"Bo Cai Zhong Chang" — A Slogan for Effective ELT Methodology for College English Education

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"Bo Cai Zhong Chang" (assimilating the merits of different teaching methodologies for our own use) has been in the last two decades a slogan in China for seeking an ELT methodology that suits the context of the country. How did this slogan come into being? What are the contextual factors that determine the approach to College English teaching? How do College English educators in China adapt ELT methodologies for use in the classroom? This paper answers these questions by identifying the learning and the socio-political contexts that affect ELT methodology through a general review of recent discussions on College English education and official documents and textbooks for the College English programme. With the ever-increasing number of PRC students pursuing their studies in Singapore, the answers to these questions have become all the more relevant to our language classroom practice here.

Introduction

China undoubtedly has the largest undergraduate student population learning English as a foreign language. This population ranges from "real beginners" in the remote regions (Wu, 2000) to advanced learners who desire higher language proficiency than that required by the syllabus (He & Chen, 1996). The growing demand for English as a means to access modern technology and the economic development in the past two decades has led to substantial changes in the teaching of English as a foreign language in China. ELT teaching models, conventional or contemporary, have been undergoing constant scrutiny and evaluation. Thus, the literature on ELT methodology is one of the largest with both theoretical discussions and reports of empirical research. Despite vigorous discussions in recent years, there seems to be no theoretical framework that is commonly believed to effectively suit the Chinese context of English language teaching. The large population of English learners of various levels and the ever-

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growing literature on this subject apparently make it difficult to discuss ELT methodology in China within the confines of this paper. Nevertheless, a general examination of ELT methodology is possible owing to the fact that in the last two decades the College English programme - the most important ELT programme for all college students, except English majors, in tertiary institutions - has been following the same syllabus and college students in most tertiary institutions have been using the same textbook. The review that follows will focus on the literature and official documents published or issued in this period. In order to gain a better understanding of College English education, let us first take a look at a teaching model that used to dominate, and still greatly influences, foreign language teaching in China.

The Intensive Reading Model

Scholars in foreign language education (Fu, 1986; Li, Zhong & Liu, 1988) usually draw dividing lines in their discussions about the history of foreign language education in the five "post-liberation" decades (from 1949 till now) according to momentous political events. They seem to agree that major changes in foreign language education since 1949 have been due to the dynamics of politics in China. From 1949 to 1956, for instance, Russian was taught as the major foreign language because of China's close economic and diplomatic relationships with the former Soviet Union. With the door tightly closed to the Western world, many Western languages, particularly English which had been taught for a century, were almost stamped out (Li, Zhong & Liu, 1988). Starting from 1956 - when the country began its endeavour in constructing its own socialist version owing mainly to deteriorating relations with the Soviet Union - through to the onset of the Great Cultural Revolution, Russian gradually lost its popularity and English began to resume its status as a premium foreign language in the curriculum of tertiary education. In both periods, however, the so-called "intensive reading" course, developed under the influence of Russian methodologists (see Dzau, 1990: Chapter 3), was predominantly adopted for classroom teaching, although other teaching methods such as the direct model and the audio-lingual model developed overseas were experimented with in specialised institutions for language majors (Li, 1995). The "intensive reading" course is now widely taken as the Chinese version of the grammar-translation model.

The term "intensive reading" per se needs defining as it is culture-specific. "Intensive reading" in the Chinese context refers to a highly teacher-centred course in which the teacher takes students through a text on a word-by-word and then sentence-by-sentence basis, explaining "language points" (new words and grammatical rules for classroom teaching and practising), leading pattern drills and translating difficult sentences in the text before engaging students with comprehension questions at the discourse level. Cortazzi and Jin (1996) argue that this teaching model became part of a Chinese culture of learning as for centuries the learning of Chinese followed the fixed order of dealing first with characters (*Zi*), words or phrases (*Ci*), sentences (*Jiu*) and paragraphs (*Duan*) before tackling the text (*Wen*). An intensive reading class usually begins with the teacher asking some students to read aloud certain paragraphs of a text and correcting pronunciation whenever necessary. This is followed by the main lesson when the teacher explains meticulously the vocabulary and grammatical points considered new to the students. The new words are usually associated with many other words such as synonyms and antonyms (*Cihui Kaihua*) and grammatical structures analysed and systemised (*Xitong Yufa*) (Wang, 1996). During the explanation, students are from time to time asked to answer short questions to test their comprehension, to use the new words and the grammatical points in language drills or to translate sentences. Usually, there is hardly any time in class for students to tackle comprehension questions on the text, let alone time for communicative activities. Thus, Cortazzi and Jin (1996) point out that the course is not primarily designed to improve reading comprehension as the name suggests. Rather, it is a course in which, using the text as a base, students learn vocabulary and grammar mainly through teacher exposition. Because of the meticulous explanation of language points by the teacher Wang (1996) recalls that it was often the case, particularly before the 1980s, that in an intensive reading course for English majors which usually took 6-8 hours per week, only about six texts were covered in a whole semester.

The Impact of the "Open-Door" Policy

The Great Cultural Revolution, the third period in foreign language education according to Fu (1986) and Li, Zhong and Liu

(1988), started in 1966 and ended in 1976. During the first four years of the revolution from 1966 to 1970, China's higher education system virtually ceased functioning as tertiary institutions throughout the country stopped enrolling students. From 1971 to 1976 when most tertiary institutions resumed operation, English language was the dominating foreign language taught in universities while Russian was largely ignored. The political impact of the Cultural Revolution on foreign language education was so strong that EFL teaching was not foreign language teaching in its proper sense as it barely offered students anything other than the English version of political slogans or quotations of Mao Zedong, the then paramount leader of China (Fu, 1986). Ideological orientation was the primary concern of policy makers, textbook writers, methodologists and teachers of all foreign language courses during this period.

The fourth period began in 1977, the year after the Cultural Revolution when the education of the country was back to normal. From that year onwards, China became increasingly exposed to the outside world, particularly the Western countries. Owing to its "open-door" policies, its awareness of the importance of English as a means of international commerce and communications increased accordingly. From 1977 to 1984, ELT methods and teaching materials were gradually liberalised as many native speaker teachers were invited into the country and many textbooks written by Western EFL/ESL writers were imported and used in classrooms. Most importantly, in this period, according to Li, Zhong and Liu (1988), theoretical concepts in psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics and applied linguistics developed in Western countries created a strong impact on conventional ideas of foreign language teaching in China. The intensive reading model was under severe criticism, particularly from English native speakers teaching in China such as Cotton (1990) and Maley (1990), and the communicative language teaching approach (see the next two sections below for details) drew much attention from ELT methodologists and teachers.

The 1985 Syllabus

ELT specialists agree that China has experienced the greatest development in foreign language education since the *College English Syllabus* (College English Syllabus Revision

Team, 1985) was promulgated by the then State Education Commission in 1985. Han, Lu and Dong (1995), for instance, claim that the promulgation of the syllabus has resulted in many major breakthroughs in higher education in general and English language education in particular. They quote Zhou Yuanqin, Director of the Higher Education Division of the Ministry of Education, as saying,

> College English is the most substantial programme in the country. It attracts the greatest attention of our students. The programme is decisive in the country's education reform and the two (College English) tests are influential in the country. (Han, Lu & Dong, 1995: 45, my translation)

The syllabus, according to Han (1985, 1999), a College English specialist cum policy maker, incorporates the merits of many communicative language teaching models developed by Western scholars. Theoretically, the syllabus integrates the principles in Brumfit's (1984) discussions on communicative language teaching methodology in balancing language usage and use and in mediating accuracy and fluency in foreign language education. For practical ideas, the syllabus acknowledges van Ek (1976) as the main reference for the "functional and notional inventory" and Han (1999) admits that the "inventory of micro-skills" of language use is nearly a direct copy of the "taxonomy of language skills" in Munby (1978: 123-131). The "ultimate goal" of the College English programme, the syllabus specifies, is to develop students' competence to communicate in the target language via written and oral channels. In the syllabus, while linguistic competence is referred to as "the ability to use one's knowledge of the language to comprehend and construct sentences", communicative competence is defined as "the ability to employ appropriate skills at discourse level to acquire and convey information" (College English Syllabus Revision Team, 1985: 267). It clearly states that the emphasis in the teaching process should gradually move from skills training at the sentence level towards communicative training at the discourse level. For teaching methodology, the syllabus propounds the slogan "*Bo Cai Zhong Chang*" (assimilating merits of different teaching approaches for our own use), suggesting a vision outward, that is, to move from the traditional intensive reading model developed at home to the communicative teaching approach which originated from Western countries.

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A Review of the Communicative Methodology in the Classroom

Han, Lu and Dong (1995), three of the most senior figures (policy makers cum College English textbook writers) in College English education, specify three features of the communicative language teaching approach for the Chinese context. First, it develops the teacher-centred activity model (the "intensive reading" model, my interpretation) into a student-centred one. Second, it moves from the TALO (text as linguistic object) approach to the TAVI (text as vehicle for information) approach. And third, it uses the target language as the medium of instruction in classrooms. Since the promulgation of the syllabus, some College English teachers have discussed the effectiveness of different communicative methods they have experimented with in their classrooms. Zhang (1995), for example, believes that the major task for a College English teacher is to transform the classroom, where transmission of knowledge is both the process and the aim, into one that enables learners to start communicating. In his "intensive reading" classes, on the premise that essential grammatical input had been given to students, he involved his students in many communicative tasks such as group discussion, presentation, story retelling, role-play, etc. to help them improve both linguistic and communicative skills. The teaching, he reports, became both meaningful and motivating and the syllabus requirements for the language skills were better fulfilled. All three features listed in Han, Lu and Dong are apparently present in Zhang's practice. In a similar manner, Ma (1998) demonstrates how he used the communicative approach to grammar teaching to students taking College English courses.

"Success stories" like this, however, seem rare in publications and in many studies of College English classrooms. To find out if a shift from the traditional intensive reading model to communicative language teaching has really taken place, Zheng, Wei and Chen (1997) carried out a large-scale questionnaire survey among 351 teachers and 3,224 students from 20 tertiary institutions. In this survey, the teachers were asked to estimate how long they spent in each class "instructing" students. Similarly, the students were asked to estimate how long their teachers spent in each class "talking to them". Tables 1 and 2 present the statistics

from this survey. They found that most of the classrooms were very teacher-centred.

Table 1. Teachers' replies to "How much time do you spend instructing in class?" (n = 351)

% of time talking	Number of answers	% of answers
No answer	25	7.1%
21-40%	13	3.7 %
41-60%	74	21.1%
61-80%	160	45.6%
80% above	79	22.5%

Table 2. Students' replies to "How much time does your teacher spend talking to you in class?" (n = 3,224)

% of time talking	Number of answers	% of answers
21-40%	177	5.5 %
41-60%	645	20.0%
61-80%	1254	38.9%
80% above	1148	35.6%

Source: Zheng, Wei & Chen (1997: 2-3)

About two thirds of the teachers estimated that they used more than 60% of classroom time explaining vocabulary and sentences and teaching grammar. The percentage given by the students about teachers' talking time was even higher than the self-estimation of the teachers. Nearly 75% of the students estimated that their teachers' talking time was 60% or more, and more than a third of them even thought more than 80% of the class time was "teacher talk".

To further confirm the statistical findings the researchers conducted classroom observations and interviews. They noted that in College English classrooms the majority of teachers kept on explaining language points, grammar in difficult sentences and translating long sentences while their students mainly remained passive, listening and taking notes. Some often made their students practise on mock test papers, checked spelling of students' writing and gave dictation. The tools for classroom teaching remained traditional: a textbook, a piece of chalk and a blackboard though the use of language laboratories was found to be rising. Few classes, they noted, were conducted in the communicative language teaching approach as commonly defined.

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In another recent survey, similar observations were made. With the purpose of analysing the quality and quantity of "teacher talk", Zhao (1998) managed to observe and record a number of reading classroom interactions between teachers and students. After analysing the recorded data she reported findings, both quantitative and qualitative, of eight cases that she claimed to be representative. She provided evidence that College English classrooms were teacher-centred and transmission of knowledge still featured prominently in classroom practice. She noted that some teachers made clear attempts to interact with their students during their "teacher talk". However, the interactions were predominantly close-ended questions raised by the teacher eliciting simple answers from the students. Open-ended questions by the teacher and interactions between students were almost non-existent.

Nevertheless, both Zhao (1998) and Zheng, Wei and Chen (1997) reported that the third feature of communicative language teaching, as identified by Han, Lu and Dong (1995) existed in many College English classrooms. An increasing number of teachers began using the target language as the medium of instruction. Table 3 shows how the teachers responded to the question, "Which language do you use as the medium of instruction?" in Zheng, Wei and Chen's (1997) survey. These figures, they pointed out, show that the medium of instruction is in contrast with that of two decades ago when almost all lessons were conducted in Chinese. The slow but evident change in the medium of instruction is often seen as a breakaway from the traditional grammar-translation model.

Table 3. Teacher's responses to the question on the medium of instruction (n = 351)

Medium of instruction	No. of people	% of people
No answer	26	7.4%
Always in Chinese	2	0.6%
Almost always in Chinese	3	0.9%
Mostly in Chinese	27	7.7%
Half in Chinese and half in English	74	21.1%
Mostly in English	125	35.6%
Almost always in English	85	24.6%
Always in English	9	2.6%

Contextual Factors

Empirical research findings and observations in recent literature strongly suggest that except for a gradual change in the medium of instruction, major features of the traditional grammar-translation or intensive-reading model are still predominant in the majority of College English classrooms. Classroom teaching is teacher-centred and transmission of knowledge remains the standard practice as well as an educational aim. The communicative language teaching approach as defined by Han, Lu and Dong (1995) is not adopted. In many recent papers College English specialists have explicitly or implicitly questioned the value of the approach. These writers have attributed the poor accuracy shown in students' essays and oral skills to the communicative approach. They argue that years of teaching practice since the promulgation of the syllabus has shown that the communicative approach does not work in the Chinese context for these reasons:

1. To the majority of the students, reading for information is crucial in academic and professional work.

The most important skills the students need in the real world are the abilities to read and use the target language to acquire information in their subject areas or disciplines (College English Syllabus Revision Team, 1985: 266). In order to address this need, reading skills should be taken as essential for College English teaching. Basic training in pronunciation and spelling and basic grammatical knowledge should be regarded as the priority tasks in College English education (Han, Lu & Dong, 1995). Without a solid foundation of these linguistic skills, the development of students' communicative competence can only be an illusion.

2. The methodology does not address "Chinese characteristics"[1].

In Guo's (1995) list of "Chinese characteristics" of foreign language education, he firmly states that Chinese students are used to teacher-centred lessons whereby they expect teachers to explain words, sentences and texts in detail in class. On the other hand, they often feel disconcerted when they have to perform tasks such as classroom discussions and role-play. Cortazzi and Jin's (1996)

study is in general agreement with Guo's statement though they use the notion "the culture of learning", defined as culturally-based ideas about appropriate learning styles, valued classroom behaviour and also about good teaching, as against "Chinese characteristics" which implies a clear socio-political dimension.

3. The teaching approach is largely determined by what is tested.

The "wash-back" effects of the two nation-wide College English tests on College English education have been the most vigorously discussed in recent papers (Wang, 1991; Zha, 1995; and Feng, 1995). These two tests are coded CET 4 (College English Test for Band 4) and CET 6 (College English Test for Band 6) respectively and they are administered semi-annually. CET 4 is taken by almost all students because the first four band courses are stipulated in the syllabus as the courses leading to the "basic required achievement level" for the programme (College English Syllabus Revision Team, 1985: 2-3). CET 6 is taken only by those who, after CET 4, continue to do the "upper required achievement level" courses (College English Syllabus Revision Team, 1985: 4). The passing rates of students taking the tests have become increasingly important to every tertiary institution because as the statistics are published in official documents, the comparative statistical data have a clear implication for the academic reputation of individual tertiary institutions. As a result, enabling students to pass the tests has been the primary concern of teachers and authorities of many tertiary institutions. In these institutions, a pass in CET 4 is a prerequisite for graduation and the pass rates of students are linked with the promotion prospects of individual teachers. Teaching is, therefore, test-oriented. It is a common observation that, in the semester when students prepare for CET 4, they are made to spend most of their class time practising numerous mock exam papers. Oral communication skills are generally ignored as they are not tested.

4. Teachers use the textbook as their syllabus to guide their lesson planning.

The need to cover the substantial textbook materials often makes it difficult to carry out communicative activities in the classroom (Zhao, 1998). The *Intensive Reading* booklets of the most widely-used textbook series, *College English* (a series of 54

booklets edited by Dong, et al., 1997), are a slightly modified version of the same title first published in 1986. They are largely grammar-structure and vocabulary-based course books which most teachers use with traditional methodology. The *Teacher's Book* for each of the four "core" *Intensive Reading* booklets[2] contains, in each text, a large number of "language points"– basically grammar and vocabulary items for detailed explanation in class. Even though some communicative activities are suggested, the presentation of language points regarded as essential content for explanation usually takes a lot of classroom time and invariably makes the teacher take the centre stage in the classroom leaving the students to listen passively (Zhao, 1998; Zheng, Wei & Chen, 1997).

5. College English teachers are not ready to adopt the approach for classroom practice.

Despite clear indications in the syllabus to use the communicative approach and vigorous discussions by its advocators, teachers seem to believe that the communicative methodology is not realistic for the Chinese classroom. Xia (1999) reports that in recent years she has made attempts to promote communicative methods to teacher trainees and students. She notes that most of the trainees and students have shown a positive attitude towards the communicative approach. Ironically, nearly all of these trainees and students question the feasibility of this approach for Chinese classroom practice.

There are many other contextual factors identified by College English educators as causes for the failure of the communicative methodology in the Chinese context. The huge linguistic and socio-cultural differences between the target language and learners' own; inadequate training teachers received in using communicative methods in classroom situations; the large number of students in each classroom and even the physical design of seating (in most classrooms seats are fixed to the floor in rows) are all presented as factors which hinder the smooth running of communicative activities.

It should be noted that some discussions on the learning and socio-political contexts of College English education are rather speculative and intuitive. Many scholars such as Guo (1995), for example, show a strong belief that Chinese students disliked oral

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activities such as classroom discussions and role-play because they were used to passive learning. Empirical evidence given by researchers such as Feng (1998) and Zheng, Wei and Chen (1997), however, shows that students were generally aware of the importance of oral skills and keen on participating actively in oral activities. Similarly, there are different speculative views held by researchers on teacher training in the communicative methods. But the main thrust of the arguments in the many observations made by teacher trainers such as Xia (1999) and Crook (1990) indicates that it is the educational philosophy held by the trainees and their attitude towards the communicative approach, rather than the training they have received, that keep them from adopting communicative methods in classrooms.

Looking for Alternatives

Doubts on the communicative language teaching approach in recent years has, not surprisingly, led ELT methodologists to look for alternative ways of teaching. The flexible implication of the slogan, *"Bo Cai Zhong Chang"* has allowed some College English specialists such as Li (1995) and Gu (1997) to further claim that "there is no set methodology for teaching" (*Jiao Wu Ding Fa*). They argue that given the context of College English education the teaching programme should not follow any particular methodology, no matter how theoretically established it is, and teachers as individuals need to be flexible, innovative and creative. Other specialists, however, continue their efforts in seeking theoretically sound methodologies for College English. Qin (1996) reviewed the feasibility of the "whole language approach" for use in the Chinese situation. Three years later, Qin (1999) recommended the "double activities approach" developed by Wang (1996) on the basis of the "integrated approach" adopted for secondary schools in Singapore, the "activities-based approach" designed in Australia and the theoretical "balanced activities approach" proposed by Harmer (1983). Xia and Kong (1998) compared the "difficulty-based teaching method" and the "task-based teaching method" developed in Western countries with the traditional teaching approach dominant in China and suggested that the two methods could help learners explore their own potentials and address the new demands for education in the new century. A "thematic-teaching model" designed and tested on a small scale is detailed in Ying, He and Zhou (1998). The literature of these

methodology "proposals" shows that the majority of them are again modelled from the communicative language teaching principles.

The 1999 Syllabus

In 1994 after nearly a decade of implementation of the 1985 Syllabus, policy makers and College English specialists decided that the syllabus needed to be revised "in order to face the challenge of the new century and to raise College English teaching to a new level" (College English Revision Team, 1999: 175, my translation). The new syllabus was finally promulgated at the end of 1999 after five years of revision. Han (1999) pinpoints in the new syllabus, several changes made to the 1985 version. The most obvious change is that the "ultimate goal" stipulated in the 1985 version to develop students' communicative competence is entirely missing from the new version. The general objective of the programme has evolved into "to develop students' strong reading skills and certain levels of listening, speaking, writing and translating competence so as to enable them to *exchange information* in English" (College English Revision Team, 1999: 1, my translation and italics). Even the term, *communicative competence*, is replaced by a new notion, *Yingyong Nengli*, which could be translated into "competence for application". The changes in the general teaching aim and terminology clearly suggest a redirection in teaching philosophy.

What remains unchanged is the ranking of reading skills. As in the 1985 syllabus, reading skills are stipulated as the most essential of all language skills in the revised syllabus. Such ranking has long been challenged by College English researchers and teachers with empirical findings (Ying, 1996; Xia, 1997; Huang & Shao, 1998). These researchers have conducted large-scale surveys among graduates and employers. On the basis of the empirical evidence that oral skills are regarded by these two groups of people as the most important of all language skills, they strongly argue that the syllabus should at least attach equal importance to the development of all language skills. In a recent paper, Zeng and Zhang (1999) reveal that, according to a "Revision Explanation" which they were "lucky to have access to", this ranking was based on a survey conducted among "officials" and teachers as these two groups regarded reading skills as the most important. They argue that the validity, reliability and practicability of the survey are

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problematic because it ignored the views of graduates and employers, the most pertinent informants as far as the future needs of the students are concerned. The "Revision Explanation" critiqued by Zeng and Zhang (1999) suggests that, in needs analysis, perceptions of "officials" (policy makers) about the future needs of learners are final as policy makers would certainly view the needs in connection with the general educational aims and with the political and socio-economical needs of the country. This is a crucial socio-political dimension foreign language educators have to take into consideration for curriculum planning. The teachers' ranking of reading skills as the most important, as given in the "Revision Explanation", is equally revealing as it indicates that reading is highly valued by Chinese language educators. The "Revision Explanation" re-establishes the point that foreign language education always takes place in a particular context and the aims of language programmes are always politically determined (Byram, 1997). A thorough analysis of the learning and socio-political contexts is thus a prerequisite for meaningful curriculum planning for ELT programmes.

As for teaching methodology, the new syllabus gives no indication of which methodology is to be adopted but makes a call for searching out a methodology with "Chinese characteristics":

> The teaching methods developed at home and abroad are all products created in specific circumstances and for specific contexts. We must, of course, learn from valuable experience and advanced teaching methodology developed abroad. More importantly, however, we must sum up the effective teaching methods and experience accumulated at home and appropriately mediate the relationship between making use (of foreign experiences) and carrying forward (our traditions). We must base ourselves upon our own situation and reality and seek a new ELT approach with Chinese characteristics. (College English Revision Team, 1999: 11, my translation)

The need of *"Bo Cai Zhong Chang"* (assimilating merits of different teaching methodologies for our own use) does not seem to be fundamentally changed. The tone, however, suggests a strong desire for a teaching methodology of Chinese identity and implies a re-evaluation of the outward vision, that is, to favour the communicative approach as shown in the 1985 syllabus, and the importance of a revisit to traditional models developed at home.

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Conclusion

Methodological discussions in recent years and the evidence shown in official documents clearly suggest that the methodology is dependent upon many interrelated factors which include the socio-political context, the culture of learning, the testing system and the educational philosophy of textbook producers. In most College English classrooms in China, the intensive reading model, though slightly altered under the impact of the communicative approach in recent years, has remained the main teaching mode simply because it has addressed these contextual issues more effectively than the communicative approach. First of all, the model is taken as one developed at home and it puts clear emphasis on the training of reading skills, the most important skill as perceived by policy makers and teachers. As the model is knowledge-oriented, it suits the deeply rooted culture of learning in which transmission of knowledge is seen as the main task of classroom teaching (Cortazzi & Jin, 1996). The majority of College English teachers had been trained in the intensive reading model and they are, in Guo's (1995) words, "used to teaching texts as linguistic objects". Teachers in general believe that learning a foreign language is a linear and accumulative process and its success depends upon a solid foundation of the "three basic elements" – pronunciation, vocabulary and grammar. Above all, to do well in crucial tests such as CET 4, students need only develop reading skills and grammatical competence.

Despite these contextual factors in favour of traditional models, recent critical reviews of the communicative approach and the call made in the new syllabus to revisit traditional methodology, the slogan, *Bo Cai Zhong Chang*, stays firm as few teachers and language education scholars seem to strongly believe that the intensive reading model is *the* methodological framework for China. Some Chinese ELT educators such as Fan (1999) argue that the most appropriate model is likely to be an "eclectic" model which is defined as "ideal", having developed from a selection of well-grounded models including the existing model and taking into consideration contextual factors such as time, location and types of learners. In the syllabus of the programme for English majors, the title of the main course has been changed from the traditional "intensive reading" into "integrated English". Wang (1996) points out that the change of the course title should not be taken simply as

a wording issue. This change symbolises a reformation of teaching philosophy and suggests an integration of teaching approaches. I share Wang's view that there should be an integration of teaching approaches. I also agree with Fan (1999) that the realistic model comes from realisation and modification of current practice. Both Fan and Wang clearly advocate a true *Bo Cai Zhong Chang* attitude. It seems clear that the course title change made in the syllabus for English majors is also necessary for College English as it is obviously the first step in the direction of an integration of teaching approaches. As indicated in the section on contextual factors, I further argue that systematic and comprehensive studies need to be carried out to gain further insight into the learning and socio-political contexts of the College English programme. It is with this insight that ELT educators in China are more likely to develop a theoretically grounded model for College English, which truly assimilates the merits of different ELT teaching approaches (*Bo Cai Zhong Chang*).

With the ever-growing number of PRC students and professionals taking English courses in Singapore, an examination of ELT methodology in China has become all the more relevant to our teaching practice here. Knowledge of the teaching models widely used in China, for example, would help us better understand our PRC students' expectations of classroom activities. Similarly, familiarity with the *College English Syllabus* and the objectives stipulated in it could increase our awareness of the English background of our PRC postgraduate students and professionals working in Singapore as the majority, if not all, have completed the required courses of the College English programme. But, to what extent this knowledge or insight can be incorporated into our curriculum planning, classroom teaching, material development and assessment is obviously beyond the scope of this paper. For curriculum planning, for instance, all the "Chinese characteristics" discussed above ought to be thoroughly reviewed in connection with the Singapore context, the short-term and long-term needs of our PRC students and the Singaporean culture of learning. This paper, from this perspective, presents a new dimension for reflecting on our existing practice.

Notes

1. The notion of "Chinese characteristics" has been widely used as a political catchphrase since the former paramount leader of China, Deng Xiaoping, had his book "Build socialism with Chinese characteristics' published (Deng, 1985). The use of the notion usually carries the socio-political connotation though the arguments presented in Guo (1995) are mainly socio-cultural.

2. Of the 54 booklets, the first four *Intensive Reading* booklets are taken as the 'core' materials for College English teaching mainly because they incorporate all the required elements contained in the four inventories (vocabulary, grammar, micro-skills and functions/notions) in the syllabus, in which reading skills are stipulated as the most required. The *Teacher's Book* to the four *Intensive Reading* booklets, therefore, show the editors' teaching philosophy with suggested guidelines for teaching. All the other booklets, such as *Extensive Reading*, are of secondary importance and are mostly assigned as homework. In class, the teacher may give answers to the questions in those booklets.

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