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Introduction

China has enjoyed a long history of using English literature in English language teaching. The Chinese interest in literature, derived from the Chinese teaching context, has remained strong. In China, as with the rest of the world, literature is regarded as one of the most important teaching instruments for students to access the target culture, to develop their linguistic and cultural awareness and to develop their competence with the language. As a teaching tool, it can be useful to fill the void that is brought about by the use of the communicative approach. English teaching in China, however, is filled with worries and problems. This paper proposes some solutions to the problems from pedagogical point of view.

Background

China enjoys a good reputation for its long traditional love of literature. This tradition derives from the Confucian influence in education. Before the abolition of imperial examination system in 1905, students were required to read the prescribed classics and their annotations on which the imperial examinations were based. Students were expected to learn the Chinese language and to reach near perfection by studying classical literature. The Chinese literary tradition had a great impact on English language teaching in China. Influenced by the Chinese literary tradition and by English literature teaching methodologies in Britain and the United States (Harvey, 1985), English literature teaching came to occupy central stage in English teaching in China and this tradition continues into the present day.

Foreign language departments would probably lose their status if they did not teach English literature. Du (1990) notes, "there is no institution which did not include literature of some kind in its curriculum" (p.199). Just as Burnaby and Sun (1989) have observed,

with respect to teacher status, we note that in Western countries as well as in China, more prestige and perquisites are accorded to people who teach literature and cultural aspects of a language than to people who teach language skills. (p.236)

Duran (1993) also points out, "there appears to be still, built into the structure of our profession, an inherited notional superiority of a given idea of literature" (p.168). In Du's (1990) view, language teaching is inseparable from literature teaching in that literature is used as a "reinforcement device" and, therefore, has gained a secure place in the Chinese English program, a place "determined by its role in language-skill reinforcement and in cultural orientation" (p. 204).

Flowers of English Literature Teaching

Literature teaching in China formally begins when students of English language majors enter their third year at university. At their upper-intermediate and advanced levels, students are expected to have developed a sound foundation of the language, and to be able to cope with literature. Similar to the situations in other parts of the world, English literature is taught in China for many reasons. The
most common ones are that literature provides an easy access to motivating content materials and cultural background, encourages language acquisition, expands students' language awareness, develops students' interpretative abilities and educates the whole person (Widdowson, 1975; Mullane, 1984; Brumfit, 1985; Spack, 1985; Akyel & Yalcin, 1990; Carter & Long, 1991; Lazar, 1993). Collie and Slater (1987) say that literature can provide valuable authentic material, cultural enrichment, language enrichment and personal involvement. According to Osburne's (1987) survey of master's level English language teacher trainees in a Chinese university, the trainees have more interest in literature than linguistics and methodology. Du (1990) also reported that, in his survey of Chinese students' attitudes towards the courses offered by a university, 42 out of 58 students (84%) indicated a "strong liking" for and a "great interest" in literature. He claimed that there is a great potential in China for the use of English, and thus for literature in English.

**Motivating Materials.**

Before they study English literature, most Chinese students have already been exposed to Chinese literature, modern or classical. Their undiminished interest in literature would lead them to the study of English literature under proper guidance and careful selection of materials. Literary texts provide them with "a convenient source of content" (Brumfit, 1985, p.105) and, because literature never offers a definite answer, with ample opportunities for meaningful negotiations. Richards (1976) points out that "the all-important fact for the study of literature or any other mode of communication -- is that there are several kinds of meaning" (p.180). Duran (1993) says that "literary texts are inherently motivating and interesting, because they are written in genres specifically directed towards giving pleasure" (p.161). Literary artistic beauty can impress students deeply and this can further help them concentrate on what they are learning.

Carter and Long (1991) make a clear distinction between the study of literature and the use of literature as a resource. The study of literature means "reading literature with an academic, institutionalized setting for purposes of obtaining qualifications in literary studies" and "it involves a considerable baggage of critical concepts, literary conventions and metalanguage" and the fostering of the student's analytical abilities (p. 3). The use of literature as a resource means encouraging the student's "greater sensitivity and self-awareness and greater understanding of the world around us" by using literature as a special source for personal development and growth (p. 3). For Chinese students, they either study literature to acquire linguistic and literary competence or to use literature as a resource to understand the world. In China, such literary materials are more easily available than other reading materials. Because of their previous knowledge of Chinese literature, comparative and contrasting studies can make their literature learning more productive and joyful. If students are highly motivated and if they find what they are learning is of great interest and relevance to them, they can learn the language better (Collie & Slater, 1987; Lazar, 1993; Kramsch, 1993; Du, 1990). Not only is their past literary knowledge helpful to them but, as adults, their life experiences can facilitate their understanding. With these experiences, they can "identify and identify with the experiences, thoughts and situations which are depicted in the text" (Carter & Long, 1991, p.5-6). Furthermore, literary texts are generally authentic. Authentic texts "offer genuine samples of a very wide range of styles, registers and text-types at many levels of difficulty" (Duff & Maley, 1990, p.3). By negotiating the meaning in the text, with an urge to know the meaning embedded in it, students are likely to improve their language proficiency (Du, 1990).

**Access to Culture.**

Culture is embedded in literature. Language and culture are inseparable, interdependent, and interactive (Damen, 1986; Kaplan, 1986). Valdes (1986) says that literature is "culture in action" (p.137). Stewart (1982) points out that every step of language learning involves the target-language culture. Language and culture are bound and "inextricably tied together" (Alptekin, 1993, p.139). Brown (1986) has also said that "second language learning is often second culture learning" (p.33). It is quite impossible to learn the language without learning the culture (Valdes).
To learn a second language is to acquire a second cultural identity through acculturation while still preserving one's own native language identity (Brown, 1986; Acton & de Felix, 1986). Brown (1986) suggests that the success of second language learning depends largely on the synchronisation of linguistic and cultural development and that too early linguistic mastery by a student may mean that such a student "may be less likely to achieve healthy acculturation and be unable to cope psychologically even though his [sic] linguistic skills are excellent" (p.42). Damen (1986) calls cultural awareness the fifth dimension, in contrast to reading, writing, listening and speaking. Scott (1965) says that "literature, like an artefact, is typically a product of a given culture, and commonly functions as an inclusive model of that culture" (p.293). Valdes (1986) seems to agree with this idea. She says "one of the major functions of literature is to serve as a medium to transmit the culture of the people who speak the language in which it is written" (p.137). Marckwardt (1978) proposes explicit culture teaching in language programs through literature. He points out that cultural awareness, sensitivity, and rapprochement are not automatic by-products of foreign language instruction or of exposure to a foreign literature. If they are to be achieved at all, they must be planned for and built into the course of study.

In China, language learning and culture learning have been well integrated through literature. Children are sent to school to xue wenhua, that is, to learn language and culture. They learn Chinese, particularly written Chinese, through well-chosen literary texts. When they reach upper secondary schools, more than 80 per cent of their Chinese texts are taken from literary masterpieces. Ideologically and politically, this enculturation of the national cultural identity is key to Chinese education. Bearing in mind such a traditional approach to both language and literature, Chinese English educators have also integrated linguistic and cultural learning by introducing well selected literary texts.

**Facilitating language acquisition.**

In recent years, the language-based approaches to the teaching of literature have gained a much wider acceptance in pedagogy than previously. Language is taught through the medium of literature. Such approaches integrate linguistics and literature on a supplementary level. Carter and Long (1990) points out that such integration would "foster an activity-oriented, student-centered, and language-sensitive approach" (p.217). It is valuable for Chinese English majors at their advanced level to linguistically analyse literary texts (Carter & Long, 1991). Short (1990) predicts that the linguistic approaches to the teaching of literature in the native speaking and non-native speaking classrooms have much in common, in spite of what many literature specialists would have supposed. An increasing cross-fertilization of ideas across the native/non-native teaching divide is likely in the new decade.

Akyel and Yalcin (1990) report that students seem to feel literature is "the most effective literary form for helping them develop their linguistic skills and cultural awareness" (p.175). Birch (1989) says that "literature is considered to be the expression of language at its fullest use" (p.86). Marquardt (1982) has also noticed the important role that literature plays in the total mastery of the language:

Knowledge of the deep structures of the target language and of the underlying values, assumptions, beliefs, and intergroup attitudes of its culture are now seen to be as important in the real mastery of a language as a facile use of the patterns of everyday speech. And the study of literature of the language is felt to be the surest way to attain these more elusive qualities that go to make up a total mastery of that language. (p.185)

Widdowson (1978) defined two levels of linguistic knowledge: usage and use. According to Widdowson, usage is the knowledge of linguistic rules; whereas, use is the application of linguistic rules for meaningful communication. The use- usage distinction implies that students are expected not only to know the language system, but also to know how it is used for meaningful
communication. Literature, therefore, enable students to negotiate multiple levels of meanings (Widdowson, 1975). McKay (1982) argues that literary texts can contribute to either usage or use. She argues against the traditional use of literature to develop usage only, and she supports the idea that literature provides one of the best sources for "developing an awareness of language use" (p. 520). Povey (1967) has also observed that connotative vocabulary, complex sentence structures, subtle and figurative use of the language and intricate plots can all contribute to the expansion of students' language skills.

Valdes (1986) gives a narrower definition of literature:

> Literature is an unabridged fiction, drama, poetry, or essay written for an educated audience of native speakers of the language in which it is written, purporting to represent life as it really is. (p.138)

But the scope has now been broadened to include, according to Lalande (1988), radio plays, diaries, travelogues, fairy tales, folklore, biographies, autobiographies, science fiction, historical accounts, newspapers, magazines, church hymns, Scripture, songs, libretti, farces, comic books, romances and detective/mystery works. This categorisation seems to narrow the gap between literary and non-literary studies. Carter and Nash (1990) assert that "literary language is not special or different in that any formal feature termed literary can be found in other discourses. The literary does not exist without the non-literary and draws constantly on non-literary sources of supply by means of a process of re-registration" (p.58). If there is a difference, it is the difference in language uses and functions. They suggest, therefore, that "the terms literary and non-literary might be best replaced by the more neutral term textual" (p. 59). They have found that there is literariness in almost all writings. To them, the study of literature or literariness can facilitate language acquisition. They maintain that

> Far from demeaning "literature" and reducing appreciation of literary language use, examination of literariness in language leads to greater respect for the richness of "ordinary" language in all its multiple contexts. (Carter & Nash, 1990, p.59)

Fowler (1981) has made a similar investigation into the literary and non-literary differences in the use of language. He says

> Some of the varieties used in the constitution of a specific "literary" text may tend to occur regularly in some, but not all, other "literary" texts but they are not restricted to "literary" texts (rhyme and alliteration are found in advertisements); and "literary" texts also draw upon patterns which tend to occur in "non-literary" texts. (p.21)

Van Peer (1988) strongly advocates the marriage of literary and non-literary texts in language learning. He argues that there should not be any firm formal linguistic distinction made between literary and non-literary language. He proposes that

1. Whatever the present state of linguistics as a discipline, the linguistic nature of (literary) texts is inescapable. Neglecting this nature gives rise to an unwarranted lack of descriptive adequacy.

2. Whatever the present state of literary studies as a discipline, the literary nature of some texts is an inescapable object of study and presents an enrichment to linguistics. Neglect of this research area produces an unnecessary poverty of linguistic knowledge and theory.

3. The multiplicity of theoretical and methodological perspectives in both linguistics and literary studies does not allow a strict separation of their fields when it comes to the study of literature; instead, their interaction may be beneficial in trying to remedy their mutual deficiencies. (p.10)

Teach language through literature has been a traditional approach in China for centuries. In the early
1930s, stylistics -- an integration of linguistic and literature studies -- became very popular. My observations and personal experience suggest that, when Chinese teachers teach literature, they use the traditional Chinese linguistic approach. The same approach is taken for the teaching of English literature in China. But the knowledge of the approach does not guarantee success in their English literature teaching because of their lack of linguistic and cultural competence. The practice of integration can be seen from the names of the institutions where foreign languages are taught. For almost a century, in most universities, the departments engaging with language and literary teaching have been called the Departments of Foreign Languages and Literature or the Department of English Language and Literature, indicating the inseparable and harmonious integration of linguistics and literature.

**Facilitating Interpretative Capabilities**

Literary texts can provide a basis for linguistic and stylistic analysis. The reader responds to the meaning of the texts via interactive participation in reading. Carter and Simpson (1989) agree that "without analytical knowledge of the rules and conventions of normal linguistic communication we cannot adequately validate these intuitive interpretations either for ourselves or for others" (p.5-6). They emphasise that detailed knowledge and principled analysis of the language system is necessary to have greater systematic awareness of the language used in literature. Duran (1993) argues that literary texts are full of layers of meanings and each meaning must be determined by a specific context. While interacting with the texts, the reader interprets the meaning from contextualisations, virtual or imaginary, and literary texts can, therefore, "function as challenging interpretative puzzles rather than merely frustrating gaps" (160). Widdowson explains,

> Because you've got to find the evidence, as it were, which is representative of some new reality. So, with literary discourse the actual procedures for making sense are much more in evidence. You've got to employ interpretative procedures in a way which isn't required of you in the normal reading process. If you want to develop these procedural abilities to make sense of discourse, then literature has a place. (Rossner, 1983, p.31)

He goes on to say that literary texts require readers to use their linguistic knowledge to the utmost. To him, apart from its stimulating functions, literature "sets up conditions for a crucial part of language learning -- the ability to infer meaning by procedural activity" (p. 33). Teaching literature can thus develop students' capabilities in the process of interpretation, and "in using literary texts educationally, it is easy to force the process of interpretation into our attention precisely because literary texts often resist easy interpretation" (Duran, 1993, pp. 160-161).

For Chinese students, the development of interpretative abilities is crucially important. In their past years of studies, what they have touched upon is too factual for them to make much inference. They lack the ability to read between the lines. They need to develop interpretative abilities to upgrade their reading abilities. The aim of learning is not just for surface meanings only, but meanings well hidden in the texts. Widdowson (in Rossner, 1983) says "unless they can do that in English, they're not really learning English, and they're certainly not learning how to use it" (p.34). Students should be encouraged "to grapple with the multiple ambiguities of the literary texts" and "to develop their overall capacity to infer meaning" (Lazar, 1993, p.19).

**Filling the Post-Intermediate Void**

Much ESL/EFL (English as a second language/ English as a foreign language) research has concentrated on ESL/EFL students at the beginning and intermediate stages or in non-major contexts. There are fewer scholarly articles on teaching English majors at their advanced stage. In China, there are currently over 100,000 English majors at their advanced stage, that is, in their third and fourth years of undergraduate studies. This figure does not include over 1,000 postgraduates majoring in English language and literature. These students have studied English for more than eight
years: six years in secondary schools and two years at the university. They have been selected to study English because they have done extremely well in the stringent national matriculation examinations. By being chosen to study English, they are the pride of the generation. Most of these students will be English teachers, interpreters, tourist guides, translators, managerial personnel and other professionals. In their first two years of university education, they have acquired quite a high level of competency in English in the four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Li, 1990).

By the end of the second year, students begin to be relatively quiet instead of actively talking in English as they have done before. They think they are now able to express whatever they want and that they have learned enough for most of their needs. My own experience suggests that ordinary ways of teaching, such as grammatical analysis, sentence structural analysis, story telling, diary writing, translation, group activities and role plays, all appear to be dull or too routine to them. They feel that the curriculum items suggested by van Ek (1977) in The Threshold Level for modern language learning in schools and Munby (1978) in Communicative Syllabus Designs are not enough to cover their needs. They want something new, something more advanced, more interesting, more challenging and more theoretical, something from which they can learn what they need to improve their English. Freed (1990) points out that those "who have more or less mastered the language of daily activities profit less ... from oral/social interaction" (p.473). Students' learning comes to a standstill. To prevent such a stagnant stage in learning, literature plays an extremely important role in the success of their language learning. Ausubel (1968) identifies six human desires which can be adapted to language learning: the need for exploration, the need for activity, the need for stimulation, the need for knowledge, the need for ego enhancement and the need to manipulate. Literature can satisfy all these desires.

There is a crisis of fossilisation at the advanced stage of ESL/EFL education. On the one hand, students are no longer interested in the ways they are taught and they feel very confident about their own communicative abilities. If the teaching methods went on with the communicative approach at this stage without taking other approaches into account and, if the teachers were not flexible, teaching would be doomed to failure. On the other hand, teachers are often disappointed that many post-intermediate language majors cannot communicate effectively either in speech or in writing (Orton, 1990). They are still not very competent linguistically, literally, analytically (Nakuma, 1995) and socio-culturally. There is a kind of gap in what is expected of the students and what they think they are capable of. Nakuma (1995) calls this situation "the post-intermediate void." Teaching literature might provide a possible solution to this crisis. Teaching literature, however, is not an easy job. As I have mentioned above, students' limited linguistic and literary competence is a big obstacle. Although the students have learned some Chinese literature and have some knowledge of it, English literature can be a headache for them at first because there are many literary conventions that they have never learned before. Reading classical English literature such as Chaucer, Shakespeare, John Donne, Charles Dickens, Mark Twain, Emily Dickenson, Charlotte Bronte, Virginia Woolf, Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot can be a daunting task for them. At this stage, English literature is beyond the capacity of the students, but the Chinese educators strongly believe that students cannot have a total command of the language without learning the literature of the target language. Therefore, it is reasoned, literature has to be taught. Both teachers and students are challenged. If well controlled, this challenge can be very rewarding.

According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1981, 1985, 1991), adult second language learners have two means for internalising the target language: acquisition and learning. By acquisition, he means a subconscious and intuitive process of constructing the system of language. By learning, he means the learning process that focuses on form and rules. He says that communicative competence can be gained by "using conscious knowledge of language to increase formal accuracy when it does not interfere with communication" (1981, p.100). He claims that the acquirer should be provided an important condition to "understand (via hearing and reading) input language that contains structure 'a bit beyond' his or her current level of competence. ... If an acquirer is at the stage or level i , the language which learners are exposed to should contain i+ 1" (p.100). He suggests that students need
some challenge in order to progress but, if the challenge is too big \((i + 2)\) or too small or non-existent \((i + 0)\), the students do not progress. Literature, with its complexity in syntax, its connotative use of vocabulary, its involved styles and layers of implied meanings and its cultural dimensions, can offer students a challenge if materials are appropriately selected.

Thorns in English Literature Teaching in China

Although teaching English literature as a means of accessing to linguistic and literary competence has been blooming in China for more than a century and obvious success has been achieved, there are also thorns that should not be ignored. They include a lack of qualified teachers, students' linguistic incompetence, problems with the current literature examination system and drawbacks in textbooks. These problems, which have remained untouched and have remained so in the long history of English language teaching, can prevent greater success in literature teaching. Tackling these problems is not an easy task because they are too familiar for the Chinese educators to noticed.

Lack of Qualified Teachers

It is true everywhere that students' study of literature does not necessarily lead them to become competent in literature. Millions of English majors in China, old and young, have been trained intensely in English literature and a lot of time and effort has been devoted to it. Although some might have become linguistically highly competent, for the majority of them, their final achievement amounts to almost nothing, particularly in their literary competence. Linguistically, advanced students can understand more difficult vocabulary than the average native speaker, but very few of them "can produce flawless, appropriate writings" (Wang, 1986, p.102). Literarily incompetent teachers cannot produce literarily competent students unless the students are able to study independently with a sufficient amount of literary input.

Literature courses in most universities are taught by foreign teachers. Less than 30% of these foreign teachers have studied English literature as their major (BA, MA or PhD) while more than 70% of them have never formally touched literature as a subject. Their only qualifications are the fact that English is their mother tongue and they can read, write and speak it. Apart from their linguistic advantage, their literary knowledge is no better than the Chinese students themselves who have been exposed to literature more than their foreign teachers. When I observed one lesson by a foreign teacher-- a doctoral degree holder in botany, I felt very disappointed. This teacher did not know anything about literary conventions. *Kubla Khan* was explained as a funny fragmentary dream without any literary value. The multi-level meanings and symbols of the poem were non-existent. The whole poem lost its value, so did the lesson. The teacher, however, was not to blame because he was not employed to his best advantage. The problem occurs because Chinese universities find it difficult to recruit qualified English literature majors or English language majors, and most Chinese think that as long as one understands the written form of the language, one can understand and teach literature. This assumption excludes competent Chinese teachers from teaching English literature because their linguistic knowledge cannot be compared to that of any native speaker. Maley (1986) has sharply criticised the Chinese criterion for recruiting teachers. He says "If it walks, and talks English, and has an MA or PhD., it is OK" (p.106). Cowan, Ligh, Mathews and Tucker (1979) reported in 1979 that nearly all Chinese individuals with whom we talked expressed dissatisfaction with the present system of recruiting and screening experts. (p.477)

When foreign teachers are not available, Chinese teachers take the place of English literature teacher. This can be doubly difficult for them because of both linguistic difficulties and literary deficiencies. They teach in the way that their teachers taught them. They pay much attention to surface meanings...
and to what the authorities have recommended (Orton, 1990). They do not have their own analytical skills or judgments. When they teach Keats' Ode to Autumn, they consult the annotations by some Chinese authority. When the authority says this poem is a description of the beautiful autumn season, they tell students so without a second thought that this poem might have other layers of meanings. This recourse to authority has strongly, and in many cases, erroneously affected the analytical power of both Chinese teachers and students. What is worse, many Chinese teachers who have never had an MA or PhD degree in English or literature take in and teach MA and PhD students in English literature. When these students graduate, they teach other students at the end of their wits, and a terrible cycle goes on. The older Chinese teachers, some of them without any literary competence, in order to be promoted by having taught an advanced course, are more willing to teach English literature than younger ones who have recognised that linguistic competence does not mean literary competence. The glory of teaching literature seems to be too much of a burden for both older and younger teachers to bear. In many universities, I have observed that literature teachers are old teachers approaching retirement. It is impossible for the blind to lead the blind in teaching English literature.

**Students Linguistic Deficiency**

The second problem of teaching English literature in China is the students lack of linguistic ability to decode literary meaning in literature. In spite of their years of learning English and the many years of exposure to Chinese literature, their linguistic ability falls far short of the minimum requirements. I taught English literature for many years, and the difficulties I have met were Herculean. Culler (1975) writes,

> ... anyone wholly unacquainted with literature and unfamiliar with the conventions by which fictions are read, would ... be quite baffled if presented with a poem. His knowledge of the language would enable him to understand phrases and sentences, but he would not know, quite literally, what to make of this strange concatenation of phrases. He would be unable to read it as literature... because he lacks the complex "literary competence" which enables others to proceed. He has not internalized the "grammar" of literature which would permit him to convert linguistic sequences into literary structures and meanings. (p.114)

Many scholars have suggested careful selection of literary texts. But in China, state sanctioned textbooks are to be used which are arranged chronologically from the medieval English literature to the end of the First World War. Take for instance, in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth, Donne's religious poems, Milton's Paradise Lost, Pope's The Rape of the Lock, T. S. Eliot's poems, almost every line, sometimes every word, has to be explained by the teacher. One of the purposes of literature teaching is to develop the students' analytical abilities. The students, however, are linguistically handicapped and to develop their analytical abilities requires patience, time, effort and understanding. At this stage, the communicative approach which emphasises learner-centred ways of learning may prove impracticable. The teacher is the sole authority in the classroom. Moreover, except for their textbooks, students do not have any access to reference materials. Independent learning is almost impossible. Students' interest in learning literature is often changed from positive to negative: from "I want learn" to "I am forced to learn." Sometimes, films and video tapes of great works such as Macbeth, Oliver Twist and The Red Badge of Courage, are available, but my experience indicates that, except for recalling some picture images, students rarely understand them.

In my teaching, I tried some short stories by Hemingway, such as The Cat in the Rain and White Elephant, and poems by Philip Larkin, thinking that they might not present linguistic difficulties for my students. I asked them to read these literary pieces before they came to the class and gave them some questions to prepare for discussion in class. Sadly, they could only retell the story, without any ability to look into the clues and symbols in the stories and poems. To retell a story does not mean...
the acquisition of the analytical ability. But Chinese students at this stage are only capable of this surface level understanding. Literary competence generally is not greatly improved after two years of literature study. I have supervised many bachelor degree essays. Almost every student gave an account of the story or the poem, adding something like "I like it very much." When asked why, they hesitated. They do not have any of their own ideas in their essays. Or if they are lucky enough to locate some reference materials, they borrow others' ideas without giving any credit, or simply translate from some Chinese source into English. When they borrow ideas, they do not consider if they are appropriate to their essays. Orton (1990) has observed that one student copied the idea that Moby Dick represents the proletarian class from a Russian book translated into Chinese.

Perhaps this problem is common for both native or non-native speaking students embarking on literary learning. Richards (1976) has discussed the difficulties that native English speakers have when learning literature. These are some of the same difficulties experienced by Chinese students. He says that students, by and large, have difficulties "making the plain sense of poetry" (p.13), and suggests that students have particular difficulty with sensuous apprehension and in visual imagery. Students tend to be misled by their own irrelevant associations, emotions, sentimentality, stock responses, doctrinal adhesions, technical preoccupations and critical preconceptions. And, for Chinese students, socio-cultural and political factors can also affect their misinterpretation. They are bound by their own culture in their own political contexts and cannot easily jump out of this boundary. Chinese students tend to be indoctrinated to analyse everything from a Marxist point of view while not many students have really understood Marxist dialectical materialist ideology. Because of this, they tend to view things as black and white and there is nothing in between.

**The Drawbacks of the Textbooks**

Tertiary institutions have customarily used the state sanctioned textbooks. However, the selected texts are ones written exclusively before the First World War and are limited to the Chinese Marxist point of view (Mahoney, 1990). For literary study, students are required to read great masters in order to imitate them. Only since China's opening policy (Porter, 1987, 1990), with many people educated in the West, are some contemporary literary figures introduced in China. These texts are subject to careful political screening. Some texts are politically censored and banned because they do not fit China's present political climate or they are hostile to Chinese culture.

Teachers are required to use the state-sanctioned textbooks which are arranged chronologically. Students are required to start from the very beginning and work through to the end. However, the medieval literature is linguistically and socio-culturally difficult for students, for example, in their use of archaic words and expressions. Nobody uses Chaucerian dictions and styles nowadays but our students work hard to digest something that is totally beyond their power. Students are deprived of good opportunities to learn contemporary literature and contemporary language because the texts rarely cover literature after the First World War. Furthermore, their initial interest is degraded by this inappropriate selection of texts. Another drawback in the selection of texts is the proportion of literature taken from English-speaking countries other than Britain. It is assumed that the British literature has a longer history than any other English speaking countries and, therefore, it should occupy a larger proportion in the teaching. In many universities, the syllabi devote approximately 70% of teaching hours to British literature and 30% to American literature. As do their examination papers. Literature of other English-speaking countries, such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand, is often excluded.

The third drawback of literature textbooks in China is the over-emphasis on literary history rather than on literary works. Students study literary history to understand a string of names of authors, literary works and the social and political situation of each literary period. Many Chinese English majors can well remember who has written what but they have rarely read the original. They may eloquently tell the story of *Hamlet* and *Oliver Twist* but they may have never read them. They read the introductions about them in Chinese. It can be argued that this kind of teaching does not foster...
students' literary competence nor their linguistic capability. Sisney and Du (1993) complain that knowing that Chaucer wrote the *Canterbury Tales* is unlikely to improve students' language proficiency. Although they have been led on a historical tour in literature, a "flight from the text" (Carter & Long, 1991, p.8), their socio-cultural competence and their analytical abilities (Nakuma, 1995) cannot be well developed.

**Discussion**

English literature has played an important role in the teaching of English in China. The multiple functions of literature have been recognized in language learning, in acculturation and in ideological and political dissemination. Although literary competence is also a desired outcome, Chinese teaching focusses on the linguistic aspect of English literature. The state-administered English Teaching Curriculum for Undergraduate Senior English Language Majors (ETCUSELM) (English Curriculum Designing Committee, 1990) states that the aims of English teaching at this stage are to further develop the students integrated skills in listening, speaking, reading, writing and translating, and to develop their socio-cultural and communicative competence [author's translation]. (p.1)

To accomplish these goals, we have to consider whether English literature should be and can be taught in China. If literature is to be taught, then we have to think of how to improve the quality of literature teaching, teaching approaches and materials selection.

**Effectiveness of Teaching English Literature in China.**

Elliot (1990) says that "literature provides advanced language learners with highly motivational material of an incomparably rich nature" (p.191). Widdowson (in Rossner, 1983) also agrees that "literature of its nature can provide a resource for developing in learners an important ability to use a knowledge of language for the interpretation of discourse" (p.34). He strongly disagrees with the removal of literature from curricula simply because it is old-fashioned. He says "being old-fashioned is not in itself a good reason for getting rid of anything. I think literature was got rid of on very facile grounds, ill-considered grounds" (p.34). We should not, he points out, exclude literature from the curriculum by emphasizing the importance of linguistics, and he continues:

> Literature was ruled out of court very largely because linguists, generally speaking, are not literary scholars. Its amazing how much philistine there is among linguists and applied linguists. It is rather surprising how few people concerned with language these days have any interest in the knowledge about literature (Widdowson in Rossner, 1983, p.34).

Most Chinese students have a great interest in literature, an interest they have developed from their early years of Chinese language learning. Learning English literature is in line with this interest. Although many Chinese teachers have fears about literature teaching and learning, others are good at teaching literature. However, the main purpose of teaching English literature is not to produce literary scholars, but to enhance the students language learning (Du, 1990). If Chinese students at an advanced level can learn their language through Chinese literature, why cannot Chinese students learn English by using English literature? If Chinese literature teachers can be produced, English literature teachers can also be produced. We should not give literature up only because teachers, or rather qualified teachers, are not available. The key lies in the quality of literature teachers, teaching approaches, the state language policies and the selection of materials.

**The Concept of the New Teaching Curriculum.**

The ETCUSELM (English Curriculum Designing Committee, 1990) uses literature to evaluate and
measure students linguistic knowledge and competence, even though literature is not a compulsory subject in the curriculum. It stipulates that, in their fourth year, students should be able to read editorials, feature articles, and book reviews at a level to those in *The Times Weekly* and *New York Times*, and history, (auto)biographies, and literary works of moderate difficulty, such as, *Vanity Fair, The Man of the Property, Corridors of Power, The Great Gatsby, The Catcher in the Rye, The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich, Dangers of Non-Conformism*, and *The Third Wave*.

The ETCUSELM says the purpose of teaching literature is to enable the students to understand and analyse the ideas, linguistic structures and literary styles, figures of speech and rhetoric, to consciously absorb linguistic knowledge, to develop their cultural capacity, to develop their expressive capabilities and to accelerate their reading speed (120-160 words per minute with 75-80% correct comprehension). Students are required to read 4,000 printed pages per annum, and they must remember 9,000 - 12,000 words and be able to use 4,000 active words in speech and writing. The curriculum has set literature as the standard of evaluation and measurement. This implies that literature should be taught to fulfill the goals set in the curriculum. Rather than just reading about literature, students should read literary works to improve their language skills, enrich their cultural knowledge and foster their analytical power.

Chinese students have their own styles of learning (*Sampson, 1984; Brick, 1991*). Attention should be paid to their needs and their learning styles. Appropriate approaches should be adopted and appropriate materials selected. Du (*1990*) noted that

> Chinese students are by no means as noisy in class as their Western counterparts. They are industrious, good at rote learning and capable of working on their own, but are often reluctant to raise and answer questions. (p.207)

However, Du suggests that students' learning habits should be challenged so as to maximize the benefits of learning English literature. He also recommends that "literature courses are conducted in such a way that they are neither language courses for practical skills nor literature courses with a view to specialisation in literature" (p. 206). He favours a method aiming at somewhere in between these two approaches.

**New Teaching Approaches.**

As mentioned previously, literature teaching in China, by and large, follows a traditional approach that was popular in Britain and the United Sates before the 1970s (*Wang, 1981; Harvey, 1985*). This approach introduces historical and biographical backgrounds, linguistic analysis and literary analysis. The literary analysis attends to such elements as theme, points of view, characterisation, plot, structures, styles and diction, which many Chinese literature teachers cannot handle. Older Chinese teachers tend to prefer translations of some sections and often refer to the translations by others. Although literature teaching in the West has changed a great deal, the changes have not much influenced teaching practice in China. However, some scholars are exploring ways to improve literature teaching in China. Whether China can follow the tide of changes abroad and whether these changes can help improve English teaching in China is doubtful.

Qian (*1993*) says that a stylistical approach to literary texts is particularly suitable to Chinese students because they are accustomed to slow and close analytical reading. Qian argues that such an approach can totally mobilise what they have learned, provide them with a means to interpret the message, hidden or half hidden, and develop their awareness of the language system. Most Chinese teachers and students are familiar with this approach to language analysis, and this familiarity and past experience can be of great help to them.

However, Qian (*1993*) also suggests that we should be aware of the limitations of this approach because many variables, such as intertextual, authorial, socio-historical and personal factors, cannot...
be stylistically analysed. Gower (1986) holds a negative view of the stylistical approach to teaching literature. Gower argues that "analysis can help only if it is totally subservient to reading -- in which it is no longer really analysis at all, but a gesture towards greater understanding, towards better reading" (p.130). To Gower, a stylistic approach cannot help develop students' reading potential because it "runs counter to reading" (p. 130). When writing about Hong Kong, Duran (1993) suggests "interactive approaches" to literature teaching. These approaches include listening and speaking activities by using literary texts as the content for prediction, classification, cloze, comparison and contrast, general problem-solution, discussion, stylistic analysis, role play and creative writing. Duran says that the new roles of literature have to be defined and literature should be taught from a cross-cultural and social perspective because "in the late twentieth century in most societies, we live in a period of cultural hybridization and new and changing mixes between cultural inheritances and traditions" (p.168). He agrees that literature teachers should not cling to only one approach; different approaches may suit different purposes and different students. Benton and Brumfit (1993) claim that the mainstream in literature teaching in the 1990s is the "reader response" approach in which, "with the readers creative participation as the central tenet, perception is viewed as interpretative; reading is not the discovering of meaning (like some sort of archaeological dig) but the creation of it" (p.2). This revolutionary approach was proposed by a group of scholars in the late 1970s and 1980s (such as Iser, 1978; Suleiman & Crosman, 1980; Protherough, 1983; Benton & Fox, 1985; Freund, 1987; Dias & Hayhoe, 1988). Benton and Brumfit (1993) say that the "reader-response approach" is derived from "old-fashioned liberal humanism" (p. 3). This approach emphasises "both the integrity of the text and of the reader, acknowledging the uneasiness of each reading event." It recognises the importance of moral values to individuals' reading of the text, with "shifts away from critical authority and received knowledge towards the development of personal responses." It accommodates many other contemporary literary theories, and prefers learning process to product by sharing one's own thinking with others, "with meanings not fixed, with the infinitely renewable quality of literary experiences" (pp. 3-4).

Many teachers are experimenting with the above-mentioned approaches. Each approach has its limitations when applied to English literature teaching in Chinese cultural and socio-economic contexts. Elliot (1990) asserts that

The old method of teaching English Literature as a body of received knowledge to be learnt largely though lecture mode is frequently criticized as being too product-centred, tending to impose the meaning of texts on the student. The approach to literature through stylistics now also comes in for similar criticism in that it tends to focus narrowly of the words on the passage as a self-enclosed system, moving through complex linguistic analysis to the discovery of a fixed meaning. (p.192)

Teaching literature in China, while continuing with the most useful, and the most acceptable and applicable traditional approaches, can also use other methods such as the stylistic approach, the interactive approach and the reader-response critical approach. Duran (1993) also recommends an eclectic attitude towards adopting new methods. According to the requirements of the Chinese state-administered curriculum for English majors, the promotion of the students linguistic and socio-cultural competence is a priority, though with equal attention to discourse analysis and learning strategies. Garrott's (1992, 1995) intensive studies of Chinese values and their application in English language learning in China indicate that the diversity of Chinese students' learning preferences challenges any one single approach to teaching and she concluded that in order to meet the diverse needs of the Chinese students, diverse teaching approaches have to be taken into account by all English teachers.

**Conclusion**

English literature teaching in China has an important role to play. It can help students acquire the language, facilitate their socio-cultural competence and their interpretative capabilities and it can be
used to fill the post-intermediate void. But, as discussed in this paper, there are problems with the teaching of English literature in China. This paper argues that, to solve these problems, more attention should be paid to educating qualified teachers, to adopting teaching approaches suitable to the Chinese students, to designing English literature teaching curriculum and syllabus and to carefully selecting texts for the students. Literature teaching in China should focus on the fostering of students' linguistic, literary and socio-cultural competence and their critical and interpretative abilities, rather than imparting knowledge about literature. To achieve this goal, the adoption of new teaching methods should be considered. While continuing with traditional approaches, we can also incorporate other approaches now popular in the West, such as the reader-response approach, the stylistic approach and the interactive approach, to meet the diverse learning preferences of the Chinese students.

References


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