Expectations and Questions In Intercultural Classrooms

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Introduction

This paper will examine the expectations of Chinese students about teaching and learning, compared with those of British students and teachers, as well as make some comparisons with Japanese students. The focus is on expectations of learning and on concepts about what should happen in the classroom, especially regarding expectations of 'good' teachers, of 'good' students, and about asking questions in the classroom. Such expectations are key elements in *cultures of learning*. We suggest that the teaching of both foreign languages and intercultural communication in classrooms (especially where participants themselves come from different cultural backgrounds) can be hindered unless participants are aware of differing underlying conceptualizations of learning and are prepared to question their own assumptions.

Foreign language classrooms are important sites for researching intercultural communication for it is here that many students first learn about other cultures. It is here that many of the ground rules for intercultural communication are established. In such classrooms students encounter elements of a target culture (C2) directly in the topics selected for study and indirectly through ways in which this other culture is encoded and symbolised in the target language (L2). If the teacher is a native speaker of L2 then the medium of classroom communication is also intercultural, since the teacher will most likely use the learners' L2 as the classroom medium and, less consciously perhaps, to draw on his or her own culture of learning (the learners' C2) when teaching. Thus when the teacher and students come from different language and cultural backgrounds the situation is, by definition an intercultural one, both as *content* and *medium*. This is, of course,

also the case when students come from varying cultural backgrounds, as often happens in classes for English as a Second Language. Participants will, naturally enough, bring all their cultural expectations about teaching and learning to the classroom and this is likely to be an important factor in classroom interaction. The intercultural classroom is the classic situation where different cultures of learning meet.

Theoretical Context

It seems well-established now that the study of target cultures is an integral part of foreign or second language teaching (Valdes 1986; Byram 1989; Harrison 1990; Kramsch 1993). This is normally culture as *content*, in which textbooks or teachers inform learners' perceptions and attitudes towards the target culture (Byram & Esarte-Sarries 1991); or culture as *background*, so that teachers may be in a better position to meet learners' needs through understanding the culture which the latter bring to the classroom (McKay & Wong 1988; Battle 1993); or as *intercultural awareness*, in which learners gain awareness and specific skills relating to communication between cultural groups (Damon 1987; Robinson 1988; Clyne 1994; Bremer et al. 1996). Studies of culture in *classroom discourse*, both in multicultural and foreign or second language classrooms, have also clarified the key role that cultural uses of language can play in teacher-student interaction and, consequently, in student learning (Cazden 1988; Johnson 1995). Recently, too, the burgeoning literature on language learning strategies (e.g. Oxford 1990; O'Malley & Chamot 1990) has begun to stress the influence of cross-cultural views of *learning styles* in foreign and second language classrooms (Reid 1995; McDonough 1995; Oxford & Anderson 1995).

Such developments are crucial to understanding intercultural classrooms, but they need to take account of learners' and teachers' own perspectives on learning, not only the interpretations of researchers. Such perspectives influence expectations about what *should* happen (whether it happens or not), which, in turn, is the framework for participants' interpretations and evaluations of what *does* happen and of each other (Cortazzi 1990).

Cultures of Learning

A good example of differing interpretations of learning is the contrast between Chinese and British cultures of learning. A '*culture of learning'* might be defined as socially transmitted expectations, beliefs and values about what good learning is, what constitutes a good teacher and a good student and what their

roles and relationships should be; about learning and teaching styles, approaches and methods; about classroom interaction and activities; about the use of textbooks; about what constitutes good work (Jin & Cortazzi 1993, 1995; Cortazzi & Jin 1996a, 1996b).

Between 1992 and 1995 we made video recordings of kindergartens, primary schools and middle schools in 5 cities in China. We also interviewed teachers and students to ask them about learning and about the classroom methods we had seen and recorded.

The Chinese teachers stressed that knowledge is central to learning; through knowing, skills for learning will be developed. Memory is crucial, for learning in general and for developing Chinese literacy skills in particular. The teachers emphasized the role of models, that students should pay close attention to demonstrations and should imitate, recite and learn models by heart. When the foundation of this knowledge is established through understanding and memorization, critical thinking and creativity will come later. The teacher, as a model, should be a worthy example of morality and of mastery, i.e. is one who has mastered the subject taught. Practice is also stressed - given large classes, this is often done as homework or repetition in class. Students are encouraged to prepare work at home and recite, or otherwise display what they know, in class. This develops confidence. Confidence is also seen in a collective approach to classroom life: there is much group support for those who find learning difficult; social and moral learning are closely linked to academic learning. In class, much of the teaching is seen as performance, a carefully prepared event with close attention paid to pace, variety, presentation and virtuosity. Students also perform individually in front of the class, after preparation, usually with skill and confidence.

The video recordings were shown to groups of British teachers who then gave their reactions and interpretations. Their responses showed a marked contrast to the Chinese teachers' comments, though both groups were discussing the same events.

The British teachers stressed skills. Skills, they said, should be developed first; this would lead to knowledge later. When they saw the Chinese students reciting from memory this was largely dismissed as 'rote-learning' and 'uncreative'. Similarly, they thought there were too many models: such imitation did not allow learners to develop their own ideas and independence. Many objected to what they labelled a 'transmission' model; they preferred a more 'constructivist' or 'interpretative' approach in which there was more interaction,

discussion and more emphasis on learners building up their own understanding through activity and personal experience. For this reason, they emphasized group activities or tasks. While they stressed groupwork, fundamentally they believed teachers should meet individual students' needs, and that learning was a matter of developing each unique individual's talents. Rather than performance, the British teachers stressed that teaching was largely a matter of organization, of setting up a positive learning environment and providing appropriate resources for activities and tasks for pairwork or group learning.

Our purpose is not, of course, to judge which of these sets of cultural expectations is 'better': no doubt there are both positive and negative features to each, and each culture of learning presumably has an appropriate role in its original context. Rather, the point is to examine possible consequences of different cultures of learning in intercultural classrooms. Thus when 'Western teachers', as Chinese students label them (e.g. teachers from North America or Britain), teach English in China there are asymmetrical perceptions about what happens and differing evaluations. This emerged when 135 Chinese university students wrote essays on the topic of 'Western teachers in Chinese classrooms' (see Cortazzi & Jin 1996b).

An analysis of these essays showed that the Chinese students believed that they benefited from the opportunity to learn 'different thinking' from Western teachers. However, the students were puzzled when these teachers apparently did not understand students' writing (which had few grammatical mistakes): essays that students believed were good received low grades, while others considered poor by students were graded highly. Students thought that Chinese teachers of English were more effective for teaching grammar and vocabulary since they had good knowledge, used a systematic approach and always corrected errors. In contrast, Western teachers were seen as simplifying vocabulary and underestimating students' knowledge. However, the Western teachers were more friendly and encouraging and helped students to practise oral English.

Research Methods

Several steps were taken to investigate more fully these cultural concepts of learning. First, 135 Chinese students at Nankai (Tianjin) and Renmin (Beijing) universities were asked to write essays in English on '*What makes a good teacher*?', '*What makes a good student*?' and '*Why students do not ask questions'*. These essays were analysed for the frequency of mention of common ideas. The analysis was supported by comments from interviews with a further 30 Chinese

postgraduate students and teachers. Secondly, 60 experienced Chinese teachers of English and 88 experienced British teachers wrote answers to the open question '*Why do teachers ask questions*?' Thirdly, the analysis of Chinese students' essays formed the basis for a questionnaire about good teachers and students and why students do not ask questions. This questionnaire consisted mainly of the most common items from the original Chinese students' essays, interview comments from Chinese students and teachers, supplemented by a couple of points made by British students and teachers. The questionnaire is thus basically Chinese in origin. This questionnaire was given to a further 104 Chinese students and 21 teachers at Nankai, Renmin and Hubei (Wuhan) universities; to 160 British students at Leicester and De Montfort universities and to 45 British teachers; and to 93 Japanese students at Toyama University. Respondents rated items on a Likert scale, and completed open statements such as '*To me, a good teacher is* .....'. The latter kind of item was used to explore metaphors.

The Likert scale asked respondents to rate their agreement with the statements on a five point scale (Hatch & Lazaraton 1991 p.57; Scholfield 1995 p.144), e.g. 'How far do you agree with the following statement? *A good teacher explains clearly* : strongly disagree/ disagree/ I am not sure/ agree/ strongly agree'. The five point scale allows the researcher to calculate respondents' strength of agreement with the original essay statements to be computed by calculating mean scores (strong agreement is 5; agreement is 4 , and so on ; 1 is strong disagreement). Hence, the higher the mean for a statement, the stronger the collective agreement of a group with that statement. Significant differences between the Chinese, Japanese and British means were then calculated using a Mann-Whitney test and these differences are reported below using the following levels: $p< 0.05$ as significant, $p< 0.01$ as highly significant, and $p< 0.001$ as very highly significant.

The questionnaires were in English. This is potentially a difficulty for the Chinese and Japanese groups. However, the subjects were all university students or teachers of English who had had at least six years study of English. Translations were available if required.

The results are summarized below, first looking at expectations of good teachers, then at expectations of good students, and then at the use of questions. Finally, conclusions are drawn about cultures of learning and intercultural classrooms.

A Good Teacher

The analysis of the Chinese students' essays revealed that having *deep knowledge*, or a synonymous phrase, was mentioned by 67% of the students and this might be considered a dominant expectation. Other characteristics and aspects of classroom behaviour were mentioned with frequencies shown in Fig. 1.

Fig. 1. Chinese Students' Expectations of a Good Teacher

A GOOD TEACHER	% OF RESPONDENTS
has deep knowledge	67.0%
is patient	25.0%
is humorous	23.7%
is a good moral example	21.5%
shows friendliness	21.5%
teaches students about life	17.5%
arouses students' interest	17.0%
is warm-hearted and understanding	16.2%
uses effective teaching methods	16.2%
is caring and helpful	14.8%
explains clearly	6.7%

The open items in the questionnaires yielded metaphors for a teacher from the Chinese which were dominated by *friendship* and *parenthood*. A good teacher was *'a good friend', a 'kind friend', 'a respected friend', or 'a strict father and a kind mother', 'both a father and a friend'* (58 respondents gave similar phrases). Other common metaphors were a *guide*, a *model*, and phrases stressing *patience*, *humour*, *responsibility*, and especially *knowledge*.

The Japanese students gave fewer metaphor responses overall, but 14 mentioned a *friend*, 10 mentioned a *source of knowledge* and a further 10 an *arouser of interest*. Other common characteristics included *humour*, *clarity of explanations*, *kindness*, but only two mentioned a *parent*.

The British gave an extraordinary range of metaphors and numerous descriptive phrases, dominated by *enthusiasm*, *interest*, *organization*, *discipline*,

and *nurturing*. Examples are that a teacher is '*a source of enthusiasm', 'the sunshine giving light'*, one who '*fuels students' interests', 'sparks interests'*, is *'an efficient manager', 'a good organizer', 'a carer', 'a juggler', 'a sergeant major'*, even '*a coconut - tough on the outside, nice on the inside, nutritious and tasty'*. 14 mentioned a *parent*, 6 mentioned a *friend*. While 17 stressed that a teacher is *a source of knowledge*, 6 others specifically stated that teachers were *not* expected to know all the answers and that teachers were learners themselves.

While the teacher as *parent* metaphor appears in all three groups, it is likely to have different cultural values in each group. An obvious contrast is between Chinese and British ideas about parents. For many Chinese, there are strong resonances of filial piety in the application of the metaphor, with ethical dimensions of striving for moral excellence and the humanity of the Confucian quality of *ren*, and its understanding and warm-heartedness (Tu 1990 p.117-8). For the British, the metaphor may signal a caring attitude but it is unlikely to carry with it the echoes of two millenia of such core Confucian attitudes.

As can be seen in Fig. 2 on the next page, or from examples in the bar chart in Fig. 3, Chinese and Japanese subjects both valued *deep knowledge* in teachers as very highly significant more than the British. The Japanese placed as very highly significant more emphasis on teachers being able to *answer students' questions* than the Chinese. The latter similarly emphasized this more than the British. Together with this stress on knowledge, both the Chinese and especially the Japanese valued *warm-heartedness and understanding* in teachers as highly significant more than the British. These responses from the Chinese and Japanese accord well with Confucian values. In contrast to the emphasis on knowledge, the British gave as very highly significant more emphasis to various personal qualities and skills with which teachers relate to learners. Thus the British valued teachers being *patient, sympathetic, caring and helpful*, and the ability to *arouse students' interests* far more than either the Chinese and the Japanese.

The Chinese put as very highly significant more emphasis on the teacher as a *moral example* and as one who *teaches students about life* compared to the British and, interestingly, also compared to the Japanese.

Surprisingly, the British (4.196) emphasized the teacher as one who *controls students' discipline* as very highly significant more than the Chinese and the Japanese. Perhaps discipline is more obviously a problem in the British social context. The Japanese very low mean score (2.902) remains intriguing. This much lower score than that of the Chinese (3.258) is highly significant. Some Japanese students commented that after the 'examination hell' and the enormous pressure

and competition to enter university in Japan students felt that they could relax more at university.

Fig. 2. A Good Teacher In Students' Minds

A GOOD TEACHER	**means CHINA**	**means BRITAIN**	**means JAPAN**
has deep knowledge	***4.535***	***3.548***	***4.484***
is patient	***4.307***	***4.571***	***3.696***
is humorous	***4.180***	***4.141***	***4.296***
is lively	***4.141***	***4.234***	***4.272***
is a good moral example	***4.141***	***3.803***	***3.806***
is friendly	***4.372***	***4.177***	***4.333***
teaches students about life	***4.109***	***3.803***	***3.457***
arouses students' interest	***4.398***	***4.766***	***4.391***
is caring and helpful	***4.141***	***4.392***	***3.978***
controls students' discipline	***3.258***	***4.196***	***2.902***
explains clearly	***4.271***	***4.730***	***4.516***
is a responsible person	***4.398***	***4.304***	***4.129***
is sympathetic to students	***3.729***	***4.279***	***3.565***
has an answer to students' questions	***3.984***	***3.327***	***4.333***
organizes a variety of classroom activities	***3.884***	***4.200***	***3.946***
uses effective teaching methods	***4.457***	***4.654***	***4.204***
helps students to study independently	***4.341***	***4.407***	***3.925***
is warm-hearted and understanding	***4.341***	***4.088***	***4.441***

Fig. 3. Examples of contrasting expectations of a good teacher by means.

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The British also emphasized *organizing a variety of activities* as very highly significant more than the Chinese and as highly significant more than the Japanese. This might be explained by an East Asian emphasis on knowledge which may leave a less perceived need for organizational skills. This is supported by the British highly significant emphasis on *effective teaching methods* compared to the Chinese and a very highly significant lower mean for the Japanese. The British also valued *clear explanations* as very highly significant more than the Japanese. This would accord with Hinds' proposal (1990) that Japanese and Chinese cultures emphasize 'listener/reader responsibility', while English speakers emphasize 'speaker/writer responsibility'. It is also interesting that the British, on some key items, actually give significantly more emphasis than the Chinese respondents, since the questionnaire is, in a sense, Chinese in origin. Generally, the Chinese and Japanese students' cultures of learning seem more knowledge-centred, while the British culture of learning centres more on skills, methods and organization.

A Good Student

The analysis of the Chinese students' essays revealed that 43% of them mentioned being *hard working* as an outstanding characteristic of being a good student. Other frequently mentioned aspects are given in Fig. 4. In their questionnaire responses (see Fig. 5 and the examples if Fig. 6) the Chinese,

Japanese and British all gave high means to students being *hard working*, although the Chinese mean was significantly higher than that of the Japanese.

In conformity with Confucian values, the Chinese gave as very highly significant more emphasis to showing *respect* to the teacher, compared to the British but the reverse was true of *obedience*. However, the British, surprisingly, gave correspondingly more emphasis to both of these aspects than the Japanese, and they gave very highly significant emphasis to *paying attention to the teacher* compared to both the Chinese and the Japanese, from which it appears that care needs to be exercised before firm conclusions about Confucian values are drawn. On the other hand, and also very highly significant, both the Chinese and British put more emphasis on *developing independent thinking* than the Japanese, although the Chinese had correspondingly more significant emphasis on this than the British. Similarly, both the Chinese and the British emphasized as very highly significant both *developing critical thinking* and *studying independently* compared to the Japanese. Again, both of the former put a similar degree of emphasis on *applying knowledge learned in class* compared to the Japanese.

Many Western teachers in China and Japan have been heard to comment that East Asian students are 'passive' and that as teachers they find it difficult to stimulate 'active participation'. This is at variance with the Chinese, Japanese and British perceptions elicited here (see Fig. 5). The results show that both the Chinese and Japanese give as very highly significant more emphasis to *answering teachers' questions* and to *asking questions after class*, as well as significantly more emphasis on *asking questions in class* and *volunteering comments in class* than the British (The difference between the Japanese and the British in the latter two items is very highly significant). This would suggest that Western teachers in intercultural classrooms might improve classroom interaction (or their perception of it) by more effective use of questions.

Fig. 4. Chinese Students' Expectations of a Good Student

A GOOD STUDENT	% OF RESPONDENTS
is hard working	43.0%
is sociable, learns from/with others	18.5%
pays attention to the teacher	15.5%
respects and obeys the teacher	15.5%

is active in class	14.8%
co-operates with the teacher	11.8%
studies independently	11.1%
applies knowledge	7.4%
is well-motivated to study	6.6%
develops a good character	6.6%
asks questions	6.6%

Fig. 5. A Good Student In Your Opinion

A GOOD STUDENT	**means CHINA**	**means BRITAIN**	**means JAPAN**
is hard working	***4.094***	***4.035***	***3.878***
is sociable	***3.850***	***3.765***	***3.857***
learns from/with others	***4.126***	***4.287***	***3.934***
pays attention to the teacher	***3.750***	***4.179***	***3.736***
respects the teacher	***4.220***	***3.910***	***3.330***
obeys the teacher	***2.836***	***3.388***	***2.780***
volunteers comments in class	***3.738***	***3.498***	***3.890***
co-operates with the teacher	***4.008***	***4.000***	***3.596***
studies independently	***4.359***	***4.149***	***3.725***
is well-motivated to study	***4.291***	***4.294***	***4.167***
develops a good character	***4.307***	***3.660***	***4.132***
answers teacher's questions	***3.797***	***3.211***	***3.857***
asks questions in class	***3.622***	***3.383***	***4.000***
asks questions after class	***3.703***	***3.149***	***3.582***
helps fellow students	***3.976***	***3.871***	***4.033***
develops critical thinking	***4.244***	***4.279***	***3.484***
applies knowledge learned in class	***4.323***	***4.365***	***3.989***
prepares for the class in advance	***4.102***	***3.355***	***3.934***
develops independent thinking	***4.630***	***4.450***	***3.978***

Fig. 6. Examples of contrasting expectations of

a good student by means.

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The high rating of *asking questions after class* accords with the oft-heard comment by Western teachers that they wish East Asian students would put their questions during the class, rather than waiting until after the class before they ask, so that all students might hear or discuss the answers. As discussed below, there are almost certainly further cultural aspects of learning which prevent this. Other Western teachers' comments regarding difficulty with developing pairwork in Japan is supported here by the very highly significant emphasis of the British on students *learning from/ with other students* compared with the Japanese, although there is no significant difference with the Chinese. However, the Chinese show a significantly higher response on this item than the Japanese. The British may find pair or groupwork easier when it is spontaneous, compared with East Asians. However, Japanese students can learn from each other effectively within group activities, providing there is a *sempai-kohai* relation between students in a group (i.e. a senior-junior hierarchical relation), so that older students are responsible to teach more junior ones. This is effective practice in extra-curricular activities, including English clubs (Erich Berendt, personal communication). This is also

true in China, if the superior relation in the hierarchy is based on experience and knowledge, rather than, say, having higher grades. Generally, Western teachers might develop more interactive practices (in their terms) by allowing Chinese and Japanese students time to prepare, since both the latter give very highly significantly more emphasis on *preparing for the class in advance* than the British.

Why Students do not Ask Questions

Asking questions is part of some Chinese students' conceptualization of learning and of what it means to be a good student (see Fig. 4). It can be argued that this is a strong part of the Confucian tradition but one which may overridden by other Confucian maxims which stress respect for the teacher and being obedient [1]. Thus, while British students may ask *as a way of learning* (and this heuristic questioning is expected by British teachers), Chinese students may ask *after learning* (and this reflective questioning is expected by Chinese teachers). For the Chinese students one has to learn something and know something about a topic before one can ask, otherwise a question will look foolish. What Westerners are prone to call 'rote learning' may be seen by Chinese as part of a longer educational progression in which memory comes first, to be followed later by understanding and questioning [2], either questioning to oneself or to teachers and fellow learners. In Chinese terms, a learner needs to know *before* asking. In British terms, students come to know *by* asking.

As seen in Fig. 7, the Chinese students give *shyness* as the major reason for not asking questions in class. If the question is thought to be foolish, others may laugh or they are afraid of making language mistakes when speaking out. Comments in interviews revealed a cultural reasoning

Fig. 7. Why Chinese Students do not Ask Questions in Class

REASONS FOR NO QUESTIONS	% OF RESPONDENTS
students are too shy	40.7%
other students may laugh	23.7%
prevented by Chinese tradition/habits	19.3%
they do not want to interrupt	17.0%
they ask after the lesson	17.0%
they are afraid of making mistakes	14.1%

they do not know enough to ask	12.6%
they are too lazy/bored	9.6%
nobody else asks	8.9%
the teacher does not encourage it	8.2%
students can solve the problem themselves later	8.2%
they have no questions	7.4%

behind the lack of questions which is unlikely to be found among British students. Chinese students say they do not want to lose face by asking questions because this may disturb the class and it shows a lack of respect for the teacher. They do not want to cause problems for the teacher, who may not be able to answer and would therefore lose face by not knowing. This is understandable, given the knowledge-centred aspect of being a good teacher for the Chinese groups. Not to know, when one is supposed to know as a teacher, is shameful. However, for British teachers, with whom these results have been shared, this is difficult to accept. British teachers cannot see that it is a problem for a teacher to say, *'I don't know'*. This is also understandable, in view of the skills-centred and method focus of being a good teacher for the British. In fact, many British teachers say, *'I don't know'* but immediately add *'but I'll find out'* or *'let's find out together'*, thus turning ignorance (*'nobody knows everything'*) into the teaching of skills (*'I'll show you how to use the reference book and how to find the answer'*). The Chinese student who causes the teacher to lose face by revealing lack of knowledge also loses face by showing a lack of respect and by publicly shaming the teacher. Students should prepare mentally before asking in order to avoid foolish or superficial questions. It takes more thinking time to prepare good questions and so the asking may be postponed till later. Further, many Chinese students believe that a good teacher should predict students' questions, so they do not ask before the teacher has finished explaining. If the teacher does not, in fact, answer the as-yet-unasked question then the question cannot be important, since a good teacher would have predicted good questions (a poor teacher would not be able to answer and so it is not worth asking a teacher who is evaluated as poor). The result may well be that the students wait until after the class before they ask, or they try to find the answer for themselves through self-study.

Two common results of all this in intercultural classrooms are: first, Chinese students wait until the class is finished before they ask questions, which

puzzles British teachers; second, that Chinese students are puzzled by what they call 'simple' questions asked by British students and they are very surprised at how British students 'interrupt' and 'challenge' the teacher with questions, showing a lack of respect.

Further consequences for intercultural contexts are exemplified in two incidents observed in Britain. In the first, a Chinese candidate was in a group interview for a teaching position for which he was well qualified. He was sitting with other Chinese candidates. The whole group was asked, by the British interviewers, *'Do you have any questions?'* to which he replied *'I'm ready to answer any questions but the most fearful thing is to ask questions*'. While the reply may be true for the speaker, the British interviewers probably expected questions and would think that candidates' questions are an important indicator of their thinking and interest in the job. The second situation reveals British teachers' perceptions that students' questions not only have a heuristic function for the learner but also a diagnostic function for the teacher. The teacher was reporting a Chinese student's progress to her parents at a parents' evening in a secondary school. He said, '*She is quiet, she listens, she does all the homework well, her marks are good, but I don't really know her level. Because she doesn't ask any questions, I'm not really sure what she is thinking or what her level of understanding is.*'

Teachers' reasons for asking questions varies across cultures. In this research, a major reason given was *to check understanding and review learning* (84.1% of the British teachers and 95% of the Chinese teachers said this). However, while 50% of the British teachers used questions *to develop thinking, creativity and imagination*, only 16.7% of the Chinese teachers mentioned this. Again, 12.5% of the British teachers explicitly asked questions *to encourage active participation*, but only 1.7% of the Chinese teachers did so. Such differences have serious implications for teaching across cultures or in multicultural classes.

The foregoing discussion is based on interview comments and observations which seem valid. The results of the questionnaire (see Fig. 8) certainly confirmed that there were major differences in the perceptions of the Chinese, British and Japanese concerning why students do not ask questions. However, these differences were not at all in the expected direction: in all cases (except one) where there were significant differences, the mean scores of the British, or of the Japanese, or of both of these groups, exceeded the means of the Chinese (although the original items were mostly derived from frequent mentions in Chinese

students' essays). Not only is the direction of these differences a surprise, the large number of very highly significant differences indicates cultural distances concerning the roles of questions in classrooms. The extent of this distance can also be gauged from a Discriminant Analysis of the Chinese and British responses: 88.8% of the Chinese predicted group membership was Chinese; 95.7% of the British predicted group membership was British, and 92.8% of 'grouped' cases were correctly classified, i.e. this percentage reflects a very high difference between the two groups' responses. As seen in Fig. 6, both the British and Japanese means for students not asking questions are greater to a very highly significant degree than the Chinese means concerning

Fig. 8 Reasons why Students do not Ask Questions

REASONS WHY STUDENTS DON'T ASK QUESTIONS	**means CHINA**	**means BRITAIN**	**means JAPAN**
they are too shy	***3.124***	***4.250***	***4.253***
they are afraid others may laugh	***3.194***	***4.188***	***3.582***
prevented by culture / tradition	***3.031***	***3.289***	***3.333***
they do not want to interrupt	***2.969***	***3.158***	***2.977***
they ask <u>after</u> the lesson	***3.411***	***3.286***	***3.176***
they're afraid of making mistakes	***3.333***	***4.134***	***4.297***
very highly significant degree than the Chinese means concerning *shyness*, being *afraid of making* they do not know enough to ask	***3.395***	***3.272***	***3.758***
they are too lazy / bored	***2.449***	***2.906***	***2.692***
nobody else asks	***2.953***	***3.465***	***3.703***
teachers don't encourage questions	***2.651***	***3.079***	***2.549***
students find answers themselves	***3.574***	***3.196***	***2.978***
they have no questions	***2.225***	***2.935***	***2.516***

shyness, being *afraid of making mistakes* and not asking because *nobody else asks*. The British are more aware to a very highly significant degree that *other students may laugh* than both the Chinese and the Japanese, although the Japanese are significantly more aware of this than the Chinese. Further, the British mean score for *having no questions* is greater to a very highly significant degree than that of

the Chinese and showed a highly significant difference from the Japanese, whose mean is in turn also significantly higher than that of the Chinese. The British are *too lazy* to ask questions to a very highly significant degree compared to the Chinese. The Japanese mean score for *not knowing enough to ask* is also greater to a very highly significant degree than the British mean and highly significantly greater than that of the Chinese. As another surprise, it appears that the Chinese and Japanese teachers encourage questions more than British teachers, since the British mean for *teachers don't encourage questions* is greater to a very highly significant degree than the other two. The exception to the general trend of Chinese means being lower than either or both British and Japanese means is that the Chinese students *find answers themselves* more to a very highly significant degree than the British or Japanese (the mean differences for *asking after the lesson* are not significant).

Questions Raised and Conclusions

These questionnaire results do not necessarily contradict the interview comments, video and essay data; above all they confirm the general proposition that there are different underlying cultural concepts of learning. Perhaps a variety of research methods is needed to explore this. The apparent contradiction - certainly the surprising results - between Chinese students' comments about Chinese reasons for not asking questions and the British and Japanese emphasizing the 'Chinese' responses very significantly more than the Chinese themselves remains unresolved. However, British undergraduate students are seen to have problems of asking questions in seminars, as noted by themselves and their tutors. There may be a different set of cultural, psychological and cognitive reasons for the phenomenon. The questionnaire items did not ask for reasons for responses. The interviews and video discussion, however, did explore reasons in some depth. Also the fact that one of the authors is Chinese and the other British may have helped us to interpret data from these two groups, though not the Japanese data.

This research actually raises more questions: about the balance between methods and their validity, and possibly about whether there are, in fact, different cultural styles of responding in interviews and to questionnaires. Since the questionnaires were in English and the interviews with Chinese students were in Chinese, the language medium of the research is open to question (Japanese subjects were not interviewed). Perhaps responses in subjects' first languages are

more valid than those in their second languages, even after allowance is made for their relatively good knowledge of the second language (English). Also, there may be culture-specific modes of response to certain types of questions. In the case of the open-ended metaphor questions (*'To me, a good teacher is...'*), the British students seemed to take this as a challenge to be creative, giving an extremely wide range of responses, many of which were highly original across the three cultural groups. In contrast, the Chinese and Japanese groups seemed to give more obviously common metaphors from a common stock; their range of replies is more limited and they gave very few responses that were original [3]. Although the subjects' responses to the open questions and Likert scale items have been interpreted here as reflecting cultures of learning, it is also possible that there are differing cultural perceptions from subjects about how to respond to such research tasks. Both researchers and respondents may have cultural ideas about research behaviour and norms, and what a particular research project or research task is about. Such ideas can differ within a single cultural group. It is quite possible that they would differ in intercultural research settings. Configurations of such differences within and across cultures might be termed *cultures of research.*

The cultural concept of *questioning* may have led to variations in responses, e.g. the British concept of questioning, as revealed in discussions, seems exclusively verbal, whereas the Chinese concept, as it emerged in interviews, seems to include internal reflection as well as verbalization. This cognitive dimension is missed by Western teachers who report that Chinese students do not ask questions in class; the students say they '*have many questions in their heads*', they '*think a lot in order to answer these questions*' and are '*active in their minds*'. The British teachers may over emphasize verbal replies and overlook cognitive responses.

The cultural expectations of teachers and students, of their roles, relationships, and ways of interacting, can clearly affect learning in intercultural classrooms. If British teachers believe students should express themselves when they have a problem and that students should request help, while Chinese students believe teachers (as parents and friends) should be sensitive to learners' problems and offer help but that to ask for it is to impose a burden, then there is a cultural gap. In such a case, the need for help is unexpressed by the Chinese and unnoticed by the British; and the students do not get support.

Learning is part of culture, but there are cultures of learning. Culture is both medium and content, so too is learning: students have to learn how to learn and learn about learning while learning. Cultures of learning define the ways in which

learning takes place, they define how teachers and students deal with the curriculum and with each other, they define how classroom participants learn intercultural communication.

A key element in a culture of learning is that it provides the framework of expectations, interpretations and evaluations of learning. Hence, for an effective intercultural classroom both teachers and students, of all cultural groups represented, need to learn about each others' cultures of learning, otherwise they may not fulfil expectations. They need to know, on both teachers' and students' sides, how to interpret the other's culture, and the others' culture of learning. They need to interpret others' interpretations. A first step is to question their own interpretations. We would call such a process of mutual learning about other cultures of learning **Cultural Synergy**: in this process all representatives of all cultures in the classroom have something to contribute of equal value, and all participants will learn about how others learn.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express thanks to those who helped distribute the questionnaires, especially to Karen Fedderholdt at Toyama University, Japan and Tina Jarvis and colleagues at Leicester University, UK.

Notes

Hu 1967 p.108, p.117; Chen 1990 p.387-8

[1] Hartzell 1988 p.464

[2] Tu et al. 1992 p.53

[3] Tannen 1980 reports an experiment in cross-cultural discourse in which Greeks and Americans were shown a film, after which they were asked to narrate what they had seen. Tannen found that the Greek subjects focused on personal involvement, showing concern with characters' motives and offering judgements. The Americans, in contrast, focused on context, giving detailed objective reports. Tannen interprets these results as demonstrating cultural styles of narration. Additionally, however, there is the likelihood that subjects saw the

task differently; the Greeks may have thought of the task in terms of personal response, while the American may have believed it was a memory task. As in the research reported here, it is possible that several layers of cultural responses are involved simultaneously.

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