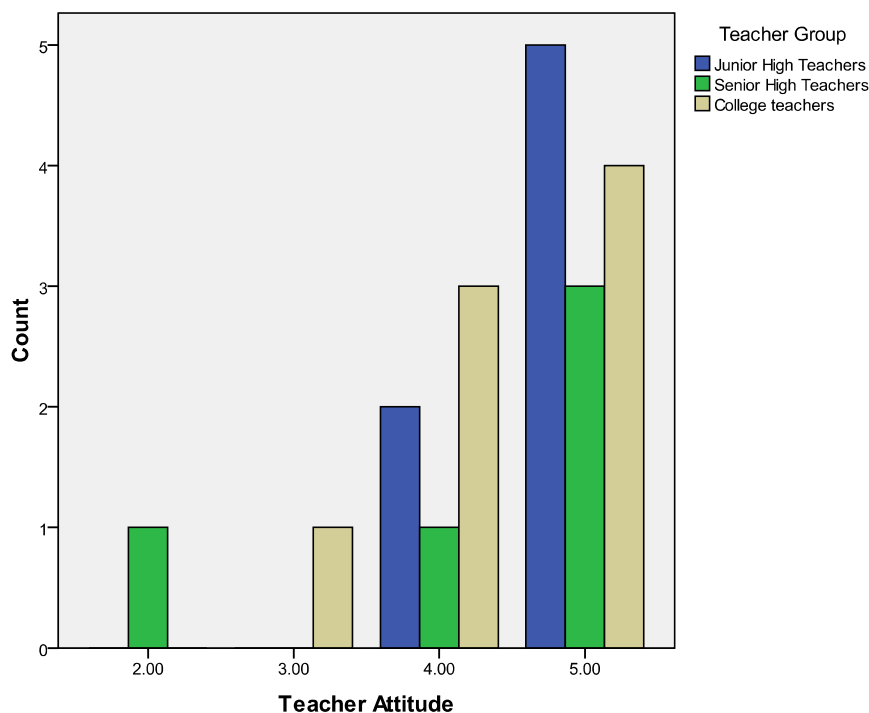
Note¹¹⁵. 5=very useful; 4=relatively useful; 3=not sure; 2=not too useful

Table 7.4 Teachers' Attitudes towards the Use of Text Memorisation in Foreign Language Teaching (N=20)

Attitude	Number of learners expressing attitude		
	Junior High(7)	Senior High(5)	College(8)
Very useful	5 (71%)	3 (60%)	4 (50%)
Moderately useful	2 (29%)	1 (20%)	3 (38%)
Not sure	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	1 (12%)
Not too useful	0 (0%)	1 (20%)	0 (0%)

¹¹⁵ The teachers' attitudes were converted to the labels listed in the first column of the table according to their responses to the statement 'Text memorisation is a useful practice in foreign language teaching and learning' (see Appendix 2, Part II, questionnaire item No.1). That is to say, 5 (strongly agree) = very useful, 4 (agree) = moderately useful, 3 (neither agree nor disagree) = not sure, 2 (disagree) = not too useful, 1 (strongly disagree) = not useful at all.

Figure 7.5 Teachers' Attitudes towards the Use of Text Memorisation: Across-Educational Level Comparison (Responses to Questionnaire Item No.1 in Appendix 2, Part II)



Note. 5=very useful; 4=moderately useful; 3=not sure; 2=not too useful

The numbers show that the great majority of teachers positively view text memorisation and back the use of it in foreign language learning. However, there were two teachers who hesitated to give this practice a positive rating. One was teaching in senior high school who talked about the issue rather pragmatically:

I don't require my students to recite texts, but ask them to memorise useful phrases and sentences. The texts in senior high school are usually long so that it is not very practical [to memorise texts]. And the key issue is: What's the

5982 *purpose of learning texts by heart? It doesn't have much to do with exams.*

5983 *(Wangting, TP, SH)*

5984
5985 The other nonconformist is a university teacher who repeatedly used the expression
5986 'it depends' (Wangshu, TP, U) by which she actually emphasised that materials
5987 chosen for memorisation really matter:

5988
5989 *To let the students memorise texts in the textbook is not very meaningful – they*
5990 *forget next week if they memorise this week. ... They should learn by heart*
5991 *some classic stuff written by masters – better those that are concise in words*
5992 *and profound in meaning so that they can quote it somewhere in their own*
5993 *writing if appropriate. (Wangshu, TP, U)*

5994
5995 Although this participant chose 'Not sure' for the statement 'Text memorisation is a
5996 very useful practice in foreign language teaching and learning' in questionnaire
5997 survey (see Appendix 2, Part II, Item No.1), she did say the following at the beginning
5998 of the interview: 'Text memorisation as a way of learning is advantageous and has
5999 something to do with [successful] foreign language learning' (Wangshu, TP, U).

6000
6001 While the overall attitudes of teacher participants from the three educational levels
6002 were very similar, the teachers in junior high schools seem to be most enthusiastic
6003 about the use of text memorisation in that all of them rate it positively and over 70%
6004 of them perceive it to be 'very useful' (see Table 7.4 and Figure 7.4). This is
6005 consistent with an almost unanimous perception emerging from the interview data:

6006
6007 *...it is absolutely necessary for students to do this [text memorisation] at the*
6008 *beginning stage. (Jiajie, TP, JH)*

6009
6010 *... recitation is something essential in foreign language learning, especially*
6011 *for beginners. (Shuqiong, TP, U)*

6012 6013 **7.2.2 Reasons for the use of text memorisation in foreign language teaching in** 6014 **China**

Teachers justified their positive rating of the use of text memorisation in foreign language teaching with a number of strongly argued points (see 6.3.2 in Chapter 6). Although their justifications were mainly from a subjective perspective, they also mentioned a few objective reasons why the practice has been in existence in foreign language teaching in China. These context-constrained reasons have been listed in Table 7.5 with the number of participants referring to them from each teacher group. The quantitative tally, however, needs to be treated with caution. These reasons were all mentioned in passing by the participants when they were responding to a set of predetermined questions or my spontaneous follow-up questions. The fact that some teachers did not mention a particular reason does not necessarily mean that they did not share it, but it may indicate it is not of great significance or concern to them.

Table 7.5 Teachers' Reasons for the Use of Text Memorisation in Foreign Language Teaching (N=20)

Reason	Number of learners mentioning reason		
	Junior High(7)	Senior High(5)	College(8)
No language environment ¹¹⁶	7	4	7
Test-oriented education ¹¹⁷	5	2	0
Culture of learning ¹¹⁸	2	1	1

All of the teachers supporting the use of text memorisation in foreign language teaching defended their view with reference to the lack of a natural second language environment in China:

For most Chinese, we don't have a language environment so that we have to learn through imitating others. (Yangke, TP, SH)

After all, we don't have natural language input. (Shuqiong, TP, U)

¹¹⁶ This reason was mentioned by all participants except two (*Wangting(TP,SH)* and *Wangshu(TP,U)*) who are not very supportive of the use of text memorisation in foreign language teaching.

¹¹⁷ The teachers mentioning the reasons are: (Junior High) *Yuli, Jiajie, Yaoqing, Liangying, Tangming*; (Senior High) *Liangqing, Yangke*.

¹¹⁸ The teachers mentioning the reasons are: (Junior High) *Wennu, Liangying*; (Senior High) *Yeli*; (College) *Hongying*.

6044

6045 *Unlike in foreign countries, we don't have that good condition [in terms of*
6046 *language environment]*. (Luyi, TP, U)

6047

6048 These teachers seem to be suggesting that text memorisation is one of the best
6049 practices they can choose to cope with an adverse language learning context where
6050 'the limited exposure to English beyond the classroom is a structural condition for
6051 every learner and teacher to endure and overcome' (Gao, 2007b: 261). As one teacher
6052 summarized:

6053

6054 *It's all down to the different language environment. ... Although our foreign*
6055 *teacher never thinks it is necessary for students to memorise texts, I still*
6056 *believe it is indispensable in our Chinese condition.* (Liangying, TP, JH)

6057

6058

6059 Interestingly, while not having a natural second language acquisition environment is a
6060 universal justification among the participants for the existence of text memorisation in
6061 China, only four teachers related the practice of text memorisation to traditional
6062 Chinese literacy education. One said,

6063

6064 *It is similar to our traditional way of Chinese learning. In addition to*
6065 *extensive reading, some classic texts are required to be recited. After all, both*
6066 *are about learning a language.* (Liangying, TP, JH)

6067

6068 Although text memorisation as a way of learning Chinese was rarely used by the
6069 participants to defend their use of it in learning English, their belief in the importance
6070 of text memorisation might be influenced by their previous experience of learning
6071 Chinese. As one student participant mentioned in passing: '*We even do this [text*
6072 *memorisation] when learning our mother tongue. We were required to memorise*
6073 *some texts in Chinese textbooks*' (Shuhan, LP, SH). Previous research also
6074 documented a learner's relation of mother tongue (Chinese) learning with English
6075 learning: 'It is important for a language learner to memorise when learning his or her
6076 mother tongue. It is also important for me to memorise certain English texts'
6077 (Zhixuan, quoted in Gao, 2007a: 213).

6078

6079 Another teacher referred to a ‘culture of learning’ (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996):

6080

6081 *This [memorisation] is a traditional way of learning which is more likely to be*
6082 *acceptable to Chinese. When we start learning something, we tend to commit*
6083 *them to memory. It becomes a mode of entry into learning, which is not*
6084 *necessarily bad. ...There is an issue of learning habit. There is also something*
6085 *to do with Chinese culture of learning. (Yeli, TP, SH)*

6086

6087 The ‘culture of learning’ is undoubtedly a tacit parameter of many of the attitudes or
6088 beliefs held by the teachers insomuch as ‘any particular culture of learning will have
6089 its roots in the educational, and, more broadly, cultural traditions of the community or
6090 society in which it is located’ (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996: 169). However, the practice of
6091 text memorisation is rarely talked about with the awareness of cultural specificity. The
6092 ‘take-for-granted’ concept is evident in a few teachers’ utterance: *‘I don’t believe the*
6093 *foreigners never memorise something when they are learning a language’ (Hongying,*
6094 *TP, U)*. It seems that cultural discourse has been easily obliterated by awareness of
6095 contextual constraints such as the acquisition-poor foreign language environment and
6096 exam-oriented learning. While acknowledging the indelible cultural mark left on
6097 many of the comments made by the participants, it is argued here that they hold
6098 positive beliefs about text memorisation not necessarily because they consider it to be
6099 consistent with traditional Chinese culture and values, as was indicated in some
6100 previous research¹¹⁹ (cf. X.-P. Li, 2005), but more likely because they thought *‘there*
6101 *is rationality for its existence in a Chinese context’ (Yeli, TP, SH)*.

6102

6103 The most striking difference between teachers from the three educational levels in
6104 terms of the contextual reasons for the use of text memorisation in foreign language
6105 teaching was the mention of test-oriented education that China is famous for. It is not
6106 surprising that this topic was initiated by most secondary school teachers interviewed,
6107 but not by the teachers in college, since secondary schools are under the great

416 119 This research differs from the present study in that it investigates Chinese EFL learners’
417 beliefs about the role of rote learning in vocabulary learning strategies.

6109 pressure from Zhongkao¹²⁰ and Gaokao¹²¹, two high-stakes examinations in China.
6110 What was surprising was the inconsistency among the teachers' comments on text
6111 memorisation in relation to test-oriented education. Some secondary teachers,
6112 especially senior high school teachers viewed the use of text memorisation as partially
6113 being a result of test-oriented education. For example:

6114

6115 *Learning texts by heart is for their [the students'] better command of*
6116 *grammar and therefore has more to do with exams. We do text memorisation*
6117 *mainly – probably 70% in degree – for coping with Gaokao. (Yangke, TP, SH)*

6118

6119 However, one teacher – the only one who claimed to have not used text memorisation
6120 in teaching among all secondary school teachers interviewed – stated that she omitted
6121 the practice because she thought it could not effect immediate and obvious benefit in
6122 terms of improving the students' performance in exams:

6123

6124 *Reading comprehension and cloze tests [in the English exam] test the*
6125 *integrated ability rather than the stuff in the texts. ... Although learning some*
6126 *texts by heart is better than not, the chance of considerably raising the scores*
6127 *in exams [through memorising texts] is very slim. (Wangting, TP, SH)*

6128

6129 While the scale was balanced on the issue of whether the use of text memorisation
6130 was an indication of the backwash effect of high-stakes examinations, the teachers
6131 almost unanimously acknowledged the intrinsic value of the practice on top of its
6132 utilitarian value:

6133

6134 *Of course, during the course of coping with Gaokao [through memorising*
6135 *texts], you naturally improve your oracy and other aspects [of language*
6136 *ability]. (Yangke, TP, SH)*

6137

6138 The opinion was further illustrated by one participant as follows:

418 120 A Chinese acronym for Senior High School Entrance Examination.

419 121 A Chinese acronym for National College Entrance Examination, an academic examination
420 held annually in the mainland of the People's Republic of China. This examination is a
421 prerequisite for entrance into almost all higher education institutions at the undergraduate level.

6139

6140 *I think it [text memorisation] is indispensable for students either in test-*
6141 *oriented education or use-oriented education. ... As for the use-oriented*
6142 *education in which use and speaking is emphasised, it is also beneficial to the*
6143 *students. ... I think we should use more text memorisation in such*
6144 *circumstances. Let me give you an example. We usually have parallel classes*
6145 *and advanced classes in China. You can only have communicative activities*
6146 *successfully carried out in advanced classes, but never in parallel classes.*
6147 *This is because the students in advanced classes have accumulated more and*
6148 *memorised more. (Liangqing, TP, SH, in Appendix 6)*

6149

6150 In summary, the ‘Junior High’ group and ‘Senior High’ group, comparatively, had
6151 more correspondence with each other than with the ‘College’ group in that they both
6152 constantly related the practice of text memorisation to exams.

6153

6154 **7.2.3 Problems in using text memorisation in foreign language teaching and** 6155 **teachers’ countermeasures**

6156

6157 Overall, the teacher participants held an overwhelmingly positive attitude towards the
6158 use of text memorisation in foreign language teaching. However, it does not mean that
6159 they did not experience difficulties or problems in applying this practice in practical
6160 teaching. Three salient problems reported by teachers are listed in Table 7.6 below.
6161 From the reading of the table, we can see that all listed problems were mentioned by
6162 secondary teachers. The reason why college teachers did not report any problems
6163 concerning the use of text memorisation as a teaching device may well be due to the
6164 fact that, as mentioned in 7.1.3, memorisation of texts is usually mandatory in
6165 secondary schools (especially in junior high schools), but normally operates on
6166 voluntary basis at tertiary level¹²².

6167

422 122 This conclusion is based on both the qualitative data of the current study and my personal
423 learning and teaching experience in China. For instance, one participant reported, ‘I asked my
424 friends in No.1, 3 and 29 Middle School and [they told me that] their teachers also require them
425 to memorise texts’ (Penglin, LP, SH).

Table 7.6 Teachers' Problems in Using Text Memorisation in Foreign Language Teaching (N=20)

Problem	Number of learners mentioning problem		
	Junior High(7)	Senior High(5)	College(8)
Limited time	3	4	0
Keep students' interest	5	1	0
Differentiation	6	3	0

Before embarking on my discussion, I also need to remind the reader that although this section concerns teachers' perceived problems in using text memorisation in their foreign language teaching, I will also describe some of the teachers' positive pedagogic decisions and practices in tackling mentioned problems, which emerged as an interesting theme from the analysis of the interview data.

The most frequently mentioned problem by secondary teachers was the lack of time:

*... because time does not allow us to do this [memorising all texts].
(Tangming, TP, JH)*

The students have limited time as they have loads of assignments in other subjects. (Jiajie, TP, JH)

*In fact, they [students] have very limited time to do text memorisation.
(Liangqing, TP, SH, in Appendix 6)*

In coping with the issue of limited time, the teachers usually chose to reduce the amount of memorisation task:

...we teachers don't require them to memorise the whole text or very long paragraphs.... (Liangqing, TP, SH, in Appendix 6)

... we do it [text memorisation] selectively. I suggest that the students memorise more paragraphs and sentences. (Tamgming, TP, JH)

6201

6202 Some teachers also used alternatives to text memorisation:

6203

6204 *It is completely impractical to require students to memorise long articles.... In*
6205 *this case, I will ask them to retell the text in their own words, but at the same*
6206 *time, using the new structures learned in the text. (Tangming, TP, JH)*

6207

6208 The second issue often mentioned by most secondary teachers is that of students'
6209 tolerance or interest in doing the practice, especially when it comes to young learners.

6210 It was generally acknowledged that '*keeping students' interest is very important*'
6211 *(Jiajie, TP, JH)* and the encouragement of more textual memorisation should be on the
6212 premise that '*... it does not pose a psychological burden [to the students]*' *(Liuxia, TP,*
6213 *JH)*. The choice of material therefore becomes of vital importance:

6214

6215 *The choice of the texts for memorisation is obviously important. They should*
6216 *not be too long and too boring. (Yuli, TP, JH)*

6217

6218 *...we need to choose materials that make sense to the students or interest them*
6219 *in accordance with their ages. (Liuxia, TP, JH)*

6220

6221 One teacher suggested:

6222

6223 *... the students may well be given the right to choose one they like among a*
6224 *short list of articles chosen by the teacher because everyone has different*
6225 *interests. They are more likely to be 'using their heart' if they are memorising*
6226 *stuff they are interested in. They will not be very willinghearted if they are*
6227 *forced to recite an article they don't like at all. (Wenna, TP, JH, in Appendix*
6228 *6)*

6229

6230 Another teacher used the scheme of time allocation to ease the students' psychological
6231 burden:

6232

6233 *We can increase the frequency of memorisation but decrease the amount each*
6234 *time. It's similar to having more meals but smaller portions. In this way, the*

6235 *students may feel less bored and more easily gain a sense of achievement.*

6236 *(Liuxia, TP, JH)*

6237

6238 It is generally agreed among the teachers that teachers' control over the quality as well
6239 as quantity of the material for students to memorise is crucial in maximising the
6240 benefits and minimise the side-effects of the practice of text memorisation.

6241

6242 Another issue the teachers need to tackle was differentiation in using text
6243 memorisation in foreign language teaching. There are two aspects of dealing with the
6244 problem: one is about having different students meet different standards or
6245 requirements, the other is concerned with adapting the standard of practicing text
6246 memorisation. In the first case, the rationale behind the teachers' measure was
6247 straightforward; namely, to accommodate the memorisation assignment to the
6248 students' ability:

6249

6250 *We require the excellent students to recite the whole text and the average the*
6251 *selected paragraphs. As for the poorest group, they only need to be able to*
6252 *read the text aloud in an acceptable manner. (Liangying, TP, JH)*

6253

6254 Reading the text aloud as a substitution for learning by heart, though considered by
6255 many teachers as qualitatively different from the latter¹²³, might be feasible for those
6256 who find the task too demanding. According to a participant, '*being fluent in reading*
6257 *aloud is the first step [of learning by heart]*' (Tangming, TP, JH). A similar practice
6258 was reported in previous study by a Chinese learner: 'It was difficult to memorize the
6259 text but I instead read it aloud at least 30 times.' (Interviewee 26, quoted in Jiang,
6260 2008: 131). Reading aloud, a learning behaviour that text memorisation normally
6261 involves, is 'still widely used in China at every stage of literacy acquisition' (Parry,
6262 1998: 65; see also Cortazzi & Jin, 2010). Although general ELT methodology
6263 literature does not recommend this practice (see, however, Gibson, 2008 for a
6264 different argument), interview data in the present study demonstrate a positive
6265 response from my participants:

426 123 16 participants out of 20 responded positively to the item 'Having learned a text by heart is
427 qualitatively different from being fluent in reading aloud a text' (see Appendix 2, Part II, Item
428 No.9).

6266

6267 *I enjoy reading a text aloud. I feel comfortable when I hear my own voice*
6268 *while I say aloud [texts] for memorisation. (Xuying, LP, U)*

6269

6270 *Sometimes, I read aloud an English newspaper with varying tones. I feel*
6271 *comfortable in doing so. (Yunpeng, LP, U)*

6272

6273 *In fact, the best way to memorise [a text] is through reading aloud using your*
6274 *mouth. ... Memorising through silent reading is much less effective than*
6275 *reading aloud. (Hongying, TP, U, in Appendix 6)*

6276

6277 These data also echo the following report by Chinese learners in previous research:

6278

6279 I think that it helps improve my linguistic skills when reading these texts aloud
6280 for memorisation. For instance, I could improve my intonation ... I think it is
6281 important to recite. Recitation is important when learning a language.
6282 (Zhixuan, quoted in Gao, 2007a: 101).

6283

6284 As for the second point, the rigid practice of verbatim memorisation as in Chinese
6285 literacy education was seen as not absolutely necessary as the teachers are aware of
6286 the difficulties the students are experiencing:

6287

6288 *I noticed the increasing difficulties the students encounter when the texts*
6289 *become more complex. For example, the students complain that some words of*
6290 *the same meaning appear in a text repeatedly like 'often', 'usually' and*
6291 *'always'. It is hard for them to accurately recall which one is in which*
6292 *sentence. I became more tolerant in such cases. I allow them to use these*
6293 *words interchangeably. ... We don't need to require the students to recite*
6294 *verbatim without any change which is insignificant. (Jiajie, TP, JH)*

6295

6296 As mentioned earlier, the aforementioned problems (limited time and keeping
6297 students' interest and differentiation) were not found in university teachers'
6298 comments. Unlike in secondary school, memorisation of texts is no longer a
6299 mandatory assignment in college and therefore the teachers have much less control

over the students' actual practice. The attitude expressed in the following account is not atypical among college teachers:

To memorise [texts] or not is a matter of their [students'] own choice. They may not like this method, or they don't see the need to use it because they are already good enough. As a teacher, I would suggest them to use this method as I know it should be beneficial to them if they really understand the purpose of the practice and persevere at doing it. (Qinxin, TP, U)

The fact that university teachers are normally much less involved in the monitoring process of students' memorisation of texts does not mean that this practice is not emphasised institutionally at tertiary level. College students are still expected to memorise a certain amount of texts to improve their linguistic competence, as is demonstrated in the following account:

For foundation-laying modules like Integrated English and Advanced English, which are designed to improve [students'] linguistic competence, there are chosen texts for students to memorise in each unit. The lecturers in charge of these modules co-decided which texts are selected for memorisation. ... One of these texts will be tested in the final term examination. (Jiean, TP, U)

While this teacher is talking about the case of teaching students majoring in English, the practice of text memorisation is also encouraged among non-English majors in some colleges:

In the textbook [College English – Integrated Course (Y.-H. Li, et al., 2001)] we are using, there is a regular assignment of learning by heart several paragraphs in the main text in each unit. In order to urge students to do this, we have a special section called 'cloze test' in the final examination paper. Students are required to fill in the missing words or phrases in one or two paragraphs chosen from those they are expected to memorise. (Xiaohong, TP, U)

7.3 Conclusion

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6335 In the previous sections findings and discussions have been presented that address one
6336 of the research questions in the study, that is, whether there are any commonalities
6337 and differences across educational level regarding the learners and teachers' use and
6338 beliefs on learning texts by heart. Given the relatively small size of the sample and the
6339 diversity of the participants' background, I have not been able to present a conclusive
6340 summary of the participants' views. However, it is clear that in both learner and
6341 teacher groups, the usefulness of the practice of text memorisation to foreign language
6342 learning and teaching is generally acknowledged, though, to varying degrees.

6343

6344 In terms of diversity in the learner group, the most striking aspect emerging from the
6345 analysis of data is that the more experienced learners (notably college students) are
6346 able to perceive the use of text memorisation from the point of view of its intrinsic
6347 value while the learners at beginning stages (especially junior high students) tend to
6348 focus on the utilitarian value of the practice. As regards the teacher group, the
6349 diversity relates to the practical use of text memorisation in teaching which was much
6350 more frequently reported by secondary teachers (especially junior high school
6351 teachers) than their university counterparts. Moreover, secondary teachers are found
6352 to be immensely involved in the practice whereas the university teachers only serve as
6353 an advisor. This may be in line with the institutional practice that text memorisation is
6354 in most cases an obligatory assignment in secondary schools, especially in junior high
6355 schools, but a voluntary choice at tertiary level.

6356

6357 If the relatively small sample used in this study can be taken as indicative, it would
6358 appear that the contemporary pedagogic practice of text memorisation in China is
6359 starting to bear some basic positive features such as differentiating tasks to suit
6360 students' ability and choosing texts to cater for students' interest. Chinese teachers
6361 seem to be carefully studying this traditional practice, making changes echoing what
6362 constitutes a humanistic view of learning.

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CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The aims of this dissertation, as set out in Chapter 1, are as follows:

- 1 to explore relevant literature in order to offer a systematic analysis of the role of memorization in (language) education in general and in relation to Chinese learners in particular; and
- 2 to report on a interview-based empirical study which investigates the Chinese beliefs and practices regarding text memorisation as a learning/teaching device by accessing individual voices of a group of learners and teachers.

To be specific, the study was conducted with the following objectives in mind:

- 1 to further the understanding of the values of traditional Chinese education practices and Chinese perception of learning through the lens of text memorisation;
- 2 to provide a potential reinterpretation of the Confucian philosophy of learning and traditional language teaching practices in China in order to query to what extent they are relevant to modern language education;
- 3 to move beyond stereotyped and superficial interpretation of Chinese ways of learning by conducting in-depth interviews with a group of Chinese learners and teachers from different educational levels;
- 4 to offer heuristics that can yield guidance to domestic foreign language teachers as well as western-origin EFL/ESL teachers/researchers who are or will be working with Chinese learners in a intercultural communication contexts.

In this concluding chapter, I will summarise what has been attempted and achieved as far as these goals are concerned, followed by discussions of pedagogical implications and suggestions for future research.

8.1 Summary

The summary of the thesis is in two parts: the review of the literature on (text) memorisation and the empirical investigation.

8.1.1 Literature review

The review of the literature was organised around three vantage-points. The first is the historical overview of the practice of text memorisation both in China and outside China. Building upon a stock of records which I have so far accessed, I have pushed for the following message: Text memorisation is by no means unique to Confucian heritage China. In effect, (text) memorisation had been central in Anglophone western education up to the recent past. In addition, there was no dearth of positive voices for text memorisation from Western scholars although it has been seriously attacked in mainstream education in the modern West. The fact warrants explication that text memorisation has survived in China and is still being extensively practiced in foreign language learning and teaching.

The second vantage-point I have taken is to examine the concept of memorisation in relation to Chinese learners and Confucian philosophy of learning. In this section, a substantial survey was conducted following three strands: (1) memorisation and learning; (2) memorisation and Chinese learners; and (3) the relevance of Confucian thought on education to contemporary education.

In pursuing each of the above inquiries, I have attempted to put across my own thoughts. The first line of inquisition is directed at two questions central to our understanding of the relationship between memorisation and learning: (a) Is memorisation legitimate in learning? (b) Is memorisation doomed to be incompatible with critical thinking? By making a critical review of Freire's interpretation of knowledge and drawing insights from Dewey's notion of learning, I argued that memorisation and retention of ready-made knowledge is not only legitimate in but an indispensable component of learning. More importantly, memorisation may not necessarily be incompatible with critical thinking.

In regard to the second line of inquiry, I have tried to solve the paradox of Chinese learners by drawing on the insights in the existing literature. The Chinese conception of memorisation is expounded in relation to understanding, repetition and creativity. Such culture-oriented analysis leads to the conclusion that Chinese learners' practice and view of memorisation may be best understood from the perspective of Confucian precepts for learning.

The third vantage-point I opted for understanding memorisation was a conceptual exploration of Audiolingualism which the practice of text memorisation fits into methodologically. Taking the relationship between memorisation and Audiolingualism as a point of departure, I have pointed out that memorisation is heavily emphasised in ALM despite its western origin. It has then been argued that the methodological principles underlying ALM coincide with the memorization-emphasised Chinese culture of learning. Guided by this conception, I have been able to explain why ALM, as opposed to CLT, was successfully integrated into ELT in China while it fell from favour in the West as early as half a century ago. A central message that I have attempted to convey here is that problems with the ALM identified through the lens of western culture seem to have not constituted insurmountable barriers in the eyes of learners bred in Chinese culture. Finally discussed in this chapter were the strengths of traditional language teaching in China (notably the practice of memorisation of textual materials) and how we can exploit them in modern situations.

Up to this point, I believe the first of the two aims I set for the thesis has been achieved, namely:

to offer a systematic analysis of the role of memorization in (language) education in general and in relation to Chinese learners in particular.

8.1.2 The empirical investigation

The second goal of this dissertation is, to repeat:

6477 to investigate Chinese beliefs and practices regarding text memorisation as a
6478 learning/teaching device by accessing individual voices of a group of
6479 Chinese learners and teachers.

6480

6481 Drawing upon insights from the review of memorization in the conceptual study, an
6482 empirical study was proposed. The study set the following as its goals:

6483

6484 1 to explore Chinese views of foreign language learning through the lens of
6485 text memorization which is not commonly used in other learning cultures; and
6486 2 to understand the values of text memorisation perceived by Chinese
6487 learners/teachers.

6488

6489 To that end, it set out to research two questions:

6490

6491 1 What are Chinese learners/teachers' practices and perceptions of the use of
6492 text memorization in foreign language learning/teaching?

6493 2 How can the emerged features of the learners/teachers' perceptions be
6494 explained?

6495

6496 Data were collected through a series of in-depth interviews and a small-scale survey.
6497 A group of Chinese learners and teachers of English (with only one exception of a
6498 Russian teacher) served as informants. They were chosen from three educational
6499 levels which constitute the main part of the English education system and affect the
6500 largest number of English language learners in China. While comparison was made
6501 across educational levels, there is no attempt to compare the learner group and teacher
6502 group. Part of the data from interviews with teachers was also incorporated into the
6503 discussion of learners' perceptions in Chapter 5 where the teachers were seen as
6504 advanced learners.

6505

6506 The investigation began by looking at what Chinese learners have to say about the
6507 practice of text memorization. In light of the conceptual issues discussed in Chapters
6508 2 and 3, the interview guide (see Appendix 1) was designed to explore:

6509

- 1) whether and why learners consider text memorization has been beneficial to their foreign learning experience;
- 2) what difficulties they have experienced in using text memorisation in their English learning; and
- 3) how they perceive the potential problems that might be brought about by heavy use of text memorization.

The data collected in the study show that learners' response to their experience of text memorisation was overwhelmingly positive in terms of its helpfulness to their English learning although a few limitations of the practice were also reported. The finding confirms the understanding reached by earlier research (e.g. Ding, 2004; Ding, 2007). While the previous analogous study (Ding, 2004) was focused on a small group (n=22) of successful Chinese tertiary English majors using journal entries as a research tool, the current study, mainly based on in-depth interviews, drew on a bigger sample of Chinese learners (n=62) with a diversified background in age, educational level, language proficiency and the type of affiliated institution. Qualitative analyses of the data led to a number of findings. First, the main reasons provided by the participants as to why they considered the practice of text memorisation had contributed to their foreign language learning were: cultivating the so-called 'language sense', facilitating conscious learning and developing a sense of achievement and therefore building self-confidence. The practice was thus perceived to be beneficial to foreign language learning not only because it linguistically assists and speeds up foreign language learning in one way or another, but also because it affords the learners psychological satisfaction built on their sense of achievement and confidence. Second, it was almost unanimously agreed among the participants that text memorisation is far from being rote-memorisation as it is thought to be exceedingly difficult, if possible at all, to memorise material without preceding understanding of what is to be memorised. Third, memorisation of a considerable amount of texts is believed to eventually lead to original or creative use of the language and facilitate idea development, if such memorisation is in combination with active thinking.

In order to explore the Chinese teachers' perceptions of the use of text memorisation as a teaching device, I set out the following questions to guide the construction of the interview schedule:

- 1) Whether and why the teachers use text memorisation in their foreign language teaching?
- 2) Whether text memorisation should be abandoned in modern multi-media teaching conditions?
- 3) Whether text memorisation limits students' creative use of language and/or idea development?
- 4) Whether text memorisation kills students' interest in learning?

Interpretations of the interview data have led to the findings that the overwhelming majority of the teachers interviewed feel strongly about the practice of text memorisation and insist that it be retained as a part of learners' practice in Chinese foreign language learning. The teachers' positive attitudes towards the practice arise from a number of factors: they do not view the practice as detrimental to learning in terms of learners' development in creativity concerning language use or idea development and neither are they convinced that the practice necessarily has a negative impact on students' motivation. On the contrary, they see many strong points of the practice including internalising language knowledge, automatising production, expediting learning, building a sense of achievement and serving as an overall training for the learner. It is the teachers' common acknowledgement that text memorisation can be a valuable teaching device in the EFL context like China if the students' tolerance and the quality of materials to be memorised are taken into account.

The qualitative data from the in-depth interviews described in Chapters 5 and 6 were then re-examined along with quantitative data from the small-scale survey in an attempt to identify differences in learners/teachers' conceptions across three educational levels (see Chapter 7). The analyses showed that the more experienced learners (notably college students) are able to appreciate the use of text memorisation from the point of view of its intrinsic value (e.g. improving overall linguistic competence) while the learners at beginning stages (especially junior high school

students) tend to focus on the utilitarian value of the practice (i.e. enhancing examination performance). It was also discovered that secondary school teachers reported much more involvement in and control over the students' practice of text memorisation than their university counterparts.

Thus in this empirical inquiry, I not only investigated the Chinese learners' responses to their experiences in memorising texts in foreign language learning, but also made an attempt to understand teachers' perceptions regarding the use of text memorisation as a teaching device in foreign language teaching, which, to my knowledge, has not been discussed in the literature before. Findings have been presented that address the two research questions posited at the outset of the study, that is, how the use of text memorization in foreign language learning and teaching is perceived and practised by Chinese learners and teachers, and how the emerged features of their conceptions can be explained.

Given the relatively small size of the sample, generalised conclusions of the participants' views seem to be impossible, taking account of the diversity of the participants' background. One thing that is clear, however, is that almost all participants consider the use of text memorization conducive to their foreign language learning and teaching to some extent although limitations of the practice were also acknowledged. In addition, participants in the study distinguish between active or flexible memorization and passive or rote memorization (cf. 'good memorization' and 'bad memorization' in Duong, 2006) with the latter being universally viewed negatively whereas the former is thought not incompatible with understanding and creativity. And the actual use of text memorization by teachers started to bear some basic features of good pedagogic practice, displaying flexibility and acclimatization to contemporary conditions of foreign language teaching in China. While some beliefs emerging from the data are ascribable to the combined influence of Chinese conceptions of learning and traditional schooling and literacy practice in China (Y.-Q. Gu, 2003), many of the points brought up by the informants either concur with SLA theories or have considerable justification in general education theory, as was demonstrated in previous chapters. The participants' positive perceptions about text memorization might be more attributable to their experience-based belief on the benefits and practicality of the practice in an EFL context like China than that they

consider the practice to be consistent with traditional Chinese culture (cf. X.-P. Li, 2005). These findings support the characterization of Chinese learners as valuing active and reflective thinking, open mindedness and a spirit of inquiry (Cheng, 2000; Lee, 1996).

8.2 Implications for foreign language teaching

In this section, I explore what implications the findings of the current study hold for pedagogical practice in foreign language education.

It has been documented in literature that many Chinese students have study habits that would appal Western EFL methodologists and teachers. While certain study habits and conceptions of learning have indeed proven to be obstacles to linguistic development or seriously irrelevant to modern foreign language education, some may be somewhat effectual in Chinese context if they are taken to good use. Methods must be examined and the value of each ascertained, depending on their merit in the Chinese setting (J.-Y. Wu, 1983). Twenty-five years ago, Harvey (1985: 186) reminded Western EFL specialists and teachers who were scornful of memorisation methods of learning:

The 'We've got it right' attitude is a waste of time in China. Even if it is true, nobody wants to hear it, except possibly those who have little or nothing to do with teaching.

The current study demonstrates that difference in cultural traditions did play a role in shaping many Chinese learners and teachers' perceptions of the practice of text memorisation. Nevertheless, it remains open to discussion whether all the Chinese cultural and educational values are necessarily inferior to western conceptions. Western methodologists and teachers perhaps need to be reminded again that their culture is not the only right one (Griffin, 1999). The study also suggests that oversimplified attribution of Chinese practices to national culture or overemphasis on the cultural explanation without open-mindedness and willingness to understand what the practitioners actually do and say may result in a dismissive attitude towards Chinese learners as well as Chinese learning practices. Chinese learners, as the study shows,

are thinking and reflective beings who are able to evaluate their learning experiences dispassionately in most cases and are expected to make wise decisions by weighing up pros and cons of a certain practices.

An irresistible trend in language education today is a learner-centred manner of teaching, which calls for the inclusion of and respect for the learner (Brooks-Lewis, 2009). While taking ‘expert talk’ seriously, we should not ignore the voices from those who are actually engaged in learning a foreign language. Indeed, calling for more space given to the perspectives of learners is far from being a new idea; foreign language teaching is a process which ‘aims to empower learners by putting their experiences and knowledge at the centre of the pedagogical process’ (Tollefson 2000: 146; cited in Brooks-Lewis, 2009). Given that language learning is a ‘lived experience intimately involved with people’s sense of worth and identity’ (Cook, 2003), for people who consider text memorisation ‘a learning activity which greatly expedites the kinds of experience which promote acquisition’ (Stevick, 1982: 68), and people who have other sufficient reasons to do it (even if the learner simply desires a feeling of accomplishment) or do not mind doing it at all, the teacher might be encouraged to explore techniques as to maximise the benefits and minimise the side-effects of the practice in foreign language teaching.

As the result of the study indicates, most learners were unable to enjoy the process of memorising texts, which they, nevertheless, thought to be beneficial in one way or another to their foreign language learning. In the context of mainland China where the practice of text memorisation sometimes becomes mandatory for foreign language beginners in some schools, it is the teacher’s responsibility to not only be aware of the hardship the students are going through, but help them take full advantage of the practice while making the process less psychologically challenging. I would like to invite teachers to consider the following two suggestions: First, learners should be given a certain degree of freedom to choose the materials that make sense to them (e.g. relevant to the students’ daily life, interests and needs) under the guidance of teachers who take control over the length and linguistic complexity of the texts to be memorised. Second, teachers should encourage learners and create chances for them to adapt what they have memorised for their own use. For instance, from ‘Ask not

6677 what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country'¹²⁴, the
6678 learners can be guided to construct sentence like 'Ask not what your teacher can do
6679 for you; ask what you can do for yourself'. In brief, the process of learning texts by
6680 heart should be made more a pleasure than a burden. This, of course, relies on our
6681 language teachers' professional commitment to sympathising with our students in the
6682 learning process and transforming their psychological experiences with full
6683 recognition of the humanistic value of foreign language learning.

6684

6685 However, humanism in the field of language teaching should not be taken to the
6686 extreme that we are oblivious to the axioms in language acquisition repeatedly proved
6687 by human experience. Cornelius (1953: 132) noted that 'students cannot be expected
6688 to ... use the foreign language without first having learned ... through observation,
6689 imitation, and continued repetition'. From the fact that overall learners (either in the
6690 present study or previous analogous research) responded positively to the helpfulness
6691 of memorising textual materials with their foreign language learning, I may thus
6692 venture to suggest that repetition and learning by heart be introduced in foreign
6693 language teaching at certain points for certain purposes even in the non-Confucian
6694 heritage culture contexts, even if it is unlikely to 'again form a substantial part of the
6695 language learning process' (Cook, 1994: 139). I cannot see any reason why
6696 memorisation should not be exploited effectively, if it is made an experience
6697 personally meaningful to the learner.

6698

6699 Although the research illustrates that text memorisation may, to a certain degree, play
6700 a positive role in foreign language learning and teaching in China, it by no means
6701 suggests that Chinese resistance to Western pedagogical imports (Hu, 2001, 2002a;
6702 Simpson, 2008) is justifiable. Many participants in the study acknowledged the
6703 strengths of modern Western methodology, but at the same time raised concern about
6704 directly translating Western approaches like CLT to Chinese context. Perhaps, we may
6705 need to be realistic enough to be aware of the contextual constraints: First, while CLT
6706 is primarily assumes an English as a *second* language (ESL) context, China is an
6707 English as a *foreign* language learning context (Simpson, 2008: 384; see also D.- L.
6708 Liu, 1998). However, such contextualisation is often ignored in Western accounts of

429 124 A famous sentence in the inaugural address by John F. Kennedy, the 35th American president.

ELT in China. Second, in the current Chinese examination system, tests have been used as gatekeepers to success more than assessors of success (Han, 1992) and the design of large-scale English exams is based on structuralism (Y.-A. Wu, 2001). Assuming that effective change is unlikely to be managed unless the exam system changes (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996), and if conditions for testing communicative ability remains unimproved, CLT may be doomed to failure in China.

Given these structural constrictions and acknowledging that learners' strategy use is often a choice made possible by learning contexts (cf. Gao, 2007a), a bottom-up process of progression, i.e. starting from what we already have at hand, taking the best of what works and using it where and when it works (Hird, 1995) and at the same time, raising both the teachers and students' awareness of Western educational ideals would be a more pragmatic step towards change than hastily enforcing a radical top-town reform by transplanting Western scientific teaching techniques at a heavy cost. It is thus suggested here that we begin with a relatively moderate approach that will cause piecemeal healthy changes to current pedagogical structure and 'that will cost little to implement' (D. Tang & Absalom, 1998: 128). Perhaps in addition to asking how communicative approaches can be used for ELT in China, we need to also ask how the Confucian heritage can be made good use of for learning English, i.e. how repetition, recitation, mimicry and memorising may be squared with more active and participatory approaches to develop communicative skills (Watkins & Biggs, 1996).

8.3 Limitations and suggestions for future research

As an exploratory study, the current inquiry, needless to say, has a number of methodological limitations, including the limited number and opportunistic nature of the participant sample, which makes generalisations difficult. In addition, the current study relied heavily on the informants' self-report focusing on subjects' own views and interpretations of behaviour, events and situations. Although the trustworthiness of the data has been justified (see 4.3), the content of self-report is often not directly observable and therefore has been criticised for being not objectively verifiable by scientific standards (passim the methodological literature). Given that some of the participants are immature students at the age of 11 or 12 (see Appendix 3), the shortcoming of self-report becomes more noticeable. One conspicuous problem I

6743 realised during the fieldwork was that certain predetermined interview questions were
6744 not very suitable for younger learners. The following episode serves as an example,
6745

6746 Interviewer: Do you think text memorisation will limit one's creativity?

6747 Yixiao (LP, JH): No, not at all.

6748 Interviewer: Why do you think so?

6749 Yixiao (LP, JH): I don't know. I have memorised many texts, but I'm still
6750 creative. This is me.

6751

6752 Despite the foregoing limitations, and the preliminary status of the findings, the study
6753 is intended as a contribution to the understanding of text memorization (as a learning
6754 and teaching device) in its own right as well as of what it means to Chinese language
6755 learners and teachers. Text memorization, a language practice which is rarely found in
6756 non-Chinese cultures today, warrants more research efforts than has been so far
6757 invested given its extensive use among Chinese learners and teachers. There are a few
6758 ways that future research may extend the current inquiry.

6759

6760 First of all, there is a need to know more about to what extent and how text
6761 memorisation is practiced in Chinese schools and institutions at various levels. Since
6762 English has become an obligatory subject in primary schools in urban areas, future
6763 research may target younger learners and their teachers with a focus on direct
6764 observation of the practice as well the insiders' response to their experience. In
6765 addition, comparative studies are needed on the practice of text memorisation in
6766 socioeconomically developed regions and less developed areas to find out whether
6767 there are regional differences in terms of how text memorisation is practiced and
6768 perceived. Comparison can also be made between English learners/teachers who are
6769 affiliated to foreign language schools and ordinary schools at secondary level or
6770 between those who are learning English as a major and those who are learning
6771 English while majoring another subject at tertiary level. Moreover, action research
6772 aiming to explore pragmatic ways to incorporate into CLT some positive elements of
6773 textual memorisation identified in the current study should be a welcome direction of
6774 further inquiry. Finally, future research may resort to other methodologies for further
6775 improvement in understanding the current topic. I would here like to suggest a case
6776 study for exploring such issues (which were not addressed in the current inquiry) as to

how text memorisation is combined with other learning practices in English teaching and learning since a case study potentially allows for varied research angles (Casanave, 2003; J. Flowerdew, 2002). In terms of tools of investigation, while in-depth interviews (which proved effective in the current study) can continue to be used in future research, researchers are encouraged to consider a variety of other tools of inquiry which may include observation, think-aloud protocols and diary or journal entry.

8.4 In closing

Text memorization, a traditional Chinese way of acquiring literacy and classics, has been widely practiced in ELT in China. Prior to launching any meaningful pedagogical reforms in a country like China whose traditional values have persisted in educational practice, language policy makers and methodologists should be informed by the voices from learners and teachers who work in the frontline of foreign language education concerning their own experiences with such traditional practice as text memorization.

This inquiry is revealing about Chinese learners and teachers' perceptions and practices concerning text memorisation in foreign language learning and teaching, and as such serves as a basis to our understanding of its continuing existence. I have attempted to understand Chinese conceptions of language learning and teaching through the lens of text memorisation both as an insider and an outsider. Being an insider – a foreign language learner and teacher who had received all my education, with the exception of my PhD study, in China and worked with Chinese learners for a decade – I have brought high degree of familiarity with the research topic and the situation it is to be construed. Being an outsider – a student researcher who has been immersed in British education environment for over three years – has afforded me a perspective to critically reflect on the values and beliefs rooted in my home culture that underlie the visible learning behaviours. I have aspired in this thesis to portray the practice and conceptions of Chinese learners and teachers regarding their use of text memorisation in foreign language learning and teaching in an honest and open manner while conveying the wonder and surprise that I was privileged to experience with my mixed background throughout this inquiry.

6811

6812 Both traditional Chinese language teaching and Western methodology have their own
6813 strengths and deficiencies. A hybrid of the two would be my suggestion which is
6814 meant to *qu chang bu duan* [a Chinese idiom, meaning ‘learn from others’ strong
6815 points to offset one’s weaknesses’]. This balanced attitude is fully expressed in a
6816 Chinese expression:

6817

6818 *Gu wei jin yong, yang wei zhong yong.*

6819 Make the past serve the present and foreign things serve China.

6820

6821 It may be a wiser choice to make no unnecessary boundaries between Chinese and
6822 West, traditional and modern practice only if it proves useful to the development of
6823 the learners’ learning potential to a degree.

6824

6825 Taking as the norm the epistemology underlying the modern Western language
6826 education theories, the existing literature seldom documents how certain practices
6827 which learners from non-Anglophone background have inherited from their own
6828 cultures are appreciated and made good use of. This research illustrates the point that
6829 the traditional practice of text memorisation may well be wrongly accused of being an
6830 ‘outlaw’ and deserves to recover its grace and draw attention from acquisition and
6831 pedagogic theorists. In making this point, the inquiry problematizes the uncritical
6832 assumption that all traditional practices especially those from peripheral cultures are
6833 necessarily irrelevant to contemporary language education. It is therefore essential
6834 that we go beyond a single cultural perspective and

6835

6836 ... learn to invite and to listen to the ‘multiple voices’ and perspectives that
6837 can enlighten our understanding of these [non-Western educational]
6838 traditions, just we must learn to recognise that different groups may, as a
6839 consequence of their sociocultural contexts and backgrounds, possess ‘way
6840 of knowing’ that, although different from our own, may be every bit as
6841 valuable and worthwhile as those to which we are accustomed. (Reagan,
6842 2000: 2)

APPENDICES

Appendix 1 General Questionnaire and Interview Schedule for Learners

Part I Background information

1. Name: ____; Age ____; Sex ____; Years of learning English ____

2. Home Province and City ____

3. English Scores on Final exams last term ____/____

4. English Score on Senior High School Entrance Examination (if

applicable) ____/____

5. English Score on National English Matriculation test (if applicable)

____/____

6. English Scores on IELTS (if applicable) ____/____

7. How do you rate your English proficiency as compared with the proficiency of

other students in your class? Good Fair Poor

8. Telephone: ____

Email: ____

Part II Questionnaire (Please mark the number which best indicates your true feeling.)

1. How much does text memorisation help in your English learning?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much

2. How do you see the process of text memorisation?

Boring 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Interesting

3. Is it necessary for text memorisation to continue to be practiced in English learning in China?

Absolutely not necessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 absolutely necessary

Part III Interview guide

6875

6876 1. Could you recall your experience of learning English through text
6877 memorisation?

6878 ●When and how did you begin to use text memorisation in English learning?

6879 ●Did you continue to use it afterwards?

6880

6881

6882 2. What is your overall opinion on text memorisation?

6883 ●What is your comment on the metaphor 'good medicine that tastes bitter' or
6884 'a thorny rose' (quoted in Ding, 2004)?

6885 ●To quote one student, 'If I recited all the texts, I could get good grades in
6886 tests. So reciting was an easy way to get a good grade.' (quoted in Gao, 2006)
6887 Do you agree?

6888 ●Does the practice help you with your English learning? Why?

6889 ●Do you see any problems when using this method (e.g. *boring, time-*
6890 *consuming, easily forget what has been memorised*)?

6891

6892 3. Do you think this method limits your creative thinking?

6893 ●Is it possible that there are few ideas of your own when you write English
6894 composition?

6895 ●Is it possible that you are inclined to use many clichés or trite terms in your
6896 speaking and writing as a result of text memorisation?

6897 ●Can you improve your communicative competence by using text
6898 memorisation?

6899

6900

6901

6902

6903

6904

Appendix 2 General Questionnaire and Interview Schedule for Teachers

Part I background information

1. Name _____; Sex _____; Age _____;

Affiliation _____;

2. Course(s) you are now teaching _____; Grade in which your students are _____;

2. Years of teaching _____;

3. Final degree _____; 4. Professional title _____

Part II General Questionnaire (working structure of interview guide)

Below there are some beliefs that other EFL teachers have about the practice of learning texts by heart. Please circle the number which best indicates your opinion at the end of each statement. The numbers stand for the following responses:

1= I strongly disagree with this statement

2= I disagree with this statement

3= I neither agree nor disagree with this statement

4= I agree with this statement

5= I strongly agree with this statement

No.	Item description	Choice				
1.	Text memorisation is a very useful practice in foreign language teaching and learning.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I myself benefited a lot from text memorisation when I was learning English.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	I suggest my students learn as many texts by heart as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Text memorisation should be abandoned as modern	1	2	3	4	5

6938 multi-media technology and new teaching methods
6939 are introduced in foreign language teaching.

6940

6941 5. Heavy use of text memorisation restrains students' 1 2 3 4 5
6942 idea development.

6943

6944 6. Heavy use of text memorisation inhibits students' 1 2 3 4 5
6945 creative use of language.

6946

6947 7. Text memorisation should be used in the earlier stages 1 2 3 4 5
6948 of English learning like in primary and secondary school.

6949

6950 8. Learning texts by heart should continue to be used in college. 1 2 3 4 5

6951

6952 9. Having learned a text by heart is qualitatively different from 1 2 3 4 5
6953 being fluent in reading aloud a text.

6954

6955 10. Text memorisation kills students' interest in learning. 1 2 3 4 5

6956

6957

6958 **Part Three Open questions**

6959

- 6960 1. Do you require your students to memorise texts? Why or why not?
- 6961 2. If you have ever used text memorisation in your teaching, please specify what
6962 you did.
- 6963 3. What are the difficulties you have encountered or you think you might have
6964 when using text memorisation as teaching device? (students' cooperation, no
6965 time to check etc.)
- 6966 4. How do you perceive some of the intrinsic problems with text memorisation?
6967 (boring, time-consuming, painstaking etc.)
- 6968 5. What are your suggestions for a better use of this practice in language
6969 teaching?

Appendix 3 List of Interview Participants

Students¹²⁵(42)

Junior High (12)

Yixiao	M	12	Good (148/150)	Grade 1	CQ Foreign Language School
Jinyu	F	11	Fair (119/150)	Grade 1	CQ Jianxin Middle School
Meijun	F	12	Good (145/150)	Grade 1	CQ No.18 Middle School
Kehan	M	11	Fair (120/150)	Grade 1	CQ Bashu Middle School
Yunyou	M	12	poor (90/150)	Grade 1	CQ Foreign Language School
Saijun	F	12	Good (139/150)	Grade 2	CQ Foreign Language School
Yuting	F	14	Fair (116/150)	Grade 3	CQ No. 18 Middle School
Chengcheng	M	15	Poor (91/150)	Grade 3	CQ No. 18 Middle School
Yangkun	M	15	Good (123/150)	Grade 3	CQ No. 18 Middle School
Lijia	F	15	Good (138/150)	Grade 3	CQ No. 18 Middle School
Jingyu	F	14	Poor (86/150)	Grade 3	CQ No. 18 Middle School
Huangpu	M	15	Fair (91/150)	Grade 3	CQ No. 18 Middle School

Senior High (11)

Pingjing	F	15	Fair (107/150)	Grade 1	CQ No.6 Middle School
Shuanglu	F	15	Good (122/150)	Grade 1	CQ No.6 Middle School
Xiaoyu	F	16	Poor (85/150)	Grade 1	CQ Bashu Middle School
Qinglan	F	16	Poor (92/150)	Grade 1	CQ Bashu Middle School
Zhangke	F	17	Fair (110/150)	Grade 2	CQ Foreign Language School
Shuhan	F	17	Good (130/150)	Grade 2	CQ Foreign Language School
Wanxia	F	17	Good (132/150)	Grade 2	CQ Foreign Language School
Chenming	F	16	Good (125/150)	Grade 2	CQ Foreign Language School
Xiaoqing	F	18	Good (120/150)	Grade 3	CQ No.3 Middle School
Xiaoman	F	18	Fair (108/150)	Grade 3	CQ No.3 Middle School

¹²⁵ The listed information in each line (from left to right) is: name (pseudonym), sex, age, English proficiency (score in the latest formal English exam), grade in each educational level, and affiliation. For college students, the name of their home province where they completed their secondary education is provided in the bracket at the end of each line.

7000	Penglin	M	17	Fair (102/150)	Grade 2	CQ Bashu Middle School
7001						
7002	College(19)					
7003	•Participants in China					
7004	Lixia	F		Good (125/150)	Grade 1	SWUPL (Gansu province)
7005	Deqian ¹²⁶	F		Fair (115/150)	Grade 1	SWUPL (Shandong province)
7006	Xiaofeng	F		Fair (115/150)	Grade 1	SWUPL (Guangdong province)
7007	Xujia	M		Fair (107/150)	Grade 1	SWUPL (Sichuan province)
7008	Zhibiao	M		Fair (118/150)	Grade 1	SWUPL (Guangdong province)
7009	Tengjing	F		Good (133/150)	Grade 1	SWUPL (Chongqing)
7010	Yunpeng	M		Good (127/150)	Grade 1	SWUPL (Henan province)
7011	Zhikai	M		Good (125/150)	Grade 2	SWUPL (Jiangsu province)
7012	Wanshi	F		Good (130/150)	Grade 3	SWUPL (Jiangsu province)
7013	Xuying	F		Good (128/150)	Grade 3	SISU (Sichuan province)
7014	Tiantian	F		Good (130/150)	Grade 4	SWUPL (Shandong province)
7015	Xiaodong	M		Good (135/150)	Grade 4	UIBE (Ningxia province)
7016						
7017	•Participants in the UK¹²⁷					
7018	Emma	F	27	Poor (5)	MA	Applied linguistics 4-month
7019	(Yunnan)					
7020	Eli	M	26	Fair (6)	MSc	Chemistry 3-month
7021	(Chongqing)					
7022	Rock	M	27	Poor (5)	MSc	Maritime Engineering 4-month
7023	(Jiangsu)					
7024	Jake	M	23	Good (7 ¹²⁸)	PhD	Ship Engineering 4-month
7025	(Chongqing)					
7026	Leila	F	23	Good (6.5)	MSc	Electronic Engineering 3-month
7027	(Hubei)					

434 126 This participant is a HongKong citizen and completed her primary education in Hongkong.

435 127 The listed information for this special group in each line (from left to right) is: name
436 (pseudonym), sex, age, English proficiency (score in IELTS), degree of study, speciality, time
437 length of stay in the UK and their home province in China.

438 128 This participant took TOEFL and the IELTS score presented here was a converted equivalent
439 to TOEFL.

7028	Heysea	F	22	Poor (5)	MA	Management	2-month
7029	(Beijing)						
7030	Howard	M	23	Good (6.5)	MSc	Electronic Engineering	3-month
7031	(Shenzhen)						
7032							
7033							
7034	<u>Teachers¹²⁹ (20)</u>						
7035							
7036	Junior High (7)						
7037	Yuli	F	34	BA	CQ No. 18 Middle School		15
7038	Wenna	F	26	BA	CD Foreign Language School		4
7039	Liuxia	F	24	BA	Oven English Training School(P)		3
7040	Yaoqing	F	27	BA	CQ Bashu Middle School		5
7041	Liangying	F	38	BA	CQ No.18 Middle School		15
7042	Tangming	F	36	BA	CQ No.3 Middle School		13
7043	Jiajie	F	29	BA	CQ Foreign Language School		4
7044							
7045	Senior High (5)						
7046	Wangting	F	33	BA	CQ No.6 Middle School		10
7047	Zhengping	F	38	BA	CQ Wulidian Vocational School		15
7048	Yangke	F	38	BA	CQ Zhisui Middle School		15
7049	Liangqing	F	37	BA	Chongqing No. 18 Middle School		13
7050	Yeli	F	30	BA	Longman Language Training School		3
7051							
7052	College (8)						
7053	Xiaohong	F	40	BA	SWUPL (Lecturer)		17
7054	Hongying	F	38	MA(Russia)	SWUPL (Lecturer)		6
7055	Peishen	M	65	BA	SWUPL (Associate professor)		41
7056	Shuqiong	F	37	MA	SWUPL (Associate professor)		14
7057	Wangshu	F	35	MA	SWUPL (Lecturer)		7
7058	Qinxin	F	35	MA(UK)	SWUPL (Lecturer)		6
7059	Luyi	M	24	BA	Only Education		1

440 129 The listed information in each line (from left to right) is: name (pseudonym), sex, age, final
441 degree, affiliation (pseudonym) and years of teaching.

7060	Jiean	F	35	MA	LCU (Associate professor)
7061	13				
7062					

Appendix 4 Raw Data from Questionnaire Survey

Students' responses to the questions in questionnaire survey:

1. How much does learning text by heart help in your English learning?

Not at all 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Very much

Junior High		Senior High		College	
Yuting	2	Pingjing	4	Lixia	6
Chengchen					
g	4	Shanglu	5	Deqian	4
Yangkun	7	Xiaoqing	7	Xiaofeng	6
Lijia	5	Xiaoman	6	Xujia	7
Jingyu	5	Penglin	6	Zhibiao	6
Huangpu	4	Xiaoyu	4	Tengjing	5
Saijun	6	Qinglan	4	Yunpeng	4
Yixiao	6	Zhangke	6	Zhikai	7
Jinyu	5	Shuhan	7	Wanshi	6
Meijun	7	Wanxia	7	Xuying	7
		Chenmin			
Kehan	5	g	6	Tiantian	5
Yunyou	4			Xiaodong	7
					not
				Emma	sure
				Eli	5
				Rock	4
				Jake	7
				Leila	7
				Heysea	7
				Howard	6

2. How do you see the process of learning text by heart?

Boring 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Interesting

Junior High		Senior High		College	
Yuting	1	Pingjing	1	Lixia	3
Chengchen					
g	3	Shanglu	4	Deqian	4
Yangkun	7	Xiaoqing	5	Xiaofeng	5
Lijia	6	Xiaoman	4	Xujia	3
Jingyu	5	Penglin	3	Zhibiao	5
Huangpu	2	Xiaoyu	3	Tengjing	2

Saijun	6	Qinglan	3	Yunpeng	6
Yixiao	3	Zhangke	5	Zhikai	6
Jinyu	4	Shuhan	6	Wanshi	5
Meijun	5	Wanxia	7	Xuying	7
		Chenmin			
Kehan	4	g	3	Tiantian	5
Yunyou	2			Xiaodong	5
				Emma	4
				Eli	5
				Rock	4
				Jake	7
				Leila	6
				Heysea	6
				Howard	5

7075

7076 *3. Is it necessary for text memorisation to continue to be practiced in English*

7077 *learning in China? Absolutely not necessary 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 absolutely necessary*

Yuting	3	Pingjing	6	Lixia	4
Chengchen					
g	4	Shanglu	5	Deqian	5
Yangkun	7	Xiaoqing	6	Xiaofeng	5
Lijia	4	Xiaoman	6	Xujia	5
Jingyu	4	Penglin	5	Zhibiao	6
Huangpu	4	Xiaoyu	5	Tengjing	3
Saijun	6	Qinglan	4	Yunpeng	5
Yixiao	4	Zhangke	7	Zhikai	7
Jinyu	5	Shuhan	7	Wanshi	6
Meijun	6	Wanxia	7	Xuying	7
		Chenmin			
Kehan	5	g	5	Tiantian	7
Yunyou	4			Xiaodong	7
				Emma	4
				Eli	6
				Rock	5
				Jake	7
				Leila	6
				Heysea	6
				Howard	6

7078

7079 **Teachers' responses to the items in questionnaire survey:**

7080 1= I strongly disagree with this statement

7081 2= I disagree with this statement

7082 3= I neither agree nor disagree with this statement

7083 4= I agree with this statement

7084 5= I strongly agree with this statement

7085

7086 1. Text memorisation is a very useful practice in foreign language teaching and
7087 learning. 1 2 3 4 5

7088

Junior High		Senior High		College	
Yuli	5	Wangting Zhengpin	2	Xiaohong Hongyin	4
Wenna	5	g	4	g	5
Liuxia	5	Yangke	5	Peishen	4
Yaoqing Liangyin	4	Liangqing	5	Shuqiong	5
g	5	Yeli	5	Wangshu	3
Tangming	4			Qinxin	4
Jiajie	5			Luyi	5
				Jiean	5

7090

7091

7092

7093 2. I myself benefited a lot from text memorisation when I was learning English.

7094 1 2 3 4 5

Junior High		Senior High		College	
Yuli	3	Wangting Zhengpin	3	Xiaohong Hongyin	4
Wenna	5	g	4	g	5
Liuxia	5	Yangke	3	Peishen	4
Yaoqing Liangyin	4	Liangqing	3	Shuqiong	5
g	3	Yeli	4	Wangshu	3
Tangming	4			Qinxin	3
Jiajie	5			Luyi	5
				Jiean	3

7096

7097 3. I suggest my students learn as many texts by heart as possible. 1 2 3 4 5

Junior High		Senior High		College	
Yuli	5	Wangting Zhengpin	1	Xiaohong Hongyin	5
Wenna	5	g	4	g	5
Liuxia	4	Yangke	4	Peishen	4
Yaoqing	4	Liangqing	4	Shuqiong	4

Liangyin

g	5	Yeli	4	Wangshu	1
Tangming	2			Qinxin	5
Jiajie	4			Luyi	4
				Jiean	5

7099

7100 *4. Text memorisation should be abandoned as modern multi-media technology and*

7101 *new teaching methods are introduced in foreign language teaching. 1 2 3 4 5*

7102	Junior High		Senior High		College
	Yuli	1	Wangting	4	Xiaohong
			Zhengpin		Hongyin
	Wenna	1	g	2	g
	Liuxia	1	Yangke	2	Peishen
	Yaoqing	2	Liangqing	1	Shuqiong
	Liangyin				
	g	2	Yeli	1	Wangshu
	Tangming	2			Qinxin
	Jiajie	1			Luyi
					Jiean

7103

7104 *5. Heavy use of text memorisation restrains students' idea development.*

7105 *1 2 3 4 5*

7106	Junior High		Senior High		College
	Yuli	1	Wangting	3	Xiaohong
			Zhengpin		Hongyin
	Wenna	1	g	2	g
	Liuxia	2	Yangke	2	Peishen
	Yaoqing	1	Liangqing	2	Shuqiong
	Liangyin				
	g	2	Yeli	1	Wangshu
	Tangming	1			Qinxin
	Jiajie	1			Luyi
					Jiean

7107

7108 *6. Heavy use of text memorisation inhibits students' creative use of language.*

7109 *1 2 3 4 5*

7110	Junior High		Senior High		College
	Yuli	1	Wangting	3	Xiaohong
			Zhengpin		Hongyin
	Wenna	1	g	2	g
	Liuxia	1	Yangke	1	Peishen

Yaoqing	2	Liangqing	1	Shuqiong	1
Liangyin					

g	2	Yeli	1	Wangshu	3
Tangming	2			Qinxin	1
Jiajie	2			Luyi	1
				Jiean	2

7111

7112 7. Text memorisation should be used in the earlier stages of English learning like in
7113 primary and secondary school. 1 2 3 4 5

7114 Junior High		Senior High		College	
Yuli	5	Wangting Zhengpin	4	Xiaohong Hongyin	5
Wenna	5	g	4	g	5
Liuxia	5	Yangke	5	Peishen	5
Yaoqing	4	Liangqing	5	Shuqiong	5
Liangyin					
g	5	Yeli	5	Wangshu	3
Tangming	5			Qinxin	4
Jiajie	5			Luyi	5
				Jiean	4

7115

7116 8. Learning texts by heart should continue to be used in college. 1 2 3 4 5

7117 Junior High		Senior High		College	
Yuli	4	Wangting Zhengpin	3	Xiaohong Hongyin	5
Wenna	5	g	4	g	5
Liuxia	5	Yangke	4	Peishen	4
Yaoqing	4	Liangqing	5	Shuqiong	5
Liangyin					
g	3	Yeli	5	Wangshu	2
Tangming	2			Qinxin	4
Jiajie	4			Luyi	5
				Jiean	4

7118

7119 9. Having learned a text by heart is qualitatively different from being fluent in reading
7120 aloud a text. 1 2 3 4 5

7121 Junior High		Senior High		College	
Yuli	5	Wangting Zhengpin	3	Xiaohong Hongyin	4
Wenna	5	g	3	g	5
Liuxia	5	Yangke	5	Peishen	2
Yaoqing	4	Liangqing	5	Shuqiong	5

Liangyin

g	5	Yeli	5	Wangshu	3
Tangming	4			Qinxin	4
Jiajie	5			Luyi	5
				Jiean	4

7122

7123 *10. Text memorisation kills students' interest in learning.* 1 2 3 4 5

7124	Junior High		Senior High		College
	Yuli	1	Wangting	3	Xiaohong
			Zhengpin		Hongyin
	Wenna	1	g	3	g
	Liuxia	2	Yangke	1	Peishen
	Yaoqing	3	Liangqing	1	Shuqiong
	Liangyin				
	g	1	Yeli	2	Wangshu
	Tangming	2			Qinxin
	Jiajie	1			Luyi
					Jiean

7125 **Appendix 5 Data Samples – Transcripts of Interview with**
7126 **Students** (Six Transcripts with Two from Each Educational
7127 Level: Junior High, Senior High and College)

7128

7129 **Sample 1 (Junior High, Poor)**

7130 Venue of interview: The main teaching building, CQ No. 18 Middle School

7131 Date of interview: 12 March 2009

7132 Time length of recording: 29 mins 31 secs

7133 Background information about the interviewee:

7134

7135 Name: Chengcheng

7136 Sex: Male

7137 Age: 14

7138 Grade: 3, Junior High

7139 English proficiency compared with peers: poor (91/150)

7140 Affiliation: CQ No. 18 Middle School, P.R.China

7141

7142 R¹³⁰: Some students liken learning by heart to ‘good medicine that tastes bitter’ or ‘a
7143 thorny’ rose. What’s your idea? Do you agree?

7144 C¹³¹: *The second one ‘thorny rose’ is what I like to use to express my feeling. It really*
7145 *makes me annoyed because it’s too difficult. I always cannot remember. I forget the*
7146 *previous sentence after I’ve memorised the next one.*

7147

7148 R: Why cannot you remember? Have you ever thought of it?

7149 C: *Why cannot I remember? It’s simply very hard for me.*

7150

7151 R: Some students say that learning texts by heart is a shortcut for getting high scores
7152 in the exams. Do you agree?

7153 C: *No, I don’t agree. It’s pointless without knowing how to use them even if you*
7154 *memorise the text. I mean, rote-memorisation is useless.*

7155

7156 R: How about memorising texts on the basis of understanding?

7157 C: *It should be helpful, I guess, but I don’t have enough time. Sometimes I learn texts*
7158 *by heart after understanding and listening to the recording. I feel better in this way.*

7159

7160 R: Do you think Learning texts by heart restrain the students’ creative thinking?

7161 C: *It will not restrain our creative thinking. We just memorise the sentence patterns*
7162 *and the contents of the text. It’s not that we copy the whole sentence when we use the*
7163 *language.*

7164

7165 R: What aspect does text memorisation help with your English learning if there is
7166 any?

7167 C: *For instance, grammar; words and set phrases.*

7168

7169 R: Why does it help with grammar?

7170 C: *When you communicate with others, it’s less likely to make mistakes if you*
7171 *memorise the sentence patterns through learning texts by heart. And if you memorise*

442 130 R stands for researcher who is I myself.

443 131 C is the initial for the participant: *Chengcheng*. This coding is used throughout the
444 presentation of data samples.

7172 *many texts in the text book, you are advantaged when you are taking exams,*
7173 *especially in the grammar section.*

7174

7175 R: Have you ever come across any original sentences in the text in exams?

7176 C: *Very rare, but we do occasionally.*

7177

7178 R: Since there is rarely original sentence involved in the exam, why does learning
7179 texts by heart help with the exam?

7180 C: *As I said just now, **I get to know the sentence patterns through learning texts by***
7181 ***heart, therefore, I understand the grammar***¹³² *and I can choose the right answer.*

7182

7183 R: Can you list any aspect that text memorisation does not help?

7184 C: ***It should be more or less helpful in every aspect of English learning. I cannot***
7185 ***think of any respect in which it does not help. It's simply a matter of degree. For***
7186 *me, it helps most with word memorisation.*

7187

7188 R: Do you encounter any difficulties when learning texts by heart?

7189 C: *The biggest problem for me is that I almost forget all that I've memorised the day*
7190 *before after a night sleeping. I have to go over them again for several times. It's really*
7191 *hard for me to do this job because sometimes I cannot even read through a whole*
7192 *sentence when there are long words in it. It's a boring process for me as well.*

7193

7194 R: It's also time-consuming, isn't it?

7195 C: *Yes, it's time-consuming, but I don't think it's a waste of time.*

7196

7197 R: How long does it take you to memorise a typical text in the textbook?

7198 C: *One hour or so.*

7199

7200 R: We normally forget the texts we've memorised soon.

7201 C: *Yes, it's very easy for me to forget what I have memorised. This is because there*
7202 *are so many things to memorise.*

7203

445 ¹³² The bold italics in the transcript are excerpts quoted in the thesis.

7204 R: How many texts can you recall of all the texts memorised so far?

7205 C: *Nothing, not even a sentence. But if I'm given a little bit time to review, I can*
7206 *regain them or pick them up again soon.*

7207

7208 R: How does learning texts by heart differ from grammar exercises plus memorisation
7209 of individual words? Which one do you prefer and why?

7210 C: *I prefer grammar instruction plus memorisation of words and expressions.*

7211 *Learning texts by heart seems to me a big system which I am unable to control. I have*
7212 *no particular goal to achieve while learning texts by heart. As for grammar learning,*
7213 *I have very clear goal which is to understand the grammar rules.*

7214 **Sample 2 (Junior High, Good)**

7215 Venue of interview: The main teaching building, CQ No. 18 Middle School

7216 Date of interview: 12 March 2009

7217 Time length of recording: 25 mins 30 secs

7218 Background information about the interviewee:

7219

7220 Name: Yangkun

7221 Sex: Male

7222 Age: 14

7223 Grade: 3, Junior High

7224 English proficiency compared with peers: Good (123/150)

7225 Affiliation: CQ No. 18 Middle School, P.R.China

7226

7227 R: Some students liken learning by heart to ‘good medicine that tastes bitter’ or ‘a
7228 thorny’ rose. Do you agree? Or do you have your own metaphor?

7229 Y: *I don't have any metaphor to describe it, but I do have my own idea on this topic. I
7230 think we should take efficiency into account when taking advantage of this practice.
7231 From my experience, learning by heart several texts intensively is more effective than
7232 memorising many texts extensively. My experience is to learn well those best few by
7233 heart and then move on to other texts.*

7234

7235 R: Some students say that learning texts by heart is a shortcut for getting high scores
7236 in the exams. Do you agree?

7237 Y: *It can be said so. Learning English texts by heart, similar to learning Chinese
7238 texts, is just **learning the whole contents and system**. I think this method helps an
7239 awful lot, at least to me. I got 135[out of 150] in the simulation test. But I have to
7240 admit that I do not have a good command of grammar.*

7241

7242 R: Do you think Learning texts by heart restrain the students’ creative thinking?

7243 Y: *I don't think so. **Learning by heart doesn't equate copying other's stuff, but**
7244 **imitating them**. It's a good way of learning English. **It should not be considered as**
7245 **discouragement of the students' creativity. I'm not copying all that I've committed**
7246 **to memory - it's obviously impossible - but make use of the phrases and expressions**
7247 **to make my own sentences.***

7248

7249 R: What particular aspect does text memorisation help with your English learning?

7250 Y: *It helps a lot in terms of words and phrases. It also helps in the way of thinking. By*
7251 *way of thinking, I mean English way of thinking. **The more texts I learn by heart, the***
7252 ***more comfortable I feel with speaking and writing.***

7253

7254 R: Some people call it 'the feeling for the language'.

7255 Y: *Yes, yes, 'the feel for the language'. I cannot state why it should be used in this*
7256 *way, but I feel it is the way it should be spoken. As for grammar, it should be useful as*
7257 *well. But I haven't learned grammar very well.*

7258

7259 R: How about pronunciation?

7260 Y: *If you are learning texts by heart after recording, it naturally helps in this respect.*

7261

7262 R: Can you list any aspects that text memorisation does not help?

7263 Y: *I cannot think of any aspect that learning texts by heart does not help. **It is such a***
7264 ***good method that it benefits me in every aspect.***

7265

7266 R: Have you encountered any difficulties when learning texts by heart?

7267 Y: *The biggest problem is the new words in the text.*

7268

7269 R: Hasn't the teacher taught it?

7270 Y: *I would forget them.*

7271

7272 R: How do you solve the problem?

7273 Y: *Look it up in the dictionary or ask the teacher.*

7274

7275 R: Any other problems? Are you bothered by the practice? Is it boring?

7276 Y: ***I don't think learning texts by heart is boring. On the contrary, it's very***
7277 ***interesting for me.***

7278

7279 R: The student I interviewed just now considers it a very boring practice, but you see
7280 it interesting. Why do you think you have different feelings?

7281 Y: *First of all, I'm keen in English, but she is not. Second, she is poor in this subject.*
7282 *As a result, she is unwilling to do the practice.*

7283

7284 R: Why do you like English?

7285 Y: *I started liking this subject since Junior High because I like my English teacher.*
7286

7287 R: Isn't it time-consuming?

7288 Y: *It is a subject in the school. I have to learn it even if it's time-consuming. I can*
7289 *understand grammar rules through the teacher's grammar explanation and doing*
7290 *grammar exercises. I can deal with examinations, but not daily communications in*
7291 *real situation. Grammar learning cannot solve the problem of flexible use of English.*
7292

7293 R: How long does it take you to memorise a typical text in the textbook?

7294 Y: *I can finish reciting a short passage within 10 minutes. **I can only do this after***
7295 ***listening very carefully in the class and understanding its meaning and the***
7296 ***grammar involved in the text** and memorising all the new words and expressions. I*
7297 *cannot have a thorough understanding of the contents even in this way. It's only a*
7298 *superficial memorisation.*
7299

7300 R: Why do you think you can do the job so quickly?

7301 Y: *There are two reasons: First, I understand the meaning of the text and the*
7302 *grammar involved. Second, I have laid a good foundation on the basics through*
7303 *previous text memorisation.*
7304

7305 R: Isn't it that we forget what is memorised soon?

7306 Y: *Forget what is memorised? True. But I can soon recall it after a quick review.*
7307

7308 R: What's the point of learning by heart since it's easy to forget?

7309 Y: ***I admit I've already forgotten what has been memorised so far, but I still don't***
7310 ***think it's a waste of time. Instead, it really helps me a lot. I learned my English***
7311 ***mostly from learning texts by heart, as it were. I usually refer the grammar back to***
7312 ***the sentence in the text I have memorised and try to understand its usage in the***
7313 ***context.** I also attempt to make my own sentence using the structures learned. Yes, I*

7314 *cannot recall the intact sentences, but those sentence patterns are retained in my*
7315 *brain.*

7316

7317 R: How does learning texts by heart differ from grammar exercises plus memorisation
7318 of individual words? Which one do you prefer and why?

7319 Y: *I prefer learning texts by heart. If we use the latter method, we'll find it difficult to*
7320 *use English flexibly and creatively. Teacher's explanation certainly helps, but*
7321 *learning texts by heart helps much more. Knowledge can only be changed into*
7322 *capability or something of your own in this way.*

7323

7324 R: Will you use text memorisation in your future English study?

7325 Y: *I would certainly use it as this method can not only better my performance in the*
7326 *exam, but improve my genuine language ability.*

7327

7328 R: Anything to supplement?

7329 Y: *We are required to memorise texts by the teacher. But very few students do it since*
7330 *Grade Two in Junior High.*

7331 **Sample 3 (Senior High, Good)**

7332 Venue of interview: The 2nd Teaching Building, CQ Foreign Language School

7333 Date of interview: 19 March 2010

7334 Time length of recording: 28 mins 31 secs

7335 Background information about the interviewee:

7336

7337 Name: Shuhan

7338 Sex: Female

7339 Age: 17

7340 Grade: 2, senior high

7341 English proficiency compared with peers: Good (132/150)

7342 Affiliation: CQ Foreign Language School, P.R.China

7343

7344

7345 R: When did you start memorising texts?

7346 S: *From the beginning of Junior High, not in the primary school.*

7347

7348 R: Did the teacher require you to memorise each text in the textbook?

7349 S: *Almost so. The texts in the junior high are mostly short dialogues, not long*
7350 *paragraphs so that I felt it rather easy to memorise them.*

7351

7352 R: Can you see the point of doing this?

7353 S: *It's mainly for cultivating the ability to make basic grammatical judgement. I feel*
7354 *like somewhat of laying a foundation.*

7355

7356 R: Did the do text memorisation from Grade 1 to Grade 3 consecutively?

7357 S: *Not in Grade 3 because we had to go over what we had learned, preparing the*
7358 *entrance examination for Senior High School.*

7359

7360 R: How do you evaluate text memorisation from your learning experience? Does it
7361 help your English learning?

7362 S: *Absolutely. Since you don't have the [language] environment, you have to do this*
7363 *to get to know the language and get closer to the language environment. It also helps*

7364 *develop a sense of language. I think this is a choice we have to make under the*
7365 *current circumstance of China.*

7366

7367 R: Do you think it's the best way of learning?

7368 S: *Well, it should be. As I've already mentioned, we can't make us live in an English-*
7369 *speaking environment, so we have to learn in this way.*

7370

7371 R: You mentioned just now that text memorisation helps develop a sense of language.
7372 Are there any other ways it helps learning?

7373 S: *It helps with flexible use of words. You know how to use it only when you memorise*
7374 *a new word in a text. If you memorise it separately from a text, you end up still being*
7375 *puzzled about how it should be used – whether it is a transitive verb or intransitive*
7376 *verb, for instance. If you memorise it in the text, you naturally have a sense of how it*
7377 *is used and you can hardly make it wrong even if you haven't deliberately tried to*
7378 *memorise whether a verb is transitive or intransitive. In fact, **learning texts by heart***
7379 ***is the most flexible way of learning in an inflexible educational system.***

7380

7381 R: Who is this said by?

7382 S: *It's my feeling.*

7383

7384 R: Some students see the memorisation of text as 'a good medicine that tastes bitter'
7385 or 'a thorny rose'. What do you think if it?

7386 S: *I don't think there is an issue of 'bitter' or not. We even do this when learning our*
7387 *mother tongue. We were required to memorise some texts in Chinese textbooks. It is a*
7388 *cultivation of language accrual. We usually mistakenly learn English as a foreign*
7389 *language, a subject, but it is in fact only a tool of communication. Think of our*
7390 *Chinese learning. We never forget it because we speak the language every day and*
7391 *think in that language every moment. We conceive the learning of English very*
7392 *different from that of Chinese, which makes the whole thing increasingly complicated.*
7393 *I don't consider it appropriate that we make text memorisation as a special*
7394 *requirement. I see it a necessity of getting to know a new language. Take Chinese*
7395 *learning for example again, nobody considers memorising Chinese texts ridiculous.*
7396 *You learn how to make sentences and dispose words through learning from other's*
7397 *experience. We learned how to speak Chinese not from learning such knowledge as*

7398 *subject, predicate and object. We made it from learning from the experience of others*
7399 *through reading many articles. It also applies to English learning. So there does not*
7400 *exist an issue of 'thorny' or not. We should regulate our mentality, taking the*
7401 *memorisation of texts as a process of accumulation by 'taking advantage of' others'*
7402 *language.*

7403

7404 **R: Isn't it a boring and painful experience?**

7405 **S: Of course, you memorise and forget, and then repeat again. *The process is painful***
7406 ***for some people, but not for others. For me it was painful at the beginning because***
7407 ***I don't have a good memory. And at the initial stage, it is mostly mechanical***
7408 ***memorisation as you lack for basic knowledge of how that language is used. But it***
7409 ***gradually takes less time to memorise as you find a sort of feeling – you know the***
7410 ***rough meaning and can express in your own words, memorisation is thus made***
7411 ***much easier.***

7412

7413 **R: So it is 'thorny' anyway?**

7414 **S: Not exactly. *It is a process of evolving from struggle to relaxation. It is not***
7415 ***painful all the way.***

7416

7417 **R: Why can we learn English through communication, interaction or doing games?**
7418 **Isn't it more enjoyable?**

7419 **S: *It is of course a good way of learning. But it is far from enough. Being able to***
7420 ***communicate orally takes a long time. We start learning English very late, which***
7421 ***makes it very difficult for us to achieve that goal. This is one reason. The second***
7422 ***reason is that the process [of communication] is casual, which makes the use of***
7423 ***grammar peccable or certain knowledge missed out. After all, we have to deal with***
7424 ***exams. So we'd better achieve accurate mastery of grammar points through text***
7425 ***memorisation because oral languages including our Chinese contain many***
7426 ***grammatical errors.***

7427

7428 **R: Do you mean the texts you are required to memorise mainly deal with written**
7429 **language?**

7430 S: *I think so. Memorising text benefits writing much more than oral communication.*
7431 *For instance, it makes your writing more idiomatic or colourful. **I don't think it helps***
7432 ***a lot with natural communication.***

7433

7434 R: What if we memorise dialogues? Didn't you say just now that you did
7435 memorisation of dialogues in junior high?

7436 S: *The dialogue looks like very flexible, but it is in fact rather stiff. The dialogue in*
7437 *the text can only simulate one typical situation. But in actual communication, there*
7438 *are numerous possible circumstances. You may still be at a loss as to what to say in*
7439 *real communication. So **you need to be put in practical situations to learn how to***
7440 ***communicate.** Dialogues are not very suitable for learning by heart. I realised this*
7441 *when I went to the USA. I could only give a positive response when I was asked*
7442 *whether I slept well last night even if I did not because I never learned how to express*
7443 *'I didn't sleep well'.*

7444

7445 R: Do you think text memorisation restrains our creative use of language? Or what is
7446 the relationship between memorised stuff and flexible use of language?

7447 S: *It is an indirect connection. The memorised stuff will create a link or structure in*
7448 *your brain although they might not be utilised directly. The structure gradually knit in*
7449 *a bigger one as you memorise more and it eventually turns into your own stuff. I think*
7450 *it should be like this. It's not the case that you can draw out [memorised stuff] for*
7451 *immediate use. It's definitely not that you memorise something yesterday and then you*
7452 *can use them today.*

7453

7454 R: Do you mean that enough should be amassed before practical use?

7455 S: *Absolutely. It needs long-term accumulation. For instance, what you've memorised*
7456 *yesterday is incorporated into what you've memorised the day before yesterday. There*
7457 *involves a further synthesis and reorganisation. It is something you absorb yourself*
7458 *and then you speak out. It's similar to eating. What we've eaten and what is turned*
7459 *into through digestion – I mean the stuff supporting the functioning of our body are*
7460 *two different things. **What we eat is rice, but what is transformed is glucose.** This is*
7461 *the feeling I have for text memorisation.*

7462

7463 R: Back to the question I asked earlier – does text memorisation restrain our
7464 creativity?

7465 S: *No, no, of course not.*

7466

7467 R: Will it encourage the use of clichés in your writing? For example, we tend to write
7468 ‘His face is as red as a red apple’ when we start learning to write in Chinese.

7469 S: *It’s very possible at the very beginning. It is simply because you don’t know how to*
7470 *express other ideas apart from this one. It doesn’t mean that you don’t have different*
7471 *ideas. You can accurately express yourself after achieving a certain level of*
7472 *proficiency. The issue you proposed can not exist for long. The effect can be offset by*
7473 *doing as many extra-curriculum readings as possible. It is no difference from Chinese*
7474 *learning. We can only say ‘his face is as red as red apple’ if we fail to read extensively*
7475 *after class.*

7476

7477 R: So there is a certain degree of restraint on our thinking.

7478 S: *What I mean is that any language – especially when memorisation is involved –*
7479 *can exert certain restriction on human mind. But we can not ‘yi pian gai quan’ [a*
7480 *Chinese idiom, meaning ‘take the part as the whole’], considering the memorised*
7481 *stuff as a sort of captivity of our thinking. As I said just now, it can certainly be solved*
7482 *by reading as many as possible.*

7483

7484 R: So text memorisation should continue to be used?

7485 S: *I think it is necessary for Chinese students in current situation as we don’t have a*
7486 *language environment. Learning of a language has much to with the accumulation of*
7487 *knowledge and language use on the part of the learner. Memorising texts is good way*
7488 *of such accumulation.*

7489

7490 R: Do you still memorise texts in senior high?

7491 S: *Yes, but not each text. The teacher will choose some which contain important*
7492 *language points or many new words.*

7493

7494 R: Are you bothered by the assignment of recitation?

7495 S: *Not really, at least less than the explanation of grammar points.*

7496

7497 **R: Do you do this mainly for exams?**

7498 **S: *We are aware that it does not have much to do with exams.***

7499

7500 **R: The memorised stuff doesn't help in the exams?**

7501 **S: *Well, it can be more or less helpful. But we do this not mainly for exams.***

7502

7503 R: So you are not averse to this practice?

7504 S: *No, not at all though it can be painful at the initial stage.*

7505

7506 **Sample 4 (Senior High, Fair)**

7507 Venue of interview: The 2nd Teaching Building, Chongqing Foreign Language School

7508 Date of interview: 19 March 2010

7509 Time length of recording: 27 mins 55 secs

7510 Background information about the interviewee:

7511

7512 Name: Zhangke

7513 Sex: Female

7514 Age: 17

7515 Grade: 2, senior high

7516 English proficiency compared with peers: Fair (115/150)

7517 Affiliation: CQ Foreign Language School, P.R.China

7518

7519 R: Can you start from talking about your experience of text memorisation in English

7520 learning? Did you do it in primary school?

7521 Z: *We rarely did text memorisation in primary school because only Chinese and*

7522 *mathematics were tested at that stage.*

7523

7524 R: How about in Junior High?

7525 Z: *We did lots of memorisation of texts in Junior High.*

7526

7527 R: From Grade 1 to Grade 3?

7528 Z: *Yes.*

7529

7530 R: Was each text required to learn by heart?

7531 Z: *Not exactly, but most of them, I think.*

7532

7533 R: Did the teach check in person?

7534 Z: *Sometimes. She may also appoint the team leaders to do that.*

7535

7536 R: Do you feel the practice of text memorisation somewhat help with your English

7537 learning?

7538 Z: *'A feel for language'. Memorisation of texts can cultivate 'a feel for language'.*
7539 *The grammar points can also be understood better through learning texts by heart.*
7540 *Especially 'the feel for language' can be achieved by a large amount of recitation and*
7541 *reading.*

7542

7543 R: What is your understanding of 'the feel for language'?

7544 Z: *To put simple, I subconsciously know how the grammar should be used without*
7545 *thinking about it when I try to make a sentence. It [the sentence] just flows out of my*
7546 *mouth casually.*

7547 R: Any other aspects in which it may help?

7548 Z: *I would say writing. It is in fact about sentence patterns and words. You memorise*
7549 *them through learning texts by heart and use them in your own writing.*

7550

7551 R: Will you use the original sentences memorised?

7552 Z: *We can't be that stupid.*

7553

7554 R: Is there a risk that your thinking is affected by ideas of the text since you commit it
7555 to memory? This might be the concern of many foreign teachers.

7556 Z: *No, it shouldn't. I think memorising texts is not for dealing with exams or*
7557 *something like that. It's mainly for cultivating 'a feel for the language'. You see, we*
7558 *have many texts to learn. Learning English through other means, like learning*
7559 *through communicating with others, is actually not practical at all. In most cases, you*
7560 *have to learn by yourself. Learning through communicating with others is impractical*
7561 *in China. We do have a foreign teacher. But how can only one deal with so many*
7562 *students. There are a few who are courageous enough to stop the foreign teacher for*
7563 *a conversation. As I see it, you cannot significantly improve your ability [to speak*
7564 *English] in this way. This is our current situation. You see, we have only one foreign*
7565 *teacher for all the Grade 2 students. Anyway, I think the most effective way is to*
7566 *memorise texts.*

7567

7568 R: Do you think text memorisation restrains our creativity?

7569 Z: *Creativity? I think it should not. Nowadays everybody has his/her independent*
7570 *thinking or idea, at least it is the case in our generation. Learning by heart is meant*
7571 *to equip us with more knowledge – the structure of knowledge, not to influence your*

7572 *thinking. Creativity is built on a base of certain amount of knowledge. Learning by*
7573 *heart can add in your knowledge, but will not stifle your creativity. Every student*
7574 *should have his/her own idea. My independent thinking will certainly not be affected*
7575 *by learning texts by heart. We just learn the language itself.*
7576

7577 R: How can we move from memorisation of texts by others to flexible expression of
7578 our own ideas?

7579 Z: *This is an apparently a big leap in terms of quality. Most students are now unable*
7580 *to communicate with foreigners freely. If you really want to develop in the direction, a*
7581 *special intensive training may be of help.*
7582

7583 R: Do you mean training on the oracy?

7584 Z: *Exactly.*
7585

7586 R: So memorisation of text is not inconsistent with flexible use of language?

7587 Z: *No, they are not incompatible. They are two parts of learning: learning in school*
7588 *and learning in real life. The former is for laying a foundation while the latter*
7589 *developing the skill. Learning texts by heart is to lay a good foundation. Given the*
7590 *average level of the students, the teacher has to teach in this way. If you want to go*
7591 *further, you can only depend on yourself. It's impossible for the teacher to meet*
7592 *everyone's needs.*
7593

7594 R: So you are not averse to the use of text memorisation in English learning?

7595 Z: *No, I'm not against.*
7596

7597 R: Do you think it is boring and time-costuming?

7598 Z: *For this issue, (Sigh). As the Chinese saying goes, 'no pain, no gain'. Most of us*
7599 *consider it as being unavoidable. After all, we don't have that good language*
7600 *environment like in the foreign countries. How to say? This is a very practical issue.*
7601 *We have to depend on ourselves.*
7602

7603 R: You mean we have to endure this however it is boring?

7604 Z: *Right. I found that those students who are good in English like reading aloud. They*
7605 *cultivate their feel for language and gain pleasure in doing so.*

7606 R: They don't feel boring?

7607 Z: *No, they enjoy doing it. For me, I also feel it's fun to be able to improve my ability*
7608 *to express in English through recitation. Of course, it would be better if we have less*
7609 *test-oriented stuff, like being asked to reproduce a certain paragraph in the oral test.*
7610

7611 R: Isn't it what you are memorising texts for?

7612 Z: *I'm not that averse to text memorisation; after all, every language has its unique*
7613 *beauty. I just don't like the feeling that I do this exclusively for exams.*

7614 R: Why do you have such a feeling?

7615 Z: *We all feel the same: test-oriented education.*
7616

7617 R: Isn't the practice time-consuming?

7618 Z: *Yes, especially for those who have poor memory.*
7619

7620 R: We normally forget what is memorised the other day, let alone last month and last
7621 term. What's the point of spending time doing text memorisation?

7622 Z: *How incisive the question is. As I said before, it's mainly for developing 'a feel for*
7623 *language' which can only be obtained through long-term accumulation. It needs*
7624 *continual repetition and addition to intensify the feeling, building your own system.*
7625 *It's absolutely not for borrowing a few sentences when you write. For that purpose,*
7626 *we don't really have to memorise the whole passage or paragraph. As a matter of*
7627 *fact, there is a trail retained in the deeper part of your mind even if you think you've*
7628 *forgot them all. It's very likely that you regain them or use them unconsciously if you*
7629 *don't rote-memorise.*

7630 **Sample 5 (College, Fair)**

7631 Venue of interview: The 2nd Teaching Building, SWUPL, P.R. China

7632 Date of interview: 7 March 2009

7633 Time length of recording: 33 mins 27 secs

7634 Background information about the interviewee:

7635

7636 Name: Zhibiao

7637 Sex: Male

7638 Age: 19

7639 Grade: 1, College

7640 English proficiency compared with peers: Fair (118/150)

7641 Affiliation: SWUPL, P.R.China

7642

7643 R: Some students liken learning by heart to ‘good medicine that tastes bitter’ or ‘a
7644 thorny’ rose. Do you agree?

7645 Z: *I don't like this metaphor. My feeling towards this method may vary in different*
7646 *stages. This time I may compare it to ‘thorny rose’, next time I will compare it to*
7647 *others. Of course, I'm no good at memory. I usually recite five times before I can*
7648 *memorise a sentence.*

7649

7650 R: Do you think it's a painful process?

7651 Z: *No, I don't think so. I feel happy after I memorise something because I feel that*
7652 *I'm proud of myself being able to do it. I especially feel a sense of achievement*
7653 *when I perform better than my classmates. The feeling that I'm better than others*
7654 *motivates me to learn more texts by heart. I enjoy the process most of the time*
7655 *because I can get something out of it.*

7656

7657 R: Don't you feel it hard to persevere at memorising texts?

7658 Z: *For me it is a psychological issue, not necessarily so. If you increase your scores*
7659 *by learning texts by heart, you may have a sense of achievement and continue to*
7660 *memorise texts. If you are eager to improve your English, but fail to increase your*
7661 *scores in the exam, it is likely that you ignore this method later.*

7662

7663 R: Do you think you can speak English fluently after learning many texts by heart?

7664 Z: *Of course, I can. I know I memorise many phrases and words through text*
7665 *memorisation and I can take advantage of them when I engage in real conversation.*
7666 *But it is obviously not enough. You have to read English newspapers, listen English*
7667 *programmes and watch English films. Text memorisation is only part of means to*
7668 *improving your English. I also want to emphasise that memorisation of texts must be*
7669 *on the basis of understanding. If you want to write a wonderful essay and display your*
7670 *own style of writing, you have to 'have ink in your stomach'. I mean, you need to read*
7671 *many books. In my opinion, there is not much difference between reading and reciting*
7672 *texts. You use only your eyes while reading, but you use your eyes, mouth and ear at*
7673 *the same time when it comes to reciting texts.*

7674

7675 R: Does text memorisation limit our creativity?

7676 Z: *Text memorisation will definitely not limit our creativity as it is a process of*
7677 *accumulation. And it also depends on your own attitude. If you memorise simply for*
7678 *the purpose of memorisation, it certainly limits your creativity. It can be a closed*
7679 *process if you only absorb and accumulate without releasing it. The key is that we*
7680 *need to absorb the good stuff of others, imitate them and eventually make use of them*
7681 *in a creative manner.*

7682

7683 R: What are some of the aspects do you think text memorisation especially help with?

7684 Z: *It helps most in the vocabulary which is the basics of learning English. It also*
7685 *helps with phrases and grammar. After reciting texts, I know the structure of*
7686 *sentences. Because I recite again and again, my body instead of my memory can feel*
7687 *the sense. When I am in similar situation, if I have the necessary vocabulary, I'm able*
7688 *to automatically construct the sentence without second thought. Of course, you can*
7689 *only do this after lots of practice and memorising many texts. But when I do this in*
7690 *dormitory, my flatmates complain about the noise I make. I always try to speak*
7691 *English with them, but they respond in Chinese.*

7692

7693 R: Can you find anybody to practice English with?

7694 Z: *Yes, I have a friend from my hometown who is willing to communicate in English*
7695 *with me.*

7696

7697 R: And the aspect that text memorisation does not help?

7698 Z: *The least helpful aspect is accent. After I entered college, I found I became lazier.*

7699

7700 R: Does your English teacher require you to learn text by heart?

7701 Z: No, she only requires us to memorise words and phrases, not the whole text. I

7702 joined English Association on campus. The chairman in the association asked us to

7703 recite the whole text.

7704

7705 R: Is he a student?

7706 Z: *Yes. He requires us to learn by heart long passages from Book 3. He told me that*

7707 *he had recited all the texts in New Concept English, Book 3.*

7708

7709 R: Is he English major?

7710 Z: *No, he is majoring in Forensic Science.*

7711

7712 R: Do you think text memorisation is a boring practice?

7713 Z: *I feel bored only when I come across many new words in the sentences because I*

7714 *have to look them up one by one in the dictionary before going on reciting the*

7715 *passage. **I have to understand the meaning of what I'll commit to memory before***

7716 ***reciting passages. I cannot memorise the text if I don't understand the meaning. I***

7717 *forget them quickly if I rote-memorise them without full understanding.*

7718 *It normally takes me half an hour to recite a passage. Actually, not the whole*

7719 *passage, just some paragraphs.*

7720

7721 R: What kind of texts do you usually recite?

7722 Z: *New Concept English.*

7723

7724 R: How does learning texts by heart differ from grammar exercises plus memorisation

7725 of individual words? Which one do you prefer and why?

7726 Z: *Learning grammar and words are good for dealing with exams, which is efficient*

7727 *in a short term, but learning texts by heart can truly improve your English. It is a*

7728 *dilemma for me. The former is only effective for enhancing your performance in the*

7729 *exams while the latter contributes to both exam performance and overall English*

7730 *competence. I believe text memorisation is a good way, but it is not a shortcut at all.*

7731

7732 R: How much do you think text memorisation contribute to your English learning so
7733 far? Will you use it in future learning?

7734 Z: *It contributes 40% or so. I want to raise the percentage up to 70% later.*
7735

7736 R: Why do you think we should learn texts by heart even in college?

7737 Z: *I think there are not many grammars to learn at tertiary level because we learned*
7738 *almost all of them in high school. I think we should use more other methods like*
7739 *learning texts by heart instead of conducting grammar analysis as we normally do in*
7740 *high school.*
7741

7742 R: Why do you think so?

7743 Z: *Obviously, good mastery of English is important to our future. We cannot only*
7744 *learn for interest. I use text memorisation to learn English not because it is popular*
7745 *but because it proves effective to me. I don't think I have learned by heart enough*
7746 *texts, but I memorised more than many of my classmates. Now I have a sense of*
7747 *superiority when I find I speak better English than my classmates. One point I have to*
7748 *add is that I will go to some English corners in Guangdong International Studies*
7749 *University when I go back to my hometown in Guangdong. So I have chance to make*
7750 *'output' rather than only taking in 'input'. At this stage, what I do is more on input*
7751 *than output. In addition to learning texts by heart, I also watch American film and try*
7752 *to memorise the lines.*

7753 **Sample 6 (College, Good)**

7754 Venue of interview: Building No.28 (Ship Science), University of Southampton, UK

7755 Date of interview: 18 December 2009

7756 Time length of recording: 44 mins 31 secs

7757 Background information about the interviewee:

7758

7759 Name: Jake

7760 Sex: Male

7761 Age: 23

7762 Grade: 1, Mphil/Ph.D

7763 English proficiency compared with peers: Good (CET4 - 644/710, CET6 - 610/710)

7764 Affiliation: UOS, UK

7765

7766 R: Could you recall your experience of learning texts by heart? Like when did you
7767 start the practice and what did you do?

7768 J: *I start learning texts by heart from the very beginning of learning English-first*
7769 *grade of Junior High. I think it's very useful. Most of the texts in Grade 1 are*
7770 *situational dialogue. I cannot remember clearly where the teacher required us to do*
7771 *so or not. Some important articles were required to be memorised. I just followed the*
7772 *teacher's instruction although he/she did not necessarily check it. In senior high, I*
7773 *read aloud a lot. When it comes to text memorisation, there's not that much. In the*
7774 *first grade, we were required to memorise some paragraphs. But later, especially in*
7775 *the third grade, there is no text memorisation at all.*

7776

7777 R: What aspects do you feel the practice helps with your English learning?

7778 J: *It helps most with the development of 'sense of language'. **You have sentence***
7779 ***structures kept in your mind after memorising many texts, not necessarily the***
7780 ***contents. These structures are there for your use when you need them. If you only***
7781 ***memorise isolated words, you don't know how to use them. There is a situation for***
7782 ***you to understand where and how words are used if you learn them through text***
7783 ***memorisation. You just unconsciously speak out in similar situation without second***
7784 ***thought.***

7785

7786 R: How do you define the 'sense of language'?

7787 J: *It's something sub-conscious and difficult to describe or define. When you do*
7788 *multiple choice exercises on grammar, you read through and know immediately the*
7789 *right answer without second thought if you have good 'sense of language'.*

7790

7791 R: Some students liken the practice of text memorisation to 'good medicine that tastes
7792 bitter'. What they mean is obviously that it may benefit you, but the process is
7793 painful.

7794 J: *I never feel the process of memorisation 'painful'. I like English very much. It's not*
7795 *painful at all for me.*

7796

7797 R: Have you forced yourself to do this?

7798 J: *No. Nobody forced me to do this either. I repeatedly read the text and get myself*
7799 *familiar with it. I memorise them verbatim if I have energy. **I do lots of memorisation***
7800 ***even at college. No one forced me to do so. The easier it feels the more articles I***
7801 ***memorise. I naturally memorise it after reading a few times if it is a short***
7802 ***paragraph.***

7803

7804 R: It's '*shu du cheng song*' [a Chinese expression meaning 'repeated reading leads
7805 naturally to memorisation']. What sort of texts do you use for memorisation?

7806 J: *I memorised texts in New Concept English.*

7807

7808 R: Throughout Book 1 to Book 4?

7809 J: *Only 1 to 3. But now I can hardly recall them.*

7810

7811 R: You required yourself to do this?

7812 J: *Yes. Our teacher suggested this book series.*

7813

7814 R: Wasn't it time-consuming?

7815 J: *I usually read them in the morning for half an hour or so and persevere doing this*
7816 *every day. I don't think it's time consuming.*

7817

7818 R: You said just now that you almost forget most of the texts in New Concept English
7819 you memorised. If it is the case, what is the point of investing time in memorising
7820 them?

7821 J: *It is by no means meaningless, of course. It's possible for me to forget the*
7822 *content, the exact sentence in the text, but the 'inside stuff' has insinuated in my*
7823 *mind. Text memorisation is a process through which I feel I have improved my*
7824 *English. It has done its function or fulfilled its mission – I have learned what I was*
7825 *supposed to learn through text memorisation. I found my English greatly improved*
7826 *after the process, especially writing and speaking. This is my purpose in memorising*
7827 *texts. For instance, I enlarged my vocabulary, learned many sentence structures*
7828 *and developed a sense of language. It is in fact a gradual process of accumulation.*
7829 *Retaining the texts in our memory is not our final purpose, improving our overall*
7830 *English competence is.*

7831

7832 R: How did you feel your English improved?

7833 J: *After memorising much stuff, I get to know of how others express their ideas. I*
7834 *develop a 'feel for language' and know how to express my own idea. Hasn't Marx*
7835 *said that one has to forget one's mother tongue in order to learn well a foreign*
7836 *language? You learn quicker in this way. I can gradually direct me to think in English*
7837 *through memorising English texts every day. It's a kind of being immersed in that*
7838 *language. I even spoke English in dream - my roommates told me. In a word, I*
7839 *benefited a lot from this method. Teachers should require students to learn texts by*
7840 *heart. When I was asked for valuable experience in learning English by the juniors, I*
7841 *always said, 'read more and memorise more if possible'. It's the only way to learn*
7842 *English in China where there is no language environment.*

7843

7844 R: But text memorisation is a one-way process, not interactive communication.

7845 J: *The thing is, we don't the conditions for communication. One-way input is much*
7846 *better than without recitation and without speaking. Can you think of any better way*
7847 *of learning English in China?*

7848

7849 R: Can't you find somebody to practice English with?

7850 J: *Oh, you mean speaking English with your classmates? It seems not practical at all.*
7851 *Of course, we have English corner. But very often we just repeat a limited number of*
7852 *expressions. It may be more beneficial to sit in the room to memorise New Concept*
7853 *English.*

7854

7855 R: Some students mentioned that the practice builds them a sense of confidence. Is it
7856 your feeling as well?

7857 J: *Yes, I agree this practice helps build one's confidence. It's true that you are able*
7858 *and dare to speak after memorising certain amount of texts. In my case, confidence*
7859 *comes more from the high scores in English exams.*

7860

7861 R: How do you see the problem of 'time-consuming' with this practice?

7862 J: *I would not see it as a problem. You have to invest time in doing everything. You*
7863 *can take advantage of a brief time slot in the morning and persevere at doing it every*
7864 *day. You cannot do the recitation and memorisation all day long as you apparently*
7865 *have many other things to do. You should not do recitation for eight hours on one*
7866 *particular day and fail to do it on other weekdays. The time should be evenly*
7867 *distributed to every day in small amount. So I do not see this practice 'time-*
7868 *consuming'. It's not about the problem of the activity of text memorisation, but about*
7869 *how to arrange time.*

7870

7871 R: Is it likely that this practice limits one's creativity?

7872 J: *It may apply to those who memorise model articles and copy when they write. It is,*
7873 *however, not my case. For example, I almost cannot recall a single text in New*
7874 ***Concept English which I memorised before, but I'm sure I still use many structures***
7875 ***or expressions I learned from the process of text memorisation. How can I copy the***
7876 ***idea since I almost forget the content? Even if I can remember the ideas, I do not***
7877 ***necessarily agree with the arguments presented in the article. My purpose is to***
7878 ***learn the language rather than the author's ideas.*** Now we often read articles in the
7879 newspaper and are exposed to all sorts of opinions. I may or may not agree with it
7880 based on my own judgement rather than blindly accepting the author's opinion. ***My***
7881 ***experience is that reading or memorising more can, on the contrary, facilitate your***
7882 ***creative thinking. In the beginning, we of course, have to imitate others. How can***
7883 ***one be creative at the very beginning? It is true in doing everything. We imitate***
7884 ***until we reach a certain degree to allow us to create.***

7885

7886 R: Is it possible that you are inclined to use many clichés in your writing?

7887 J: *I don't think so. I'm a science student and always engage in scientific writing. It*
7888 *may apply to students in arts. Reflecting on our experience of learning Chinese, we*

7889 *were also required to memorise many texts. I didn't feel I tend to use those clichés in*
7890 *my own writing.*

7891

7892 R: Any thing to add about text memorisation?

7893 J: *To summarise my idea, text memorisation is a very useful way of learning. I do*
7894 *benefit a lot from it. Of course, you cannot learn English well only through*
7895 *memorising texts. It has to be complemented by many other methods; for example,*
7896 *you have to listen to English broadcasting and so on. When it comes to my experience*
7897 *in text memorisation, I'd like to say, we should not take memorising texts as the final*
7898 *goal or we may not necessarily need to learn them by heart verbatim. Getting*
7899 *yourself familiar with them does the same work. For example, when I was reciting*
7900 *New Concept English, I got myself very familiar with every sentence. I might not be*
7901 *able to recall exactly which is followed by which. This is not necessary and time-*
7902 *consuming. I didn't require myself to do this, especially at later stage.*

7903

7904 R: Does this practice involve rote-memorisation, especially at early stage of learning?

7905 J: *I don't think so. I have to understand the content or the meaning before I memorise*
7906 *them. How can you memorise something that you don't understand them? It's*
7907 *impossible to memorise them without understanding first. And memorisation becomes*
7908 *easy only after you have full understanding of the content.*

7909

7910 R: Is it possible to memorise before understanding?

7911 J: *No, I don't think it's possible. Even at the beginning, the teaching material should*
7912 *be suitable for the students to understand. And then we progress step by step.*

7913

7914 R: What will you do to if you are a teacher who tries to use this method in your
7915 teaching since we are at here?

7916 J: *First, I must make sure they understand what they are supposed to memorise.*
7917 *Second, we should not make it a burden to them. I mean, this practice should not*
7918 *occupy too much time. This may damp their interest. Cultivation of the students'*
7919 *interest is very important at the beginning. Third, I need to make sure to give them*
7920 *opportunity to use what they have memorised in the simulated situation. I try to make*
7921 *them feel English is not difficult because they can do something with English. I*
7922 *believe that language is learned for use. I hold a pragmatic point of view. For*

7923 *example, I would not memorise those texts full of jargons which I couldn't understand*
7924 *even if they are in New Concept English. I'd never use them. So choosing material is*
7925 *very important. My standards include: the topic is related to my life or I'm interested;*
7926 *many commonly used words/phrases and structures are contained in the text. I may*
7927 *try to choose those articles containing some new words and get to know how they are*
7928 *used by reading repeatedly.*

7929

7930 R: You sound like an experienced teacher.

7931 J: *(Laugh) As I said just now, memorisation is not the purpose. Text memorisation is a*
7932 *good way of learning, but it needs to be smartly used. We don't have to do it to the*
7933 *extent that we are able to recall verbatim. Enough familiarity with the textual*
7934 *material serves the purpose already. You cannot expect significantly improve your*
7935 *English in a short period through memorising some texts. It must be a long process of*
7936 *accumulation. I do text memorisation all the way from the very beginning till in*
7937 *college. **I think it's an indispensable way of learning English in Chinese context, at***
7938 ***least now.** From my own experience, I have to say that I benefited a lot from this*
7939 *practice.*

Appendix 6 Data samples – Transcripts of Interview with Teachers (Three Transcriptions with One from Each Educational Level: Junior High, Senior High and College)

Sample 1

Venue of interview: Telephone interview (calling from the researcher's home in Chongqing, P.R.China)

Date of interview: 3 April 2010

Time length of recording: 27 mins 38 secs

Background information about the interviewee:

Name: Wenna

Sex: Female

Age: 26

Final degree: BA

Years of teaching: 4

Grade in teaching: 1, Junior High

Affiliation: CQ Foreign Language School

R: Do you agree on the statement that 'Text memorisation is a good practice in foreign language learning'?

W: *Yes, strongly agree. For any language learning, we can only produce output building on the basis of input. Take writing composition for example. If you want to write well, if you want to have much stuff at your disposal while writing, you have to memorise many elegant words and sentences. Memorising texts is meant to 'input' in an environment like ours. No input, no output. It should be useful for both speaking and writing. I couldn't agree more.*

R: Did you yourself benefit a lot from text memorisation when you were learning English?

W: *Strongly agree. I started learning texts by heart from the very beginning in both Chinese and English learning. You can turn them into your own stuff for use only after you memorise [the texts]. So we'd better memorise more.*

7973

7974 R: What's your comment on the statement that 'Text memorisation' can help students
7975 develop a sense of language'?

7976 W: *I agree. But I think there is prerequisite. The students have to imitate before*
7977 *memorisation. If they don't listen to the tape, they recite with their own pronunciation*
7978 *and intonation. I suggest that my students imitate the standard pronunciation before*
7979 *memorising texts. Pure text memorisation without imitation can at most help with free*
7980 *expressions in oral English, but their pronunciation and intonation cannot be*
7981 *guaranteed.*

7982

7983 R: What did you say text memorisation can help with?

7984 W: *I mean, the students may be able to have lots of 'output', to speak out after text*
7985 *memorisation. Of course, it applies to writing as well. But you cannot ensure that they*
7986 *have beautiful pronunciation.*

7987

7988 R: You think that imitation is necessary in text memorisation?

7989 W: *I think it's a must. They should read aloud after the standard recording before*
7990 *committing to memorisation. I think it is necessary at least at the stage of Junior*
7991 *High.*

7992

7993 R: Do you agree on the statement that 'I suggest my students learn as many texts by
7994 heart as possible'?

7995 W: *I more or less agree. But there is also a prerequisite. We have to first make it clear*
7996 *how the texts should be memorised. Some students memorise a lot, but they don't*
7997 *know how to make it used appropriately. I emphasise the concept of intensive*
7998 *memorisation of texts. You may choose those articles, paragraphs and sentences you*
7999 *like for learning by heart. For those you don't like, you may still find a small*
8000 *paragraph in which some sentence structures are useful for you. What I mean is that*
8001 *we need to memorise the texts selectively and smartly. I'm strongly against 'stupid*
8002 *memorisation'.*

8003

8004 R: Do you agree that 'having learned a text by heart is qualitatively different from
8005 being fluent in reading aloud a text'?

8006 W: *I agree. There is obviously a big difference between reading aloud from what you*
8007 *are seeing and recite from you've committed to memory. The requirements on the part*
8008 *of the students are not the same. Memorisation requires a higher level of mastery and*
8009 *proficiency while reading aloud is still not independent of external stuff.*

8010

8011 R: Do you think that text memorisation should be abandoned as modern multi-media
8012 technologies and western teaching methods are introduced in foreign language
8013 teaching?

8014 W: *I disagree. The modern technologies and teaching methods can of course be used*
8015 *in our teaching process. But in order to truly master a language and to cultivate*
8016 *English thinking, one must have considerable input. Memorisation is a must. I admit*
8017 *that some foreign language teaching methods are dynamic, but it doesn't mean our*
8018 *students will not need to memorise texts any more. How can you have real command*
8019 *of a language by only watching animations? Of course, as I mentioned just now, we*
8020 *need to smartly memorise the material, making adjustment and turning in to your own*
8021 *stuff. Only in this way can you know how to use them. What I mean is that both are*
8022 *equally important – memorisation and learning to use. Back to the question you asked*
8023 *just now, I actually an active advocator of foreign teaching methods which can make*
8024 *your class vivid and more interesting. But it is by no means suggesting that the*
8025 *students will no longer need to do text memorisation.*

8026

8027 R: Do you think heavy use of text memorisation will kill students' interest in
8028 learning?

8029 W: *It might affect some students. To tell you the truth, some students in our foreign*
8030 *language school have even better command of spoken English than their teachers*
8031 *when they are in their final year of Junior High or in Senior High. The excellent*
8032 *students are usually those who are fond of reading aloud and memorising. For this*
8033 *group of students, texts memorisation plays only facilitating role. **They become more***
8034 ***motivated as they memorise more - so much so that- they begin to enjoy it.** For*
8035 *those poor students, they are bothered by this practice because they are simply unable*
8036 *to do this.*

8037 R: Do you think heavy use of text memorisation will restrain students' idea
8038 development and creativity?

8039 W: *We indeed memorise others' stuff, but it doesn't mean that we mean to copy*
8040 *them or we don't need to reprocess them by adding our own stuff. After all, we just*
8041 *intend to use the bits of good or idiomatic use of language. It also depends on the*
8042 *individual students. For those excellent students, they absorb more as they*
8043 *memorise more so that they become more active in their thinking and more creative*
8044 *in language at later stage. I mean, they are able to add in their own ideas and*
8045 *express themselves by making use of what they've memorised. On the contrary,*
8046 *some poor students memorise stupidly without thinking so that they become more and*
8047 *more stupid later.*

8048

8049 R: Do you mean that the outcome depends on the approach to memorisation of the
8050 individual student to a large extent?

8051 W: *Exactly. It depends on the students' initiative. Whether one is memorising smartly*
8052 *or whether one is 'using his/her brain' while memorising really matters. Some*
8053 *students also memorise many texts, but they don't think using their head, they don't*
8054 *try to feel how the language is used so that they end up remain stupid without any*
8055 *progress. In fact, the practice of memorising texts is **extremely useful** if one tries to*
8056 *think more and get his/her understanding involved.*

8057

8058 R: Do you think that text memorisation should or should not be used in tertiary level
8059 as a learning practice?

8060 W: *I think it should be used in college as well. I memorised a lot in junior high and*
8061 *senior high, but I memorised even more in college. In secondary school, you have*
8062 *certain degree of limitation in terms of thinking and understanding. You certainly*
8063 *arrive at a higher level in college in this respect. From this perspective, we may*
8064 *benefit more from memorisation of text in college. **I'd like to memorise more good***
8065 *articles even now if I didn't have so many trivial things to deal with. I find it an*
8066 *enjoyable job. Isn't it a wonderful feeling if you could let [English] flow out of your*
8067 *mouth with addition of your own stuff as a result of memorisation of elegant essays?*

8068

8069 R: Do you require your students to memorise texts?

8070 W: *Yes. The students in our school are required to do this every day in front the*
8071 *teacher – like reciting scripture.*

8072

8073 R: Each of them approaches to you and recite? You check them in person?

8074 W: *Yes. I check every day on each of them because the school requires us to do this.*

8075 *Of course, it's an enjoyable job for me to listen to those good students whose*

8076 *pronunciation and intonation are excellent. But when it comes to those poor students*

8077 *who stumble all the way, I feel annoyed.*

8078

8079 R: So it is a requirement from the school authority?

8080 W: *In our school, from Junior High to Senior High, especially Junior High, each text*

8081 *is required to be learned by heart. We also have oral test in the final-term exams. The*

8082 *students are supposed to recite the whole text when given the first sentence of any text*

8083 *in the textbook.*

8084

8085 R: Will you require your students to memorise texts if it is not mandatory, but

8086 optional?

8087 W: *From my experience, memorising more [texts] should be facilitative in every*

8088 *aspect for the students, especially in terms of input. It is a beneficial way of learning.*

8089 *I will certainly require them to do text memorisation if the school doesn't. But I will*

8090 *not ask them to come to recite before me, which makes me anguished.*

8091

8092 R: Have you encountered any difficulties when using text memorisation in your

8093 teaching? For example, the students' cooperation or no time to check?

8094 W: *I don't think we have any in this school because we have to do this. The students*

8095 *are not allowed to go home until they are able to recite the text. They come to me to*

8096 *recite one by one. I usually cannot go home until after 8 or 9pm. The teachers in our*

8097 *school are tied to school all day long. So time is not a problem for teachers here, but*

8098 *it might be a problem for teachers in other schools.*

8099

8100 R: Do you see any problems with the use of text memorisation in your teaching? For

8101 instance, from the western perspective, this learning practice lacks of humanistic

8102 elements.

8103 W: *We just have different national conditions. Foreigners are more concerned about*

8104 *cultivating open thinking. They will get stuck if they don't memorise when they are*

8105 *learning Chinese. This is our traditional way of learning. If there are indeed some*

8106 *problems with the way of learning, I would like to mention the choice of material for*

8107 *memorisation. I don't agree that all the texts in the textbook are required to be*
8108 *learned by heart without discrimination. Among all the many texts in any textbook,*
8109 *there should be some of them which are not that suitable for memorisation. They are*
8110 *either out-dated or boring in terms of content or not very useful in terms of language*
8111 *used. We need to be selective in choosing the material for memorisation. It should not*
8112 *necessarily be the whole text; It can be some paragraphs or sentence groups. More*
8113 *importantly, the students may be given the right to choose one they like among a*
8114 *short list of articles because everyone has different interests. They are more likely*
8115 *to be 'using their heart' if they are memorising stuff they are interested in. They*
8116 *will not be very willinghearted if they are forced to recite an article they don't like*
8117 *at all.*

8118

8119 R: Do you have any suggestions for the use of text memorisation in language
8120 teaching, especially in terms of responding to the increasing pressure on the teachers
8121 to use Communicative Approach?

8122 W: *First, the issue of how to memorise is very important. We have to choose the right*
8123 *material for memorisation – I mean those articles the content of which might interest*
8124 *you and the language used in which is useful for you. Second, one has to think*
8125 *constantly during and after the process of memorisation. It's not the end of the*
8126 *practice when you are able to reproduce the text. You need to think how you can use*
8127 *them in your own speaking or writing with certain adaptation. Third, I suggest that we*
8128 *ask the students to give their opinions in the form of presentation after memorisation*
8129 *of a text. They are supposed to indicate whether and why they agree or disagree with*
8130 *the ideas expressed in the text. Of course, this also can be a discussion among groups*
8131 *or whole class.*

8132 **Sample 2**

8133 Venue of interview: Telephone interview (calling from the researcher's home in

8134 Chongqing, P.R.China)

8135 Date of interview: 10 April 2010

8136 Time length of recording: 38 mins 41 secs

8137 Background information about the interviewee:

8138

8139 Name: Liangqing

8140 Sex: Female

8141 Age: 37

8142 Final degree: MA

8143 Years of teaching: 13

8144 Grade in teaching: 2, Senior High

8145 Affiliation: CQ No. 18 Middle School

8146

8147 R: Do you agree that text memorisation is a good practice in foreign language
8148 learning?

8149 L: *I agree. **I think it is indispensable for students either in test-oriented education or***
8150 ***use-oriented education.** Many grammar points are contained in the text. And you can*
8151 *have many useful sentence patterns and phrases at hand while writing. **As for the***
8152 ***use-oriented education in which language use and speaking is emphasised, it is***
8153 ***also beneficial to the students.***

8154

8155 R: Did you benefit a lot from the practice of text memorisation when you were
8156 learning English?

8157 L: ***To tell the truth, I didn't do many text memorisations when I was a student. This***
8158 ***is probably because I am lazy. But I require my students to do this as a teacher.***

8159

8160 R: So it doesn't have much to do with your own learning experience?

8161 L: *I was lazy as I said, but I was aware of the importance of doing this.*

8162

8163 R: Do you think you will have better command of English if you memorise more
8164 essays?

8165 L: *It's **out of question.***

8166

8167 R: What's your comment on the statement that 'Text memorisation can help students
8168 develop a sense of language'?

8169 L: *I couldn't agree any more.*

8170

8171 R: What is your understanding of the so-called 'language sense'?

8172 L: *As I see it, it is first of all related to pronunciation and intonation. Second, you can*
8173 *have idiomatic expressions flow out of your mouth without any thought. Finally, it*
8174 *makes you choose the right answer from the four choices in the close test even if you*
8175 *cannot give the reason from the perspective of grammar. I think text memorisation*
8176 *especially helps with idiomatic expressions.*

8177

8178 R: You mentioned just now that text memorisation is indispensable for whatever
8179 education. If it is indeed a way of communication as many people consider it to be,
8180 can't we accumulate through extensive reading?

8181 L: *No, they are different. Extensive reading operates only on a superficial level*
8182 *focusing on the rough idea. It leaves a very shallow impression in your mind. Only*
8183 *memorisation can give provide an opportunity to seek a deeper understanding of*
8184 *language. 'A sense of language' is just built on this process.*

8185

8186 R: Why can't intensive reading help develop the 'sense of language'?

8187 L: *Well, I don't think extensive reading does the same job from my experience. I did*
8188 *read many, but reading can never leave an as deep impression as memorisation in*
8189 *your mind. The latter can also lead to deeper understanding.*

8190

8191 R: Do you suggest that your students learn by heart as many texts as possible?

8192 L: Yes, I do. But time doesn't allow them to do this.

8193

8194 R: So it is time-consuming.

8195 L: *Very much so. Although memorisation of texts is very important, we have only two*
8196 *short periods of time each week for reading aloud English. In addition, they have to*
8197 *memorise some grammar knowledge for deal with exams. **In fact, they have very***
8198 ***limited time to do text memorisation.***

8199

8200 R: Do you agree on the statement that ‘Having learned a text by heart is qualitatively
8201 different from being reading aloud a text’?

8202 L: *There is definitely a qualitative difference. If he can memorise a text well, he must*
8203 *have a deep understanding of the sentence structures. Being fluently reading a loud*
8204 *fluently requires much lower level of understanding than committing the text to*
8205 *memory.*

8206

8207 R: Are you assuming that one necessarily has achieved a good understanding if he/she
8208 can memorise a text?

8209 L: *As I see it, if one can recite well and pause appropriately between and in*
8210 *sentences, he/she must have understood the text. A tiny number of students do pause*
8211 *inappropriately in the process of recitation. It’s apparently rote-memorisation.*

8212

8213 R: Do you think that text memorisation should be abandoned as modern multi-media
8214 technologies and western teaching methods are introduced in foreign language
8215 teaching?

8216 L: *What do you mean by ‘western teaching method’?*

8217

8218 R: I mean the use of communicative activities in the classroom, like role play, group
8219 work and games, which are considered to be more interesting than traditional way of
8220 teaching?

8221 L: *Oh, I see. We have already used some of these activities because there are some*
8222 *modules in the text focusing on these sorts of activities. But **I think we should use***
8223 ***more text memorisation in such circumstances. Let me give you an example. We***
8224 ***usually have parallel classes and advanced classes in China. You can only have***
8225 ***communicative activities successfully carried out in advanced classes, but never in***
8226 ***parallel classes. This is because the students in advanced classes have accumulated***
8227 ***more and memorised more.***

8228

8229 R: Do you think that heavy use of text memorisation will kill the students’ interest?

8230 L: *No, I don’t think so. **Instead of killing their interest, the practice probably raises***
8231 ***their interest. If they find that they can speak out some sentences fluently or write***
8232 ***some good expressions in their composition, they will have a sense of achievement.***
8233 ***From this point of view, the practice makes them more motivated in learning. As a***

8234 *matter of fact, it is a very good way of learning language even in the current*
8235 *situation. The reason why **we teachers don't require them to memorise the whole***
8236 ***text or very long paragraphs** is the time issue. Our students have many subjects to*
8237 *learn and many assignments to finish. We haven't given them more tasks on text*
8238 *memorisation simply for the purpose of reducing their working loads. But I really*
8239 *hope that they could memorise more texts.*

8240

8241 R: Do you think text memorisation will restrain students' idea development and
8242 creativity?

8243 L: *No, I don't think so. The aim of memorising texts for our Chinese students is not*
8244 *for coping or borrowing others' ideas, but for taking advantage of sentence patterns*
8245 *or phrases used in the texts for their own use later whether in the exams or in*
8246 *practical use.*

8247

8248 R: So you think it will not limit the students' creativity?

8249 L: *Of course not. There is not such an issue as creativity for us Chinese learning*
8250 *English as foreigners. We simply have to follow the rules of their language. I don't*
8251 *think there exists the issue of creativity. Instead, I think the practice facilitates the*
8252 *creativity. They can have a variety of structures at their disposal in writing and*
8253 *speaking through recitation of texts. And they may be able to choose more 'superior'*
8254 *words in language use, which I consider a kind of creativity for language learners. As*
8255 *I see it, flexible use of language is the creativity in language learning.*

8256

8257 R: Is there a case that someone does memorise a lot of textual materials, but they
8258 don't know how to use them appropriately?

8259 L: *Even if some indeed don't know how to flexibly use what they've memorised, they*
8260 *are likely to be at the early stage of memorisation. **Hasn't it been said that 'He who***
8261 ***has memorised 300 Tang poems becomes a poet himself'**? This implies that one can*
8262 ***eventually savvy how that language works on the basis of long-term accumulation***
8263 ***through textual memorisation although the time it takes may vary from person to***
8264 ***person.***

8265

8266 R: Do you think this practice should be used in tertiary level?

8267 L: *It is necessary to do so. As I have already mentioned, the language system of*
8268 *English has not been established for most Chinese learners including those English*
8269 *majors. There are very few who are able to flexibly and idiomatically express*
8270 *themselves, at least among people I know. They haven't established an English way of*
8271 *thinking. They still remain on the stage of translating from their mother tongue. They*
8272 *construct their sentences by impromptu combination of words and grammatical*
8273 *structures. If you learn by heart many idiomatic expressions, you naturally have an*
8274 *essay flow out of your mouth.*

8275 **Sample 3**

8276 Venue of interview: the interviewee's home in Chongqing, P.R.China)

8277 Date of interview: 15 March 2009; 10 April 2010

8278 Time length of recording: 33 mins 46 secs; 15mins 6 secs

8279 Background information about the interviewee:

8280

8281 Name: Hongying

8282 Sex: Female

8283 Age: 38

8284 Final degree: MA (Russian)

8285 Years of teaching: 6 (*note: over 10 years of experience of working as translator and*
8286 *interpreter*)

8287 Grade in teaching: 2, College

8288 Affiliation: SWUPL (Lecturer)

8289

8290 **First-round interview (15 March 2009)**

8291 R: Do you agree that text memorisation is a good practice in foreign language
8292 learning?

8293 H: *It is certainly an effective way of learning foreign language. In the first two years*
8294 *in university, the teacher of intensive reading required us to learn text by heart. The*
8295 *more you memorise, the more proficient you become when you use the language.*
8296 *Especially in oral English, you have all those ready-made stuff at hand. And you*
8297 *certainly make less grammatical mistakes.*

8298

8299 R: Did you benefit a lot from the practice of text memorisation when you were
8300 learning foreign language'?

8301 H: *That's exactly my experience.*

8302

8303 R: Do you agree that text memorisation can help students develop a sense of
8304 language?

8305 H: *I couldn't agree any more. **The sense of language is more important than***
8306 ***grammatical knowledge.** If a student has a good command of grammar but are poor*
8307 *in terms of sense of language, he will encounter subsequent difficulties in language*
8308 *learning.*

8309

8310 R: A good command of grammar does not guarantee proficient use of that language?

8311 H: *Absolutely. It is my experience. When I do multiple-choice in the exams, I'm able*

8312 *to choose the right answer without knowing or bothering to analyse the grammar*

8313 *structure.*

8314

8315 R: Do you suggest your students learn as many texts by heart as possible?

8316 H: *I always require my students to learn by heart as many texts as possible. At least, I*

8317 *strongly suggest this method.*

8318

8319 R: Why do you have such a strong feeling on it?

8320 H: *If you learn texts by heart, **they are stored in your mind and can be accessible***

8321 ***immediately in need. There are many ready-made sentences or expressions there***

8322 ***for your use.** Being fluent in reading aloud can not achieve this result because it is*

8323 *not retained in your brain. **We can take advantage of the memorised stuff without***

8324 ***starting from scratch.** I'm always in favour of learning by heart. I require my child to*

8325 *do so.*

8326

8327 R: Do you think that text memorisation should be abandoned as modern multi-media

8328 technologies and western teaching methods are introduced in foreign language

8329 teaching?

8330 H: *I don't think that learning texts by heart should be abandoned as modern multi-*

8331 *media technology and new teaching methods are introduced. The students may feel*

8332 *comfortable to watch and listen to more English programmes without being forced to*

8333 *consciously memorise texts. Without accumulation of a large amount of language*

8334 *material, how can the students use the language proficiently? This is my idea. What's*

8335 *your take on this issue?*

8336

8337 R: May I talk about my idea after the interview? I'm interested in this topic because

8338 western scholars usually think text memorisation is not different from rote-

8339 memorisation which is a very bad practice.

8340 H: ***Language learning is a process of imitation. We are supposed to imitate other's***

8341 ***language rather than creating a language. It's obviously impossible to create***

8342 *other's language. Learning language is conceptually and qualitatively different*
8343 *form learning other science subjects.*

8344

8345 R: Do you think text memorisation will restrain students' idea development and
8346 creativity?

8347 H: *There is no such a problem as limiting one's creative thinking. We can choose for*
8348 *use those sentences which we think are useful or practical for us. It is impossible to*
8349 *copy the whole sentences or others' ideas. **We are learning the sentence structures***
8350 ***instead of the ideas expressed.** We mean to learn how the sentences are structured*
8351 *through learning texts by heart. I don't think learning texts by heart will restrain*
8352 *students' creativity. **How can one rote-memorise many texts without understanding.***
8353 ***I think it's impossible.** In the case of Chinese texts, we cannot rote-memorise either*
8354 *as it necessarily involves understanding. In terms of language, I think sometimes - not*
8355 *in all circumstances - we can memorise some classic sentences, which is of help when*
8356 *you want to use them - like use them as quotations. In most cases, we memorise the*
8357 *structure rather than the whole sentence. Like learning Chinese, how can you learn*
8358 *how to read and write without any memorisation of language sample? It is impossible*
8359 *to make a sentence from scratch, which seriously limit the speed of communication*
8360 *and the accuracy of expression. This way negatively affects the use of language.*

8361

8362 R: Do you think that heavy use of text memorisation will kill the students' interest?

8363 H: *It is possible that excessive use of text memorisation can kill the students' interest.*

8364

8365 R: How many texts do you think we should memorise?

8366 H: *Of course, it is impossible for use to memorise each text in the textbook. But we*
8367 *have to memorise a sufficient amount of them. We often say, '**progressing from a***
8368 ***quantitative change to a qualitative change**'. It applies in text memorisation as well.*
8369 *I strongly agree that "He who has read ten thousand books thoroughly can work*
8370 *wonders with his pen.' **After reading many articles, you gradually develop an idea of***
8371 ***how that language is used and internalise into your own stuff.***

8372

8373 R: What particular aspects do you think the practice help with?

8374 H: *Learning texts by heart can contribute to every aspect of language skills including*
8375 *listening, speaking, reading, writing and translation. I agree.*

8376

8377 R: Why does it help with translation?

8378 H: *We Chinese people are inclined to use Chinese structure to construct a sentence in*
8379 *Russian. We know the right structures of their language through text memorisation*
8380 *and make them understood by foreigners. This practice helps you make idiomatic*
8381 *sentence rather than Chinese Russian. I have rich experience in this respect as I have*
8382 *translated over millions of words of documents. Before doing translation, what I do is*
8383 *to study those relevant materials to figure out how native speakers do in dealing with*
8384 *similar issues. For instance, I look at what structures are used by native speakers in*
8385 *scientific and technological discourse when I translate relevant materials. As a result*
8386 *I can always make idiomatic translation. This is also true to any type of writing and*
8387 *speaking. I have a business partner who had correspondence with me for a while. He*
8388 *had been taken me as a Russian until one day he found a mistake in my email which*
8389 *would never be committed by native speakers.*

8390

8391 R: Does it help with grammar?

8392 H: *In fact, that grammar knowledge is unconsciously stilled in our mind in the*
8393 *process of memorising text. When we are learning grammar explicitly, we are*
8394 *learning many discrete points. You learn how to integrate all those discrete points*
8395 *through memorising texts. There are some students who know very well about*
8396 *grammar but fail to speak or write properly. The crux is that they first memorise too*
8397 *little, thus lack of accumulation, and second - more importantly - they lack chance of*
8398 *using the language - to use 'out' what you have memorised and make it becomes your*
8399 *own stuff. I strongly oppose the teaching method that focus excessively on grammar.*
8400 *Grammar learning should not be put in the centre of language teaching and test.*
8401 *Learning grammar can only help with the understanding of the structure of the*
8402 *language, but little with oral English.*

8403

8404 R: Do you believe that text memorisation can surely improve one's language
8405 proficiency?

8406 H: Yes. *I agree that one will surely improve one's language proficiency after learning*
8407 *by heart a sufficient amount of texts. For instance, it is impossible that one doesn't*
8408 *improve if he/she memorises the first two books. I always require my students to learn*
8409 *by heart. Those who do a lot of text memorisation obviously perform better than*

8410 *those who don't either in oral English or grammar. They have little difficulty*
8411 *understanding my explanation. And more importantly, they know how to construct a*
8412 *new sentence based on what they have memorised. Learning by heart really makes a*
8413 *difference. Of course, you have to make certain adaptations in accordance with*
8414 *different situations when you use the language.*

8415

8416 R: Any other aspects?

8417 H: *Text memorisation helps learn sentence structures, fixed phrases expression and*
8418 *idiomatic expression. It also helps resist the natural tendency of Chinese learners of*
8419 *English to generate Chinglish [Chinese English]. Once I attended an evaluation*
8420 *meeting on translation. I found some translation was heavily marked with Chinese*
8421 *sentence structure. I would not commit the same errors as I know the native structure*
8422 *of sentences through memorising articles written by native speakers.*

8423

8424 R: But there are problems with this practice like time-consuming.

8425 R: *I don't think the teacher should limit the use of text memorisation because it is time*
8426 *consuming. It may be a little difficult in the initial stage because you have limited*
8427 *command of grammar and vocabulary. It may involve rote-memorisation and 'shen*
8428 *ban yin tao' [unwise borrowing or inappropriate use]. Now, it is very easy for me to*
8429 *learn a text by heart. It is inevitable that we experience difficulty in the earlier stages*
8430 *when you force yourself to memorise. Now it is a piece of cake for me.*

8431

8432 R: Do you think that it should continue to be used in tertiary level?

8433 H: *I think this method should continue to be used in tertiary level. My point is that in*
8434 *primary level, we should not force them to memorise too much. If we do, the children*
8435 *might lose interest in learning. They should be encouraged to imitate pronunciation*
8436 *and intonation. In tertiary level, it is important to require students to learn by heart*
8437 *because it is the stage where the students are moving from intermediate stage to*
8438 *advanced stage. When basic knowledge of the language has been understood and*
8439 *more use-based practice needs to be introduced. At this stage, the students have*
8440 *learned almost all the grammars. If they can learn more texts by heart, their listening*
8441 *and speaking will definitely improve. They turn what they have memorised into their*
8442 *own through learning by heart.*

8443

8444 R: Can the practice limit one's creativity?

8445 H: *I don't think so. I don't believe that the foreigners write composition from scratch*
8446 *without have model composition for reference when they are beginners. **I don't think***
8447 ***there is as important an issue of creativity in language learning as in other science***
8448 ***disciplines. You have to keep to the rules or idiomatic usage of the language you are***
8449 ***learning. You obviously cannot create a new rule yourself, can you? I admit that***
8450 *many other subjects need more creativity. But for language learning, I cannot see the*
8451 *need of involving a large amount of creativity. Can you create a new grammar*
8452 *structure yourself? For instance, in our Russian, the noun and verb requires the*
8453 *change of 'aspect'. We cannot be so creative that we do not make any change in*
8454 *'aspect'. Language is special subject.*

8455

8456 R: Is it possible that our opinions are influenced after memorising a text?

8457 H: *It is very unlikely that we adults are affected by the opinion of an article we have*
8458 *memorised because our perspective of looking at the world has been shaped through*
8459 *our own experience and education. Of course, it might be possible for young kids to*
8460 *be influenced by the articles they have memorised. So we need to be very careful*
8461 *when choosing the texts to be memorised. They must be something positive at least.*

8462

8463 R: What's the relationship between grammar and leaning texts by heart?

8464 H: *I think they complement each other. After we learn a certain grammar point, we*
8465 *know it should be A+B+C. If we memorised a sentence sample, we definitely have a*
8466 *clearer understanding of the grammar. Our teaching model now is normally starting*
8467 *from grammar explanation. Initially, the students may not be able to fully understand*
8468 *the grammar point. If they memorise the sentence samples, they may go back to*
8469 *grammar explicitly taught and deepen their understanding. My teaching model is:*
8470 *grammar explanation-understanding-learning text by heart. From my experience of*
8471 *learning Russian for over 20 years, I think learning texts by heart is a very effective*
8472 *method. I am proud to say that I excel most of my colleagues and have been praised*
8473 *by native speakers for speaking idiomatic Russian.*

8474

8475 R: Have you memorised a lot?

8476 H: *Of course. I memorised all the texts in high school and I continued to do so in*
8477 *university. For 100 passages I have memorised, I can recall only half of them. But if*

8478 *you are able to use all the structures in those 50 articles, it is already a great*
8479 *achievement. There is a process of screening and discarding. You'd better choose*
8480 *those articles which contain some structures you are not familiar with.*

8481

8482 R: But you will forget many of them as time goes by?

8483 H: *Sure. But there is a trail left in your mind even if you forget them. It will take much*
8484 *less time when you need to pick them back. It's definitely not a waste of time. There is*
8485 *something left in your mind - like sense of language - even if you forget the texts you*
8486 *have memorised. For instance, if now I try to memorise those texts I memorised in*
8487 *university 19 years ago, it certainly takes me much less time than those who did not*
8488 *memorise them at that time. You already have an impression or feeling at least.*

8489

8490 R: Do you think memorisation is an important factor in language learning?

8491 H: *Yes, it is.*

8492

8493 R: Do you think those who have good memory can learn a foreign language well?

8494 H: *Not necessarily. Memorisation is only one part of language learning. A more*
8495 *important part is the use of language. How can you learn a language well and*
8496 *express yourself without learning to flexibly use it in authentic environment? The final*
8497 *goal of language learning is to express ideas. Memorisation is just a process of*
8498 *accumulation. It is not necessarily true that those students who have good memory*
8499 *will definitely learn a language well. They might perform well in the exam, but not*
8500 *necessarily in language use. Communicative competence involves many other factors*
8501 *including personality. If a student is very shy and not willing to express*
8502 *himself/herself, how can he/she develop good communicative competence? So*
8503 *affective factor is also important in language learning.*

8504 Second-round interview(10 April 2010)

8505

8506 R: I understand from the interview we did last time that your idea is that we must
8507 have a large amount of accumulation [of language samples] in order to have a
8508 proficient amount of language. Can't we achieve such accumulation through loads of
8509 extensive reading? Why is it necessary to learn by heart many textual materials?

8510 H: *This is because you cannot have very profound memory [of what you've read] if*
8511 *we only do extensive reading. Without deep memory, you are unable to proficiently*
8512 *and naturally develop certain fixed sentence patterns in your mind. Starting from*
8513 *scratch [in speaking and writing] can undermine the accuracy of your expression and*
8514 *be unable to guarantee the keeping of the original flavour of that language. If you*
8515 *have some memorised sentences at hand, of course, they have to be correct and of*
8516 *native use, you can take them for your own use. This actually forms a kind of*
8517 *conditioning reflex. **The correct structures or expressions are out there for their***
8518 ***immediate use if the students memorise thoroughly enough. It's as straightforward***
8519 ***as 'condition reflex' which I think is the highest state of language learning.** You*
8520 *naturally think of that sentence [when you need it] and you don't have to start from*
8521 *thinking about the structure – the subject, predicate, object and so on. It's there in*
8522 *your mind. I feel it a very efficient way [of learning language].*

8523

8524 R: So you think it is necessary for our students to learn in this way?

8525 H: *Definitely. Because we don't have the same [language] environment as we learn*
8526 *our native language. If you are in a native language learning environment, you learn*
8527 *that language naturally through daily imitation. Actually what you hear and what you*
8528 *speak out yourself can leave you a deep memory. But in a non-native language*
8529 *learning environment, you don't have the condition. You have to read through your*
8530 *month. **In fact, the best way to memorise [a text] is through reading aloud using***
8531 ***your mouth.***

8532

8533 R: I guess people usually read aloud when doing this practice?

8534 H: *Right. **Memorising through silent reading is much less effective than reading***
8535 ***aloud.** Indeed, we don't have the language environment. You naturally learn how to*
8536 *use it if you hear a sentence more than a few times. I think you have such experience*
8537 *when you are living in the UK.*

8538

8539 R: Last time you mentioned that you memorised many texts when you were a student.
8540 But committing a lot of texts to your memory obviously cannot guarantee a flexible
8541 use of language in on-line communication, right?

8542 H: *Definitely. In fact, the sample language in the textbook we've memorised is rather*
8543 *stiff. They only give you very limited ways of expression. Real-time communication*
8544 *seldom allows you to use the original sentences you've memorised given the*
8545 *unpredictable nature of this kind of conversation. There is a need for adaptation. The*
8546 *process of adaptation is actually that of re-learning. We need to incorporate what is*
8547 *new to us to what we have already mastered. There is indeed a long distance from*
8548 *memorisation of texts to the flexible use of language to express oneself. But if you*
8549 *have laid a good foundation through the former, the latter will certainly come quicker*
8550 *and easier. I have enough experience to attest to it.*

8551

8552 R: Does the practice of text memorisation to some extent limit one's creative use of
8553 language?

8554 H: *It very much depends on different individuals. Personal initiative matters really*
8555 *much. Those who are motivated to learn and know how to learn through practice*
8556 *should be able to adapt and achieve flexible use of language.*

8557

8558 R: So it is not the practice of text memorisation to blame?

8559 H: *No, not at all. I should say it's a very good way of learning according to my*
8560 *experience. It helps you lay a good foundation of language use. I have a lot to say in*
8561 *this aspect. It enlarges your vocabulary and enables you to command different ways*
8562 *of expression. In this sense, it facilitates our creative use of language.*

8563

8564 R: Do you think it is necessary to use text memorisation in college?

8565 H: *Yes, of course. It's absolute necessary. The texts we use to memorise, you know, are*
8566 *not limited to those in the textbooks. Nowadays internet is very popular and you can*
8567 *find news or all sorts of articles on the web. If you could memorise some of the classic*
8568 *sentences including those idiomatic oral expressions, you will find it very convenient*
8569 *when you need to use them.*

8570

8571 R: So you think this practice should not be limited to high school students and it can
8572 be even used by advanced learners?

8573 H: *Definitely. I do this myself even now. I try to memorise some new expressions I*
8574 *encounter when reading news online.*

8575

8576 R: You do this deliberately?

8577 H: *Yes, I memorise them on purpose. This is something I don't know, so I want to have*
8578 *command of them.*

8579

8580 R: I read that some western scholars attributed Chinese habit of memorising texts to
8581 our worship of books. They thought Chinese take books as authority and the
8582 embodiment of knowledge so that they, so much so that they try to commit the texts in
8583 books into memory. Do you agree?

8584 H: *I think there is a point in this understanding. We have different culture from*
8585 *Western one. Recitation had been greatly emphasised in our ancient literacy*
8586 *education. We Chinese do have a tendency to consider books as authority. This might*
8587 *be true in the past. But the situation is changing now. I don't think nowadays many*
8588 *people believe what is written in books is necessarily truth. We have numerous books*
8589 *appearing in the market nowadays. For those books whose contents are rubbish, can*
8590 *you treat them as truth? It's obviously impossible. Of course, we might treasure some*
8591 *stuff in our traditional culture such as the writings of Confucius and Mencius. For*
8592 *many modern writings, we may take them as information rather than truth.*

8593

8594 R: So learning by heart texts can be separate from absorbing the ideas in the text?

8595 H: *Definitely. It is at least so in language learning. I take language learning as*
8596 *learning a skill or learning to use a tool rather acceptance of ideas. Skill learning*
8597 *involves continuous repetition. **Learning a text by heart doesn't by any means equate***
8598 ***accepting the ideas conveyed in the text. They are two different issues. The former***
8599 ***is to understand how the language is used. Of course, I may accept those ideas that***
8600 ***I identify with and quote them in my writing. For those I don't, there is no reason***
8601 ***for me to accept them.***

Appendix 7 Statement of Authorisation

I, as undersigned, grant my permission (*referred as 'this permission'*) to Ms. Xia Yu, a research student at Modern Languages, School of Humanities, University of Southampton (*referred as 'Ms. Yu' or 'She'*), who is undertaking a qualitative inquiry into Chinese learners/teachers' perception of text memorisation in foreign language learning/teaching and use the information related to my language learning and/or teaching that I have surrendered to her in interviews and questionnaires and/or other means permitted by me (*referred as 'the related information'*). Ms. Yu may make reference, quote, or summarise the related information in her future thesis, academic reports, and academic talks provided that she should strictly maintain the anonymity of my personal identity, make efforts to protect me from harmful results, and guarantee my intended meanings to be respected in all her publications.

I also welcome and expect Ms. Yu to seek consultation with me over the interpretations of the related information. Otherwise, her interpretations should not be considered to be equal to my views.

In case of any unlike conflicts in readings of English text and Chinese text of this permission, the English text shall prevail over the Chinese one (omitted).

Signature:

Date:

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