English Language Testing in China: A Survey of Problems and Suggestions for Reform

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Introduction

English language education plays an important role in social education and cultural construction in China. Although China has made enormous achievements in various aspects of theoretical study, syllabus construction, curriculum designing, textbook compilation etc., there are still problems in its developing process. Reforms of English education are necessary and imperative whatever the agenda for the present and the future. Among many factors, testing has a vital function in the English education system - a comprehensive, objective and deeper understanding of testing will thus benefit the decision-making process with regards to the reform of English education.

All the suggestions relating to the reform of China’s English education and English language testing methods are made on the basis of the comparison of testing between China and the West. In this paper, China refers to the People’s Republic of China; the West is represented by America, Britain and Germany, because the literature that has been consulted was produced in these countries. The aims of writing this paper are as follows: through comparing the English language education and testing in China and the West, and explaining the existing problems of China, to find out the main problems of China’s English education and testing. After that, it is hoped that the appropriate means of solving the problems can be found and that this study will contribute towards the development of China’s English education.

As an international student in Belgium, I have undertaken study at Gent University for three-and-a-half-years (I believe that the education mode of Gent University is representative of the whole of European university systems), and during these years, I have come to deeply realize the significant differences between the English educational ideal, educational and testing methods between China and the West. From personal experiences, the European mode of education appears to be significantly more human-oriented, practical and demanding. The testing items are mainly composed of subjective essay questions, in which more weight is given on the individual student’s understanding and usage of English learning; the students have more space to demonstrate what they have learned in class and their own talent. Such an education mode is totally different from that of China. In China, the objective questions dominate all kinds of English tests; these are questions to which there is only one correct answer, therefore students seldom have chances to show their skills and competence in various aspects of the language; English classroom teaching is too rigid, with a lack of multi-media teaching.
methods and so on. Besides educational notions, teaching mode, testing methods, there are also some other questions like English educational contents, objectives towards English teaching and learning and teacher training, etc. Of course, these problems are not only history-related, but are also related to the cultural background and language environment of China. I hope that, after analyzing the Western English education teaching and testing modes, more helpful reforms could be suggested and implemented.

Due to the geographical distance, it is extremely difficult to find the Chinese books that are required to research my paper in Belgium. Therefore, I can only rely on China’s educational forums or journals to reliably collect Chinese information or data. It’s relatively easier to collect English language education and testing information. I have mainly used Bachman, 1990; Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Spolsky, 1995; Hughes, 1989; Milton, 1978 theories as the theoretical bases for English language testing and testing strategies in my paper.

Last year, I set out the systems in more detail, i.e. by a comparison of grammar tests at Bohai University in China and Ghent University in Belgium. I did collect some data and information, but due to the reason mentioned above (geographical distance), it appeared to be impossible to collect a sufficient amount of data and questionnaires in China. Consequently, I had to change my direction to a more theoretical comparison and analysis. I am still interested in completing the comparative study of grammar tests between UBohai and UGent and this is a plan for future research.

My thesis centers on the problems of English language teaching and learning, and reforms of English education through an analytical study of the development of language testing. Then, similarities and differences of the language testing of the West and China are studied by means of review and comparison. On the basis of that, the problems of English teaching and learning from the perspective of Language testing are discussed. Finally, some proposals are made for the systematic reforms of English language teaching and learning in China.

The thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces China’s education system, the development of the English language education system, and testing situations in China and in the West. Chapter 2 discusses the English language testing and testing strategies at High Education level. Chapter 3 deals with the comparison of language testing in the West and in China. Chapter 4 analyzes the problems of English language education and testing in China. Based on this analysis, Chapter 5 puts forward suggestions for teaching and testing reforms. Chapter 6 draws conclusions from this study.
Chapter I

English Language Education in China: A Brief Overview

1.1 Education System in China

The education system in China can be divided into 3 stages: Basic Education, Secondary Education and Higher Education.

1.1.1 Basic Education

Basic education includes pre-school education, primary education and special education. Preschool, or kindergarten, begins at age three and lasts until age six. The children can enter into the primary school when they are about six years old. The school year is divided into two semesters, which begin on 1st September and 1st March, respectively.

1.1.2 Secondary Education

Secondary education is mainly of two types: academic secondary education and vocational secondary education. Academic secondary schools include junior middle schools (3 years) and senior high schools (3 years). Vocational schools offer programs ranging from two to four years and train medium-level skilled personnel.

1.1.3 Higher Education

Higher education at Undergraduate level includes three-year junior colleges (sometimes also called short-cycle colleges), four-year colleges and universities, all of which offer programs in both academic and vocational subjects. Many colleges and universities also offer graduate programs leading to a Master’s Degree or Ph. D degree.

China's education system represents a pyramid: because of the scarcity of resources allocated to higher education, student numbers decrease sharply at the higher levels, compared to secondary and primary education. The college-entrance examination plays a crucial role in selecting the students for higher education. Each
province is assigned a quota of students to enter the key universities, a second quota for the regular universities within its administrative division, and a third quota for provincial universities or colleges.

The College-Entrance Examination becomes a prestigious and important way to select students for higher education in China. It is also the standard for measuring the teaching achievement of all high schools. Although the examination system for admission to colleges and universities has undergone many changes since China’s Cultural Revolution, it remains the basis for recruiting academically able students. We admit that the great function of the College-Entrance Examination is selecting qualified students for universities or colleges on the one hand, but on the other hand we have to face the consequences which follow from that: most of the teachers, students and their parents pay more attention to the scores rather than to the study itself. In China, there is an idiom, “one paper can decide one person’s life”. This ‘paper’ only refers to the College Entrance Examination paper and, from this, we can clearly see the importance of the College-Entrance Examination. If a high school graduate cannot pass the College-Entrance Examination, normally he or she will not have the chance to study at the university or college.

Generally speaking, there are three main entrance examinations for Chinese students at Undergraduate level. These are: the entrance examination for junior middle schools for the primary school students, which is less important, because the education from primary schools to middle schools (total 9 years) is compulsory; the second is the Senior High School Entrance Examination, which is more important; the most important is the College Entrance Examination, which decides whether the students can enroll at universities or colleges.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Compulsory</th>
<th>Importance Degree of the Entrance Examinations at each educational stage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>College Entrance Examination ★★★★★</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University or College</td>
<td>18-22</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senior high school or Vocational</td>
<td>15-18</td>
<td>NO</td>
<td>Senior High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
English education in China does not have a very long history. There were different features for each stage in China’s English education: its historical development, features, problems are mainly based on two Chinese books: Fu Ke, The History of China’s English Language Education, 1986 and Li L. Y. China’s English Language Teaching History, 1988.

English education in China can be traced back to Qing Dynasty, which has nearly 140 years of history (Fu Ke, 1986). With the development of English education around the world; China has also made enormous progress with regards to the teaching of English. However, there are still some stubborn problems which have prevented China’s English education from more rapid development. For instance, the problems of English teaching objectives, unscientific syllabus and curriculum designs, limitations of teaching methods and materials, and the overuse of tests. In the 21st century, the education of China is being transferred from the test-oriented to the quality-oriented educational mode. It is necessary, therefore, to review the history of English language education in China, to analyze its features and the causes of its problems, and to sketch the best path towards further development.

1.2 Early English Language Education in China

In the early 19th century, many missionaries from western countries were sent by different religious organizations to carry out mission work in the coastal cities of China due to the increasing expansion of capitalism. Robert Morrison, the first

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### Table I Educational Stages and the Entrance Examinations for each stage in China

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secondary Education</th>
<th>School</th>
<th>School Entrance Examination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Junior middle school</td>
<td>12-15</td>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Primary Education   | Primary school      | YES                         |

---
missionary to China, was considered to be the father of Protestant mission work. Setting up western schools and spreading western learning were seen as important measures to expand the mission’s influence (Fu Ke, 1986).

But at that time, the missionary schools with a limited number of students did not have a great impact on English education in China, although their foundation opened up the views of the Chinese youth and played an active role in developing education, science, technology, and the training of talents with western learning. Therefore, it was objectively the first step for the study of English in the western style.

It was not until after the Opium War in 1840 that Chinese intellectuals were forced to recognize that China was not actually the center of the world and they were compelled to take notice of the West. With reluctance, they directed their attention firstly to the military strength and advanced technology of the West, and then to its political and social systems as well as culture. China did not have its own translators to work in business negotiations and foreign affairs, so the government had sometimes been deceived by foreigners (Fu Ke, 1986). Western missionaries and businessmen hoped that China would train some foreign-language-speaking talents to assist them with development in missions and trade relations. Therefore, against this particular background, as the main vehicle of learning from - and communicating with - the West, the teaching of foreign languages was placed on the agenda of Chinese rulers for the first time. The first school of foreign languages, the School of Combined Learning (Jing-Shi-Tong-Wen-Guan) was founded in 1862 (Fu Ke, 1986). In 1902, the school merged with Jing-Shi-Da-Xue-Tang. During its 40-year history, only five foreign languages were taught at the schools: English, French, Russian, German and Japanese.

Although the history of English education of Jing-Shi-Tong-Wen-Guan was longer than 40 years, no famous translators or diplomats graduated, but the graduates were at least the first English talents at that point in Chinese academia.

Following the example of the School of Combined Learning, a group of new-style schools were established in China. These schools could be classified into two kinds: one was the foreign language schools that aimed to train translators for the Chinese government (such as Shanghai-Tong-Wen-Guan(1863), Guangzhou-Tong-Wen-Guan(1864), and Hubei-Zi-Qiang-Xue-Tang); the other was westernized schools that aimed to train talents in science and technology, as well as in military affairs (such as Fujian-Chuan-Zheng-Xue-Tang (1866)) (Li, L.Y. 1988).

Another way of training foreign-language-speaking personnel was to send students abroad, a practice which started as early as the year of 1872. The Chinese government decided to send particularly smart children to America in 1871, and four groups of 120 students had been sent there during the period of 1872 to 1875.
Besides the government, the new-style schools also sent their students abroad, for example, Britain, France, Russia and Germany etc. After they graduated, the students came back and contributed greatly to the development of China, with regards to both technology and foreign language teaching.

Although English was taught in the early missionary schools, the School of Combined learning, and westernized schools, students were sent abroad for further education. The early English language education in China was still small-scale with passive conditions due to the government’s closed-door policy and opposition from conservative officials.

### 1.2.2 English Language Education during the End of Qing Dynasty

The first Opium War (1839–42), the Anglo-French War (1856–58), the Sino–Japanese War (1894–95), and the Boxer Rebellion (1900) all resulted in defeats for China and the granting of major concessions to Western powers. With the aim of self-strengthening, the government had taken actions like The Hundred Days of Reform in 1898. Although it failed after just 100 days, some relevant reforms and policies about education had important repercussions, including advocating western learning, setting up formal schools in China, sending personnel abroad and establishing the translating press. A group of new-style schools were set up in China at the end of the 19th century, such as Tianjin Chinese and the Western School (1895), Shanghai Nanyang College (1896), and Beijing Tongyi School etc. English was considered to be the main subject and its teaching requirements were written in details in light of the duration of schooling (Li, L.Y. 1988).

The missionary schools developed rapidly in the last years of the Qing Dynasty. Besides religious education, English was considered to be a compulsory course in the curriculum. In English classes, all the teachers were required to teach in English, and all the bulletins, notices, letters and conference presentations were also written in English. So, English was the basic and necessary educational language taught and spoken in the missionary schools. There were many qualified graduates from the missionary schools that became scholars or experts in the political, language education and economic fields.

### 1.2.3 English Language Education in the Old China (1912-1949)

In February 1912, the Qing court proclaimed the decree of abdication because of the outbreak of the revolution in 1911, and ended its 268-year rule. Later on, the Republic of China was founded, and the new republic government began to carry
out the reforms in the aspects of politics, economy, and education. It established the new Ministry of Education, changed the name of “Xue-Tang” into “school”, and prohibited using the former textbooks. Moreover, the educational reforms and the ending of the governmental examination system during the final Qing years enabled thousands of young people to study sciences, engineering, medicine, law, economics, education, and military skills in Japan, Europe and the United States. Upon their return, they took important positions and became a modernizing force in society (Fu Ke, 1986).

1.2.3.1 English Language Education in Secondary Schools
In November 1922, the Republican Government issued a new educational system “RenXu Educational System”, which copied the American Comprehensive type, which adopted the six-three-three years respectively of elementary school, junior high school and senior high school for their educational structure (Fu Ke, 1986). The class hours of English lessons were as many as Chinese lessons, or even more than them.

Upon the impact of the American Comprehensive type, the English teaching began to concentrate on fours skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The English competence of students had been developed and enhanced in full-scale. In addition, several influencing series of English textbooks were used in high schools at that time, such as English Model Book by Zhou Yueran, Enlightened English Book in Middle School by Lin Yutang, and English Book in Middle School by Lin Handa, in which the oral English ability received much attention. In senior high schools, English teaching emphasized the enhancement of reading skills, so the textbooks were all the extracts from the masterpieces of English and American literatures, such as Tales from Shakespeare by C.Lamb and M.Lamb, Treasure Island by R.L.Stevenson, and David Copperfield by C.Dickens (Fu Ke, 1986).

1.2.3.2 English Language Education in Colleges
The republic government changed the name of advanced Xue-Tang of the late Qing Dynasty into specialized school. In October 1912, the Ministry of education issued the Order of Specialized School, in which it was said that the specialized school was set up with the aim of teaching advanced science and training specialized talents. In this Order, the specialized school was classified into ten categories, in which the seventh was the foreign language school. Later in December, the ministry issued the Regulations of Foreign Language School, in which it regulated the length of the school, the classification of language, and the curriculum. Students would initially study for a preparatory year and then a further 3 years of undergraduate courses. Five languages were chosen in the regulation
including English, French, German, Russian, and Japanese. Students were required to study ten courses at school, taking English as an example, the courses were English, Chinese, linguistics, history, geography, education, law, economics, international law, and Esperanto. During the years of 1913 and 1925, several public foreign language schools had been established in China, some of which were Sichuan Public Foreign Language School (1913), Hubei Public Foreign Language School (1914), Mukden Public Foreign Language School (1916), and Fujian Public Foreign Language School (1920) (Li, L.Y. 1988).

Since 1913, English departments were set up in colleges. According to statistics by the Ministry of education, there were 207 colleges and universities in 1947, of which English departments were established in 77 colleges accounting for over one-third of the total (Li, L.Y. 1988).

To summarize, much of the education system in China in this period was developing slowly due to the wars, however, English education was developing rapidly, especially in colleges and universities. Students all paid great attention to English learning largely due to dealing with the daily study at school, which was conducted in English, including the use of English language textbooks and reference books, in addition to the teaching process. In addition, students were preparing to go aboard for further education and employment after graduation. Moreover, English teaching of that time had reached a certain standard of academic quality, so it made some contributions to the development of China’s English language education.

1.2.4 English Language Education in the People’s Republic of China (1949-)

After the foundation of New China in 1949, foreign language became a compulsory subject in high schools and universities by the order of the Ministry of Education. English education had achieved rapid development with its prominent features of large educational scale, high teaching quality, fast improvement in English teaching theories and research methodology. However, the development of English education was quite different in diverse periods due to the changes of China’s political and economic situation. In light of the different situations, the English education could be divided into four sections: “Russian Language Booming” stage, “English Language Resuming” stage, unexpected undermining stage, and prosperous developing stage.

1.2.4.1 “Russian Language Booming” Stage (1949-1956)

At the beginning of the foundation of PRC, English education stayed in a reluctant
maintaining stage with few differences from before. In 1953, the First Five-year Plan was carried out, which meant that people from all walks of life started to learn from the Soviet Union with regards to the construction of socialism and industrialism. In addition, the party leaders recognized that they had no experience in overseeing the transitions to socialism and industrialism that would occur in China’s huge urban centers. For this, they turned to the only government with such experience—the Soviet Union. Thus, there was a tremendous need for talents with ability in Russian and Russian language education attracted more attention at that time (Li, L.Y. 1988).

Meanwhile, people gradually realized it was wrong that English teaching was becoming ignored in education, and English courses resumed in high schools. Whereas, because of the deep influence of the Soviet Union’s model, English teaching focused on grammar studies, while neglecting language practices. English was learnt passively by students with the center of the book and the teacher, which was called ‘rote learning’.

On the other hand, English teaching for English majors in universities and colleges was in a contractive condition. The big adjustments and combinations had been carried out twice in the universities and colleges from 1952 to 1953. After the adjustments, only 9 key English teaching universities were left in China, English teaching evolved in a stagnant manner. It had regained the new development after the Premier’s speech in 1956; up to the end of 1956, English departments were set up in 23 colleges with about 2500 English majors and 545 professional teachers (Li, L.Y. 1988).

1.2.4.2 “English Language Resuming” Stage (1957-1965)

Since 1957, English teaching in high schools had resumed. English had been the key subject in high school teaching plans issued by the Ministry of Education. The ministry respectively drew up the English Syllabus (draft) for junior and senior schools in 1956 and 1957. The drafts of the two syllabuses indicated that English teaching in high schools had started to take a step in the right direction. It was widely accepted that, as a tool of studying western learning, English was one of the basic knowledge requirements for junior high school students. In order to promote English teaching in high schools, the ministry had taken a series of actions. English has been a compulsory subject in national college entrance examinations for all types of universities and colleges since 1962. In July 1962, the ministry issued a notice with regards to starting to teach English in elementary schools. Additionally, foreign language schools were set up as secondary schools in the 1960s. In the early of 1960s, China urgently demanded a large number of translators and interpreters, as well as foreign language teachers, since it had established diplomatic and
economic relationships with both western countries and countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Under such crucial circumstances, the Chinese government adopted two important measures about foreign language education in 1964: one was setting up a group of foreign language schools to ensure better candidates for foreign language institutes and departments; the other was to make a 7-year program for foreign language education. Around 1965, before the Cultural Revolution, 14 foreign language schools had already been established across China (Li, L.Y. 1988).

The birth of Foreign Language Schools is the result of the need of politics and economics with clear objectives to lay a solid foundation for students to be cultivated into advanced foreign language personnel.

In the 7-year program for foreign language education, English was set as the first foreign language taught in schools, and a wider range of foreign language schools was developed, with 40 schools being set up until 1970 with 30000 students in attendance across the schools (Li, L.Y. 1988).

1.2.4.3 Unexpected Undermining Stage (1966-1976)
The Cultural Revolution, a political movement of ideological extremism which started in 1966, led to a whole decade of chaos and isolation in the PRC. It not only disrupted the economic and cultural development of the country but also had disastrous effects on English Language Teaching (ELT) at all levels of the education system (Hu and Seifman, 1987). The purpose of - and motivation for - learning foreign languages were totally undermined (Ross, 1992). In the first few years, all broadcasts in foreign languages were banned and all imported foreign books were forbidden, while all ELT programs were removed from the secondary curriculum, and all universities and colleges were closed. The formal education system ceased to function. Although foreign language courses resumed in some institutions of higher education in 1968, there was little teaching or learning going on. English reappeared on the curriculum in some secondary schools in the early 1970s, but ELT was essentially in a state of anarchy. English textbooks were produced at the provincial and municipal levels (Tang and Gao, 2000) but these textbooks were full of politically charged passages intended to serve the political needs of the period without any basis in theories of language teaching and learning (Adamson and Morris,1997; Fu,1986). The prevailing methodology was a teacher-centered, grammar-translation pedagogy and the quality of ELT was at its lowest.

1.2.4.4 Prosperous Developing Stage (1977-)
The end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976 and the national program of “Four Modernizations” brought in a new era: political, economic, and social development,
as well as a rapid growth of commercial, cultural, and scientific exchanges with the West.

During this period, there has also been a great boom in foreign language education in China. Secondary and higher education was re-orientated towards economic development and national modernization. ELT regained legitimacy, and its dominant objective was to prepare a new generation of Chinese for the language skills needed in order to learn science and gain technological knowledge and ability from the West. To keep up with the new requirements for ELT, English was made a core subject on the secondary curriculum and the National College Entrance Examinations (NCEE) was reinstated in 1978. To raise the status of English in the curriculum, the time allocated for English instruction was raised from 656 hours to 960 hours for students who opted for a humanities curriculum, and 932 hours for those in the science track (Ministry of Education, 1982).

Foreign Language Schools have been ruined during the Cultural Revolution, many of which were closed or changed their objectives. Until 1984, there were actually just 7 foreign language schools. Later, with the development of China’s economy and the upgrading to international status, the political and economic exchanges became more and more frequent with an urgent demand of foreign language personnel. Foreign Language Schools, whether state-run or private were just like mushroom after a spring rain. According to the statistics provided by Professor Wang Guizheng, principal of Foreign Language School attached to Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, there currently there have been more than 80 Foreign Language Schools in China.

English teaching for English majors in the colleges has been enhanced since 1978. It had made some achievements in perfecting the syllabus, publishing numbers of new text and reference books, and carrying out the researching of English teaching. At the same time, some schools and departments of foreign languages began to publish the periodicals on foreign linguistics and literature. In the other hand, English teaching for non-English majors have been paid more and more attention. The Ministry of Education set up a designing group for CET-4/6 standard tests in 1985, and it began to design CET-4/6 in order to evaluate the English competence of college students. CET-4 and CET-6 have been started respectively since 1986 and 1989, and become the largest-scale test in China (Yang, H.Z. 2003). Thus, many colleges and universities began to develop English teaching through the improvements of teaching facilities and the requirement on graduation of passing CET-4. However, there are some disadvantages in the standard tests which demand relevant reforms that are today being carried out by the scholars and teachers.

From the above discussions, it could be said without much exaggeration that
learning English has become fashionable in China over the last two decades. In high schools, colleges, universities and various types of academic institutions, English has been the most popular subject for students of all age groups.
Chapter II

English Language Testing in EFL Teaching and Learning

The history of testing and examination in China can be traced back to the imperial period nearly two thousand years ago, since the Han Dynasty (206 BC to AD 220). The imperial examinations were used to select the highest officials; these examinations determined the positions in the civil service based on merit and education which promoted upward mobility among the population for centuries. In addition, these examinations are regarded by most historians as the first standardized tests based on merit (Hu, 1984; Lai, 1970) and offer the biggest contribution that ancient China has made to the testing movement (Higgins and Sun, 2002). This tradition of using examinations for selection is still evident in the current education system in China. Over the years of primary education (Kindergarten-Grade 6), secondary education (Junior Middle Grade 7-9, Senior High Grade 10-12) and university (4-year undergraduate), students take numerous examinations at the school, municipal, provincial and national levels. Furthermore, examinations continue to enjoy a wide societal acceptance and recognition in China as fair measurement for the selection of the best talent into the social hierarchy (Cheng and Qi, 2006).

Western countries set up testing system much later than China. In the eighteenth and early nineteenth century in both France and Russia, formal examinations evolved into methods for selecting civil servants and controlling the educational process. In Germany, too, examinations played a major role in the “systematization” and centralization of education. In England, the university examination system spread into public life in the nineteenth century, becoming “a major tool for social policy” by its end. Not surprisingly, the evolution of examinations in the United States paralleled that of Europe. By the end of the nineteenth century, then, the written examination in its traditional form had become stable and entrenched in Europe and the United States. Tests were mainly subjective and unscientific at that time.

Along with the passing of time, Modern language testing has provided more objective and reliable measurements. The successful experience of mental testing was the major impetus for the appearance of the objective language tests. The first new type objective language test was founded by the beginning of 1920s in the United States. By the end of the mid-1920s, the objective test was firmly
established in American education. The newer objective examinations were commented to be much fairer than the traditional ones. Notwithstanding, it was still notable than disputes between authentic tests of integrative skills and the objective testing of discrete items of linguistic knowledge. The debate challenged the effectiveness of the objective testing (Spolsky, 1995).

2.1 Testing

Testing is the running of a system or a program against a predetermined series of data to arrive at a predictable result for the purpose of establishing the acceptability of the system or program (Electronic Oxford Dictionary, 2002). Testing includes testing target, testing contents and testing approach. The target of College English Testing in China, by which we normally refer to as classroom testing, is to check how students learn the language, such as their abilities of using the language. The contents are firmly limited in what they have learnt, we should never test over or under their learning, or the testing would be anamorphic. The Testing Approach includes written tests, oral tests and practice tests.

2.2 Testing in EFL Teaching and Learning

2.2.1 Teaching and Testing

Davies (1968:5) argued that “the good test is an obedient servant since it follows and apes the teaching”. The proper relationship between teaching and testing is surely that of partnership. Testing is a way to review what students have learnt, and to train their abilities of putting what they have learnt into effect, to help them learn more. Teaching for teachers is a means to transmit knowledge, information, or whatever related, to learners. Testing is one of the standards, to weigh teaching, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, but it is not the last word on the subject. Teaching, of course, is not only for testing; to consider it that way would be to falsely promote the achievement of high scores as our aim.

2.2.2 Learning and Testing

Testing is useful as a means of judging learning, although it is not the only way. However, until now it is still the most effective way, especially in China. Besides that, the society, students’ parents, schools evaluate the scores as the result of the
students’ learning in schools, that’s why the students regard capturing the high scores as their studying aim. In addition, there are not sufficient approaches to judge whether the students are leaning or not, so the scores have always been the first important element of their study. This phenomenon is very much concerned with the education history of China and Chinese cultural traditions.

2.2.3 Teachers and Testing

The process of constructing tests itself is beneficial because it “helps teachers put their courses in perspectives and encourages the clarification of meaningful objectives” (Jacobs and Chase, 1992:2). The writing of items forces instructors to think again about the really essential course content and objectives, and makes the content and objectives as clear as possible. They want their tests to emphasize the skills, knowledge, and abilities that they perceive to be the most important in the course. Meanwhile, if they want students to learn facts, they test them on their ability to recall information. Their tests try to send a message to students, telling them these are the essential things to learn from this course (Jacobs and Chase 1992).

Tests also provide teachers with useful feedback about what students have and have not learned. Knowledge of what students know and do not know is very important to the teachers and a lack of this knowledge is likely to bring about ineffective instruction. If teachers can make good use of test information, better teaching can be achieved. Feedback from tests can help the teacher provide more appropriate instructional guidance for individual students as well as for the class as a whole. “Results obtained from the tests enable the teacher to become more familiar with the work of each of his students and with the progress and weakness of the class in general” (Heaton, 1999:163).

Classroom tests provide feedback on what students are learning in the class and thus help instructors to determine the effectiveness of their teaching of a particular unit, or part of the course because “the overall performance of a group of students says something about the effectiveness of instruction” (Gallagher, 2000:143). Norman E. Gronlund holds the same point of view, that test results can be used to “evaluate the effectiveness of various aspects of the instructional process” (Gronlund, 1993:11). By analyzing the test results, instructors can identify problem areas that perhaps should be reviewed or re-taught before students move on to new material. If most students have done poorly in some areas, the instructor should realize that these are the problem areas in the instruction. What the teachers should do is to look at their teaching methods and the stress they have given with regards
to these areas. Perhaps there is a better way to teach these language points, or more time should be set aside for the instruction. Therefore, test results may be the basis for changes in the teaching methods and teaching models. By contrast, satisfactory performance on the tests on the part of the students probably indicates that the teaching methods are effective.

2.2.4 Students and Testing

During the learning process, students can benefit greatly if they are clear of what they know and what they do not know. Test results can provide them with this information. Therefore, tests can aid their self-assessment. Periodic tests and feedback of the results can help students “gain insight into what they can do well, the misconceptions that need correction, and the degree of skill they have in various areas” (Gronlund 1993:10). Such information provides the students with a more objective basis for assessing their own strengths and weaknesses. Therefore, well prepared and properly used tests serve as effective means of finding out students’ strong points and weak points.

Classroom tests are an excellent way to motivate students to learn the course material. Periodic testing will motivate students to review the content, seek solutions to unsolved problems. As Spolsky stated, a test may be used “with the alternative or additional purposes of motivating students” (Spolsky, 1995:7). Students pursue the mastery of objectives more diligently if they know what will be tested. “Students’ whole grasp of the subject matter will be strengthened by preparation for classroom test” (Jacobs and Chase 1992:5).

A well-prepared test can provide a worthwhile learning experience in itself. Tests provide an opportunity for students to show what they have learned and to discover the scope and depth of their knowledge. They also tell students what they do not know and serve as a guide to further study. Spolsky says, “The good learner is one who constantly tests his or her changing skill or knowledge” (1995:7). Testing and teaching are “so closely interrelated that it is virtually impossible to work in either field without being constantly concerned with the other” (Heaton 1975:1). Therefore, the close interrelationship among teaching, learning and testing must be integrated in language teaching and learning. A correct arrangement of these three aspects does help with the development of education, otherwise both teachers and students are doomed to blind themselves and to go in the wrong direction. It is far from China’s new policy of education of quality.
2.2.5 Functions of Evaluation and Measurement of Testing

From the analysis about the relationship among teaching, learning and testing, we know that measurement in English testing is a means of telling learners what are their scores in the test and what level they have comparatively in a group or a unity. Evaluation in testing refers to the explanation of the scores. It solves the problem of “How”-how are the scores? High, low, medium or else, in other words, in what degree they have learnt? The function of measurement and evaluation is to prompt learners to learn; after an objective analysis of the scores the learners have, we can find out whether they have learnt something or not, what they are not well learnt, and so on. In details, the functions are: For students: First of all, teachers are encouraged to expatiate more clearly of their teaching object, and students are naturally and correspondently encouraged and improved. Secondly, before the schedule of testing, students are required to review, consolidate, and comprehend what they have learnt. On the other hand, it also helps learners to revise their knowledge. Thirdly, testing is also helpful for students together to compare and compete. Last but not least, self-evaluation after having known the scores of tests is also very useful for students to know themselves to learn and improve gradually. For teachers: testing is a feedback of their effect ad efficiency in teaching, especially their teaching skills and methodology, etc.

2.3 Types of the Tests

There are many different types of tests, each with a specific purpose, and a particular criterion to be measured. They fall into four main categories: aptitude tests, diagnostic tests, proficiency tests and achievement tests. An aptitude test is a test given to a person prior to any exposure to the second language, which predicts a person’s future success. It is designed to measure a person’s capacity or general ability to learn a language. A diagnostic test is designed to diagnose a particular aspect of particular language and see which aspect poses difficulty for a learner. A proficiency test is not intended to be limited to any one course, curriculum or single skill in the language. Instead, it is designed to tap global competence in any language. An achievement test, which is also referred to as an attainment test, is a test “designed to measure the extent of learning achieved by a candidate in relation to a particular course of instruction, textbook, etc. i.e. a curriculum dependent test” (University of Cambridge Local Examination Syndicate 134). According to Jacobs and Chase, an achievement test is “a systematic procedure for measuring students’ achievement in the classroom” (Jacobs and Chase 1992:8).
2.4 Testing Strategies in Testing Construction Situations

Since the early 1980s, a number of language researchers have found that strategies are correlated with language performance (e.g. Anderson, 1989; Bialystok, 1981; Huang & Van Naerssen, 1985; Jamieson & Russo, 1985; Politzer & Mcgroarty, 1985). Such studies have began to interest language testers since the results “allude to the role strategy use might have in test score variation, or more interestingly, to the role it might have in how test-takers perform on language tests” (Purpura, 1999:14). Testing is a competition and testing is adversarial. Adversarial competition requires strategic preparation. Test-makers strain to construct and administrate the test as strategically as possible. At the same time, test-takers should not only prepare for the test by doing many exercises, they have to know something about testing. To put it another way, they should be well aware of what they are being tested on, what aspect of the language will be used and they should also be clear of the intention of the test makers, and try to apply what they have leaned with regards to practical language use.

2.4.1 Construction, Administration and Scoring of Good Tests

Tests are of an integral part of most college courses. Thousands of tests are administrated every day in college classrooms, and faculty members construct most of tests. Mastery in designing classroom tests, however, is not a skill that all college teachers automatically possess. In fact, most college instructors feel poorly prepared to construct test for their classes because they have never received any kind of formal training in this area. Furthermore, they may be busy preparing and delivering lectures, conducting researches, and attending committee meetings, consequently, many of the tests are hurriedly and often poorly constructed and are not used in the appropriate way. As Milton said, “Testing is perhaps the most neglected feature of good instruction” (Milton, 1978:.101).

- Essential Qualities of a Good Test

It is commonly believed that a good test should possess three qualities: practicality, reliability and validity. If these three criteria are carefully met, a test should be administrable within given constraints, be dependable, and actually measure what it is intended to measure.

A test ought to be practical, in other words it should be, within the means of financial limitations, time constraints, ease of administration, and scoring interpretation. One important aspect of practicality is that a test should have what Oller called “instructional value”. “It ought to be possible to use the test to enhance
the delivery of instruction in student populations” (Oller, 1979:52). Practicality also means that tests should be useful in promoting instruction.

Reliability refers to the stability or consistency of test scores. A test is considered reliable if its scores remain consistent and dependable when given at different times to the same subjects. Sources of unreliability may lie in the test itself or in the scoring of the test, known respectively as test reliability and rater reliability. Generally speaking, the more samples of student test performance that we take, the more reliable our assessment or their knowledge and ability will be.

As for validity, it means the degree to which the test actually measures what it is intended to measure. Roughly, it possesses content validity, criterion-related validity and construct validity. A test is said to have content validity if its content constitutes a representative sample of the language skills, structures, etc. with which it means to be concerned. Criterion-related validity is to see how far results on the test agree with those provided by some independent and highly dependable assessment of the candidates’ abilities. A test, part of a test or a testing technique is said to have construct validity if it can demonstrate and measure the ability that it is supposed to measure.

- **Test Administration**
  Test administration involves a variety of procedures for actually giving a test and for collecting empirical information in order to “evaluate the qualities of usefulness and make inferences about test takers’ abilities” (Bachman and Palmer, 1996:231). Good test administration can provide conditions that will enable all students to demonstrate their maximum level of achievement.

  Instructors should arrive early on test day and organize test material (booklets and answer sheets) for efficient distribution. Instructors should make sure that all students are seated and that there is sufficient lighting. Then, they should provide instructions for the test. Once the test begins, instructors should maintain quiet working conditions and try to avoid interrupting the students. Approaching the end of the test, instructors should give the students a notice five or ten minutes earlier before the time is up. Students are expected to stop working when time is called at the end of the test. In order to be fair, all students must stop at the same time. One thing that must be prevented in test administration is cheating; otherwise, it is unfair to the larger group of honest students.

- **Test Scoring**
  Since test scores are commonly used in making decisions about individuals, the process to arrive at these scores is a “crucial part” of the testing process (Bachman and Palmer, 1996: 193). This process “plays a key role in insuring that the test
scores are reliable” (P193). Objective tests, such as multiple-choice, true false questions and matching can cause no problem in scoring. However, for classroom achievement tests, all the teachers that are teaching the same course are involved in the scoring. Therefore, what is of prime importance is to set a very detailed guideline for the scoring. It is a good practice to have all samples rated by two raters and have a third rater rate those samples on which the first two raters differ.

- Test Results Interpretation
Test results can be interpreted in two basic ways: criterion-referenced interpretation and norm-referenced interpretation. The College English Test primarily a criterion-referenced test. Since criterion-referenced tests are designed, to describe which learning task students can and cannot perform, rather than to discriminate among students. Items in a criterion-referenced might be answered correctly by all students (zero discriminating power) and still be effective items. If the items closely match the learning outcomes, the results simply tell us that all students have mastered these learning outcomes. The difficulty of an item in a criterion-referenced test is determined by the learning task it is designed to measure. If many students fail to do an item correctly, the learning task that is measured in this item presents an area of difficulty for the students. So, no attempt should be made to eliminate easy items or to alter item difficulty simply to obtain a spread of test scores.

It is clear that test impact, or “washback”, is a force that shapes educational practice in powerful and not always positive ways. High-stakes tests can undermine good teaching practices and cause the “inflation” of test scores. As researchers begin to understand how a high-stakes language test impacts upon the learning styles of individuals and classroom curricula, we can see a path forwards.

2.4.2 Other Considerations in Test Construction
- Test Format
The format refers to the type of items in a test. The items can appear in the form of multiple-choice, true/false, matching, short-answer questions or essay questions. Sometimes the format is believed to be more effective in reflecting the students’ high-level cognitive skills. “A common stereotype depicts multiple-choice tests as measuring simple factual recall and essays as evaluating higher-order thinking” (Jacobs and Chase.1992:25) The test format is often determined by such factors as the learning outcomes to be measured, the size of the class, and time available to prepare and score the test.
• **Test Length**
The length of a test is influenced by the weight given to the test. Formative tests are generally shorter than summative exams, which can include a greater number of items and item types. The type and difficulty of the items will also influence the number that can be included in the test.

• **Item Difficulty**
If a test is used to discriminate between students to assign grades, the instructors should prepare a test that will produce a spread of scores. On an objective test, items of average difficulty provide the widest distribution of scores. Items that are very easy or very hard cannot clearly discriminate or even negatively discriminate between different levels of achievement (Jacobs and Chase, 1992: 30). It is better to begin a test with an easy item or two for motivational purposes. Students may be psychologically affected if they cannot do the first few items correctly in a test, and thus they cannot perform well on this test. A test should also include a few difficult items in order to sufficiently challenge students, but the majority of items should be of average difficulty.

### 2.5 Use of Language Testing in College English Teaching and Learning

The National College English Test Band 4 (CET 4), which is high-stakes test, is of major significance in the teaching of college English. It is a high-stakes test partly because in most universities students are required to pass the CET 4 or TEM 4 before they can get their bachelor degree; and partly because most employers require applicants to have a CET 4 or CET 6 certificate. The CET is also important for university authorities, as the pass-rate of their students in the CET is so important in assessment for teaching quality. Therefore, it has a long washback effect on the teaching of college English in China.

#### 2.5.1 Testing in the College Classroom

There are many English teaching and learning problems associated with testing because lots of instructors view tests as just a basis for grades. Too little emphasis has been placed on using tests to help teachers to teach and students to learn. Milton said that a “test is not only a grading device, but also a teaching technique in its own right” (Milton, 1982: 31). When used properly, classroom tests can not only measure educational achievement but also contribute to the effectiveness of both teaching and learning in the classroom. Therefore, tests are very important in
college courses. Teachers can learn to write good tests, which can improve the quality of the teaching and learning process. Studies have consistently indicated that fairness in exams and grading is among the attributes that contribute to effective teaching (Centra, 1981). Teachers need to remember that their tests are important to students because major decisions are going to be made about students based on test scores and the resulting grade point average.

2.5.2 The CET 4&6 (for Non-English Majors)

2.5.2.1 The Nature of the CET

In China, major English tests designed locally include the College English Test (CET), the National Matriculation English Test (NMET), the Test for English Majors (TEM), the Graduate School Entrance English Examination (GSEEE), Public English Testing System (PETS), and the WSK—an examination to select professionals for studying and training overseas.

The College English Test (CET) is a large-scale standardized test administered nationwide by the National College English Testing Committee on behalf of the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education in China. It aims to measure the English proficiency of college/university undergraduate students in accordance with the College English Teaching Syllabus (National College English Syllabus for Non-English Majors, 1999). There are 6 grades of CET, but only Band 4 and Band 6 are administered twice a year nationally, in January and June. The test criteria are based on the National College English Syllabus by the Higher Education Department of the Ministry of Education to guide the English teaching at university level. The test scores are based on 100 points before 2005, of which a score of 60 points constitutes a passing grade. After 2005, a new grading system implements, of which scores are graded on a curved scale, so that the highest possible score is 710, while the lowest mark is 290. The CET-6 is only available to students who have passed the CET-4 (Yang, H.Z. 2002).

The test only included listening, reading and writing sections from its initial implementation in May of 1999. With the approval of the Ministry of Education, the CET-Spoken English Test (CET-SET) started its operation as a new component of the CET test battery, but it is optional and required certain points from the written test.

In most colleges and universities, the CET-4 certificate is one of the graduation requirements for students to obtain their academic degree. The CET certificate is also an asset for university graduates who want to stand a better chance in the job market. Students’ performance in the CET also affects the evaluation of teachers,
their promotions, and even merit awards. At the institution level, the passing rate on the CET is often regarded as one of the criteria to judge the prestige of a university. Therefore, the CET has exerted a huge amount of influence, reportedly negative, on English language teaching and learning at the tertiary level in China since its first administration (Yang, H.Z. 2002).

Since the inception of CET in 1987, it has attracted an increasing number of candidates every year. In 1987 only, a total number of 100,000 students sat for the test, while in the academic year of 2002 alone, the CET test population has well exceeded 6 million (Yang, H.Z. 2002). The 15 years of its development coincides with the rapid growth of the nation’s economy due to the open-door policy.

For the English major students, they also need to take part in the English tests organized by the Ministry of Education, which is the Test for English Majors. Test for English Majors (TEM) is a test battery administered in China. It is comprised of the TEM 4 and TEM 8. TEM-8 is the highest level for English major students. Passing TEM-4 is also a graduation requirement for the English major students. The test is taken on April of the second academic year, and TEM-8 is taken on March of the last academic year.

The purpose of TEM is to check the implementation of the English Teaching Syllabus for English Majors of Institutions of Higher Learning (shortly as ETSEMIHL) and to bring about beneficial backwash effects on teaching and learning. According to the Syllabus, the aim of English teaching is to "foster versatile English majors who are at once proficient in English language, familiar with foreign cultures, and expert in application of their English knowledge to such professions as translators, interpreters, teachers, managers, and researchers in the fields involving English" (ETSEMIHL 2000).

2.5.2.2 The Impact of CET-4 on English Teaching

● The impact on learners’ motivation for learning English;

CET-4 is a prerequisite for getting the academic degree. Therefore, students learn English under great pressure and, in turn, enhance their instrumental motivation, rather than the integrative motivation. In such a situation, learning English is a burden instead of a pleasure.

● The impact on the conduct of the Communicative Teaching Approach;

Since CET-4 is the focus of learning English and it is the terminal measure for learner performance, the teachers always find it hard to arrange classroom activities which should involve the active participation of students. Similarly, students show little enthusiasm in practicing their oral English, because oral ability is not going to be tested, neither in the school test, nor in CET-4 (Only those who have passed
CET-4 with scores of over 80 or CET-6 with scores of over 75 have the privilege of taking the CET-4 oral test, which did not come into being until 1999). To learn what is going to be tested is always the purpose of learning English for the learners with instrumental motivation.

● The impact on English teaching;

As a large-scale test, the format of CET-4 has not changed much since it came into being in 1987. 15% of CET-4 is presented in subjective items (excluding short answer questions or compound dictation), while 85% of CET-4 is presented in objective items - in the form of multiple-choice (Yang, H.Z. 2002). A multiple-choice test item is usually set out in such a way that the candidates are required to select the answer from four given options, only one of which is correct.

Though the multiple-choice test has reliability and is easy to mark, the disadvantages are worth noting. There are a number of problems associated with the use of this format as far as the candidates are concerned.

Firstly, the result may not be reliable if the candidates get the wrong answer because the failure may be due to lack of comprehension of the given options, especially in testing the listening ability.

Secondly, scores gained in a multiple-choice test may be suspected because the candidates can get the correct answer only by guessing. The chance of guessing the correct answer in a four-option multiple-choice item is one in four – on the average, 25% of the total score might be the result of guessing.

Thirdly, the multiple-choice test may not accurately reflect the candidate’s real ability in using the language. The person who can identify the correct response in the item may not be able to produce the correct form when speaking or writing.

Though there are many disadvantages of multiple-choice test format, it is still taken by CET-4 because of its feasibility for large-scale populations. Directed by such a permanently stable testing format, students are keen to acquire the strategies for making the plausible choice from the 4 given options. The teachers interviewed admit that usually at the fourth semester, normal English class can hardly proceed without doing model test papers of CET-4 in order to pass the test. Taking our institute as an example about 10% of the students will be absent from English class, and almost no one is absent from the coaching session for CET-4 test preparation. Though most students are present at the normal English class, they evidently lack interest in the classroom activities. Many schools take extra time to get the students fully prepared for CET-4 by doing CET-4 model test papers or add guidance class for CET.

If the students want to pass CET-4, it seems almost a prerequisite for them to do the model test papers. Therefore, the normal sequence of English teaching is
affected. Hughes (1989:61) points out, “where a test which is important to students is multiple-choice in nature, there is a danger that practice for the test will have a harmful effect on learning and teaching. Practice at multiple-choice items (especially when, as happens, as much attention is said to improving one’s educated guessing as to the content of the items) will not usually be the best way for students to improve their command of a language.”

2.5.2.3 Advantages and Disadvantages of CET-4

Although CET-4 has so many impacts on learners’ motivation, the conduct of communicative competence, and the consequence of teaching, we cannot deny its advantages, it’s just like a coin has two sides. If we analyze CET-4, we should recognize the positive and negative effects of it.

- Advantages of CET-4
  A. The CET 4&6 has earned the attention of colleges and universities and many education departments. An emphasis on the teaching and learning of College English has brought into the initiative of teachers and students. Therefore, it has successfully promoted the implementation of the National College English Teaching Syllabus, and consequently, the improvement of English language teaching and learning in colleges and universities in China (Yang, H.Z. 2002).
  
  B. Every year, the CET provides objective descriptions for colleges and universities across the country with regards to student English proficiency. Since educational statistical methods are used and scores are equated, what the scores mean keeps constant over the time and comparable across different administration of the tests.
  
  C. After each administration, the CET provides an abundance of information as feedback for the classroom teachers to improve their teaching.
  
  D. The CET has become acknowledged by the public. A CET Certificate in many cases has become one of the prerequisites by which personnel departments recruit college graduates.

- Disadvantages of CET-4
  A. CET-4, in some respects, has a negative backwash on language teaching and learning in colleges, as already discussed.
  
  B. As most of the items adopted in CET-4 are multiple-choice items, there are many disadvantages of it as follows:
  
  Firstly, the scores gained in multiple-choice tests may be suspected because the candidates might have guessed all the range of the scores. Scores are reduced by the number of points the candidates are estimated to have obtained by guessing. Secondly, the technique
severely restricts what can be tested (Hughes, 1989). The basic problem here is that multiple-choice items require distracters, but distracters are not always available. In a grammar test, it may not be possible to find three or four plausible alternatives to the correct structure. The result is that command of what may be an important structure is simply not tested. Thirdly, good multiple-choice tests are extremely difficult to write. Hughes’ experience (Hughes, 1989) is that multiple-choice tests that produced for use within institutions and are often filled with faults. Common amongst these are: more than one correct answer; no correct answer; there are clues in the options as to which is correct (for example the correct option may be different in length to the others); ineffective distracters. Fourthly, cheating may be facilitated. The fact that the response to a multiple-choice test (A, B, C and D) is so simple makes it easy to communicate to other candidates nonverbally. Some defense against this is to have at least two versions of the test, the only difference between them being the order in which the options are presented. Fifthly, the extensive use of the multiple-choice tests will discourage students in writing. The evidence of the undesirable side-effect of such a use can be obtained in Guo’s article (Guo, H.R. 1994).

From the strong impact of CET-4 on college English teaching and its disadvantages as above, it is not a good phenomenon to prepare for CET-4 and to study English for CET-4. The preparation for CET-4 is not helpful with regards to improving the students’ communicative competence. Consequently, it is quite necessary for colleges and universities to establish an institute-base speaking test, in order to improve the communicative competence of the candidates. It is also necessary that they use more types of items, for instance, subjective items, etc. The situation of overusing multiple choices in CET should attract greater attention from educators and researchers, and should be changed as soon as possible.
Chapter III

Comparison of Western and Chinese Testing System

Language testing has undergone great changes in the West and in China in the past century for many reasons, including theoretical factors and non-theoretical factors. Inevitably, they will share some similarities and have some differences.

3.1 The Development of Language Testing Theories in the West

The development of language testing theories can be divided to four periods. The division of the first three periods was proposed by Spolsky in 1978, which was accepted extensively in the language testing field. They are: Pre-scientific Period, Psychometric-Structuralist Period and Integrative-Sociolinguistic Period. The fourth period is the Communicative Testing Period. It is well known that the purpose of this testing system is to examine the communicative competence of the candidates (Bachman and Palmer, 1996).

3.1.1 Pre-Scientific Period

All the language testing before the 1940s was known as Pre-Scientific language testing. During this period, the language teachers didn’t have sufficient scientific understanding about the basic concept of what is language. They regarded testing as a branch of knowledge, mainly consisting of grammar, vocabulary and phonology (Liu, R.Q. 1999). There are no quantitative bases on examining the skills and competence of the students in the testing. The testing results are mostly based on the teachers’ subjective judgment. Much attention is given to grammar rules, words transformation and the use of phrases of the traditional testing system. Normally there is no oral or listening examination. The persons who are in charge of making tests don’t take notice of reliability, validity and practicality. Therefore, such testing is called “Pre-scientific testing”.

The testing items which occur most frequently in traditional testing are (Gao, S.L. 2006):

- To fill in the blanks: singular or plural forms of nouns, definite or indefinite article of nouns; the voice or tense of verbs, etc.;
- Grammatical analysis: to point out the sentences are simple or compound, etc;
- To rewrite the sentences: to change the personal pronouns, to change the verbs from
present tense to past tense, etc;

- Translation: to translate English to the students’ mother tongue language, or vice versa;
- To answer questions: to answer questions about the given passages, etc;
- Abbreviation: to abbreviate a long article to a shorter one, or use a short article to demonstrate the main content of the given article;
- To write a composition.

The listening and oral tests are regarded as subsidiary, which are not the necessary parts of the syllabus or testing. The characteristics of the pre-scientific testing system are emphasizing linguistic knowledge and written examination while neglecting language use, listening and speaking.

### 3.1.2 Psychometric-Structuralist Period

From the 1950s to the 1960s, the Psychometric-structuralist language testing system had a dominate position, its influence lasting until the 1990's. During this period, language testing became more and more scientific. Its representative was discrete tests, which theoretical foundation was structuralist linguistics and behaviorist Psychology. (Li, Y.J. 1997).

During this period, researchers began to realize that to study the rules of language is not equal to the study of language. American Structuralists headed by Bloomfield stated that language is a system of structured signs and a custom. Language is composed of phonology, vocabulary and grammars that form a finite set. Using the elements in the finite set can generate an infinite set of sentences. Learning a language is trying to master the elements in the finite set in order to generate and comprehend sentences in the infinite set. Just because language can be divided into sub-ordinate elements, testers can design discrete items to test if learners have mastered these elements. And this method of testing is also called the atomistic approach (Yang, H.Z. 2002). For example, the structuralist testing system practices the divisible tests of phonology, vocabulary, grammar, and the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Synchronizing with structuralism, behaviorist psychology is another element which contributes to the development of testing (Liu, R.Q. 1999). Behaviorism only interests in observable behaviors and considers the study of the unobservable as non-scientific study. Influenced by behaviorism, structuralist testing emphasizes the scientific quality, veracity, objectivity and reliability of testing. In order to establish reliability, the testing system advocates the objective questions.

Compared with the pre-scientific testing, the psychometric-structuralist testing system has advantages in more all-around contents and in a more reliable and objective scoring criterion.

However, in 1979, J.Oller stated the defects of structuralist testing. He thought that any
system showed its effect and essence by all-round interactions of its elements. However, the discrete testing method divides the language into items and tests them in an isolated fashion, neglecting the relationships and interaction of these items in communicative context. Thus, the essence and effect of language is thrown out. Therefore, the psychometric-structuralist testing system lacks structural validity.

3.1.3 Integrative-Sociolinguistic Period

From the mid 1970s, the language testing entered its third stage: integrative-sociolinguistic period. Language testing scholars and researchers came to the realization that language or language use is not only a complex interaction, but also a dynamic and creative functional system. In the actual use of language, the same idea or meaning could be expressed in many ways; even if the speakers are not familiar with some language knowledge points, normally this would not stop the communication from moving forward. As for such a situation, a new request regarding the content and validity of language testing was referred, that is to examine the communicative ability of the students integrally, rather than the isolated language knowledge points. Therefore, the new testing method-integrative skills tests emerged, in order to check the students’ language knowledge and ability completely (Wu, Z.M. 2002).

Integrative skills tests emphasize that testing should employ a global integrative approach which helps testers to evaluate the all-round language levels with one testing and make students employ all of their language knowledge and skills in that testing. At that time, integrative types of questions are prevalent, such as close, correction, dictation, interview and writing etc. However, there are still many disadvantages to this method. For instance, testing items like cloze, dictation can ensure objectivity in the process of scoring, but the dynamic and creative functions of the language are neglected. Though it’s easier to design the items as dictation or composition, it is difficult to be reliable and objective in the scoring process, especially with regards to the reliability of the oral examination.

3.1.4 Communicative Testing Period

With the deeper understanding of language, the structuralist linguistic was challenged. In 1965, Chomsky denied the behaviorist theories completely, basing on that, he referred to transformational-generative grammar, of which linguistic competence and linguistic performance are the two basic concepts. The linguistic competence here means abstract language ability. In 1972, sociolinguist Hymes put forward the concept of communicative competence, of which he argued that it is not only necessary for learners to use qualified sentences according to the grammar rules, but they should also have the ability to use these
sentences within different context. On the basis of many theories, Bachman raised the communicative language ability model, which further broadens the connotation of the concept of the communicative competence (Bachman and Palmer, 1996).

At the end of 1960s, the communicative testing system was first raised by Spolsky, Upshur and Jakobovits. This testing system developed in 1970s (Spolsky, 1995). Since 1980s, communicative testing system has been paid much more attention and undergone quicker development.

Mastering a language means that learners can use the language they learn to communicate effectively with each other in a given context. There are many different ideas about communicative competence, but one point is the same: the process of communication is a process of interpretation and negotiation between the interlocutors because the same language forms may have different meanings in terms of different contexts, aims and roles of speakers etc. Therefore, language testing must be implemented with authentic materials in authentic contexts to observe if the learners have the competence of using language to achieve the aims of communication. Thus, the direct testing method has been put forward.

Compared with other testing system, the communicative testing system focuses on the competence of completing a communicative task rather than mastering some skills or points of language knowledge.

However, because of the variability and infiniteness of contexts and communicative demands, it is difficult to design authentic contexts for testing. In addition, the communicative competence in one authentic context is not enough to induce the competence in other contexts. And the testers have difficulties in controlling reliability, objectivity and interpretation of scores.

3.2 The Development of English Language Testing in China

English education in China began from the middle and late period of Qing Dynasty. And the English language testing also has undergone tortuous changes in the past 130 years. Although testing in China largely learns from the testing in the West, it still has its own characteristics and can be divided into three stages which are generally clear-cut.

3.2.1 Focusing on Translation

In 1862, the first English teaching institution—School of Combined Learning—was established in Beijing, marking the beginning of English education in China (Gu, W.X. 2004).

Facing the invasion of foreign countries, the direct cause of English teaching
was the exigent demands of foreign affairs. Thus, the School of Combined Learning was built with specific and clear aim: educating translators. English teaching in the School of Combined Learning centered on practicing translation, which was its unique characteristic. The arrangement of courses was proceeding from the translation of simple sentences to the translation of articles, and then to the translation of books.

Another characteristic of the School of Combined Learning was the frequent tests which were used to encourage students to make every possible effort with regards to English learning. The tests employed by the School of Combined Learning could be divided into month-tests, season-tests, year-tests, and grade final including written forms and oral forms. Month-tests were held on the first day of every month, with the papers designed by teachers themselves, and season-tests, similar to month-tests, were held on the first day of February, May, August and November. Different from month-tests, papers of season-tests needed to be authorized before testing. The contents of month-tests and season-tests were translation of English notes into Chinese and Chinese treaties into English. Year-tests were held before October 10 of every year, including translation, switching between English and Chinese and oral tests. The most important tests held in the School of Combined Learning were grade finals once three years including previous examination, second examination and oral examination which respectively tested on translation of English notes into Chinese, translation of Chinese treaties into English and oral interpretation of items in Chinese treaties into English.

Testing in the late period of Qing Dynasty is characterized by translation, and it is also the first stage of development of testing in China.

3.2.2 Focusing on Writing and Reading

From the establishing of the Metropolitan College to the 1980s, although there were some attempts, changes and improvements, the English teaching and testing were lingering on writing and reading.

Before the foundation of the People’s Republic of China, the nation was in the state of turbulence. But the teaching of English was never halted. Following by the Metropolitan College in 1902, many other colleges built and commenced the major of English. The contents of teaching focused on English reading, history, fictions, poems, philosophical history, literature criticism, classic works, phonology, linguistics etc. The characteristics of testing at that time were that the testing contests emphasized reading comprehension and writing. Although English testing in some college (like Jinling College in Nanjing), also included oral forms (Wen,
Q.F.1999), the testers only asked unrelated questions. For example, the former question might ask “how tall are you?”, the latter might be “what did you eat for breakfast?”.

After 1949, the educators, in order to improve the foreign language teaching, made some reforms:

- reforming on curriculum designing
- reforming on text books
- experimenting on new teaching methods
- publishing of English magazines

The reforms contributed to the progress of English teaching. However, the necessity of testing reform had not been realized.

### 3.2.3 Integrated Testing

From 1980s, English teaching in China has been greatly changed by introducing western theories. Firstly, teaching began to be based on linguistic theories. Secondly, types of classes and text books have been reformed and the discrete-subject teaching has enhanced the integrative development of students in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Thirdly, college English has been considered to be an independent subject in college education (Wu, Z.M. 2002). Also, the nationwide research institutions of countrywide College English have been established, which has accelerated the research in English teaching. The reforms have also resulted in great changes in testing: the implementation of College English Testing Band 4/6 in 1987 and in 1989, and the employment of oral tests from May 1999 marked the coming of relatively maturation of the testing system in China. CET Band4/6 tests the comprehensive competence of English of students. They include the oral tests, listening comprehension, reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar and writing whose contents are within the English Testing Syllabus. Providing by experts specialized in testing, every item in the paper must be analyzed and examined in the degree of difficulty and ease and the degree of differentiation. Besides, in order to be reliable and valid, before issuing scores, CET has undergone data processing, including data entry, weighted processing and writing-score adjusting, in order to avoid the systematic errors of people who correct the papers (Yang, H.Z. 2002).

CET, involving language testing, education meterage, language teaching and computer programming etc, are complex, scientific and systematic.
3.3 Comparison of Testing in the West and in China

3.3.1 Similarities

● Theories diversity in theoretical foundation
The development of testing in the east and the west follows the rules that more and more theories in every field join into the theoretical foundations of testing.

Actually, the testing system in China largely learns from that of the West. Thus, the similarity in the theoretical foundations between them is obvious. Pre-scientific testing system is only based on mechanical linguistics. But in the 1940s, structuralism in linguistics and behaviorism in psychology influenced the development of testing. In the 1970s, Hymes’ sociolinguistics, Chomsky’s transformational generative theory and Widdowson’s communicative theory form the foundation of communicative testing system. Nowadays, educational information technology is changing our testing (He, G.D. 2001). CET today involves the computer technology in paper designing, scoring and results analyzing. Therefore, a new era will come following the testing digital which is characterized by cognitive linguistics, behaviorism, psychometrics, ethnology and information technology.

● Similarity in original intentions
Tests in the West and in China have the same original intentions of implementing tests: to provide a tool for measuring achievement and facilitate teaching and learning.

Yang Huizhong (1999) has stated that language testing is a tool of evaluation, which assesses students’ language ability and reflects both the strengths and weaknesses in language teaching. The intention of language testing is for improvement in language teaching and learning. In China, the establishment of testing syllabus is based on the teaching syllabus in order to test to what extent students have achieved in their courses.

In the West, the situations are the same. Although scholars have different understanding and maintain their own opinions on testing, they share the same idea that a test is just a tool for measurement and facilitation. For example, Carroll stated that the “test is a procedure designed to elicit certain behavior from which one can make inferences about certain characteristics” (Bachman, 1990).

● Influenced by external and non-theoretical forces
Another similarity of testing between the East and the West is that the development of testing is influenced by external and non-theoretical forces like politics,
economics, and finance.

In the first testing phase, English language testing in China emphasized the translation because of the influence of the political factors. At that time, the foreign affairs between the government of Qing Dynasty and the imperialist powers needed lots of translators to translate treaties and notes etc. Therefore, English language testing only focused on students’ integrated ability of translation (Fu Ke, 1986). However, at present, with the development of economics, communicative and integrated ability are more important. So language testing evaluates students’ ability of listening, speaking, reading and writing etc.

The situations are the same in the West. Take the starting of TOEFL, for example. From February 1962 to March 1963, many meetings were held by the newly established council for TOEFL involving negotiations among the sponsoring organizations, the Department of Defense and colleges and universities (Wu, Z.M. 2002).

In a word, except for theoretical breakthrough, the external, non-theoretical, institutional and social forces often turn out to be powerful explanations of the development of actual language testing.

3.3.2 Differences

- Difference in relationships between teaching and testing

Language teaching and testing have a close relationship. Language teaching aims to make students mastering English into tools for participating in international communication; and the aim of language testing is to provide a scientific tool of measurement to evaluate the language ability of students objectively and precisely in order to show the strength and weakness in language teaching and to improve the quality of teaching.

During the 1970s, needs-analysis procedures appeared in language planning, and the Council of Europe’s modern language project adopted those ideas widely with its principal advocates Richterich and Chancerel. Needs-analysis is a set of procedures for specifying the parameters of a course of study including the criteria for grouping students, the selection of course contents, methodology, course length, intensity and duration. According to the theory of needs-analysis, the contents of testing are determined by the contents of teaching which is dependent on students’ needs. That is to say, language teaching is determined by students’ needs, and language testing is guided by language teaching: what to teach is what to test. Without language teaching, language testing is unnecessary because language testing itself cannot improve the language ability of students.
But in China, although scholars insist that the test is only a tool, language testing plays a dominant role in English language education in practice. Testing contents determine teaching contents. Tests become the decisive force in English language teaching and learning. Take vocabulary teaching and learning, for example. In English teaching, some teachers emphasize the vocabulary on the syllabus of CET and students try their best to remember these words. Both believe that, only by remembering these words, students can reach the level of language demanded by teaching syllabus of College English. Besides, some teachers even focus on teaching skills and strategies of testing in class to guarantee that students can get higher marks in testing.

**Difference in criterion of evaluation in language testing**

Many Chinese feel puzzled that some so-called ‘good’ students, as considered by Chinese teachers, are not ‘good’ in the eyes of foreign teachers, while some bad ones are appreciated by foreigners. This can be explained by the differences in criteria of evaluation in language testing.

In China, testing emphasizes the “point” and neglects “facets”. Students are demanded to give the specific answers to the specific questions. By doing this, students can get higher marks, but those who provide creative answers according to their own opinions will be criticized by teachers who think that these answers are excursive. The Chinese evaluation of testing cannot give integrated judgments on students’ achievement.

However, in the west, America for example, testing emphasizes “facet” rather than “points”. This encourages the creative ability of students and can examine the integrated development of students’ progress in language learning.

### 3.4 The Developing Trends of Language Testing in the West and in China

#### 3.4.1 The Reforms and Development of Testing in the West

In the testing practice, the reforming steps of England, America, Japan and Russia are further advanced than the other countries in the world (Gao, S.L.2006).

- In recent years, increasing attention is being paid by many American research institutions to how to use testing results to improve teaching quality. They think it’s helpful to use the tests to find out the bad schools and unqualified teachers. By analyzing the test results, they can find out the problems, such as whether the teachers know enough about the test books, whether the teachers have sufficient reference materials, thus, they can help the teachers according to their problems.
addition, many people regard the multiple choice tests as too easy, which cannot reflect the students’ comprehensive language ability. The others insist on using more short answers or short composition instead of multiple choice items, which can help them to gain more knowledge regarding the students’ language competence. But at the same time, they have to face the problems: it is difficult to be reliable and objective in the scoring process and the more the numbers of the candidates there are, the more difficult the scoring process will be.

- From the 1990s, England has been carrying out testing reforms in full scale. Its principle is “the core principle of testing is to estimate the positive achievement of all the candidates; to design different degree test items in order to satisfy the social needs” (He, G.D. 2001).

### 3.4.2 The Reforms and Development of Testing in China

China has the oldest history of testing and examination system for selecting the qualified talents for the government, which can be traced back to the imperial period nearly two thousand years ago. But the study on testing theories has fallen far behind that of the west. There are four features of the testing system in China: The language testing still stays in the psychometric-structuralist period; people pay more attention to the testing scores rather than its theories; people think highly of the evaluation and selecting function of the testing; the positions of testing and teaching are inverted (Shu, Y.X. 2001). From the prospect of the relationship between language teaching and testing, the test is a tool for measuring the language competence of the students objectively, correctly and fairly, which can also reflect the strength and weakness of teaching and learning. It can also be served in improving the teaching quality.

- **The testing manners**

  In China, the widely used testing items are multiple-choice items. The College English Tests and the English tests for master entrance examination adopt them frequently. Especially the CET 4/6 has profound influence on college English teaching and learning during these 20 years. Many studies show that the testing results of CET 4/6 have obvious relevance with the real language abilities of students. The data from CET 4/6 has also tightly relevance with the actual situation of the colleges. If used properly, this data could have extreme functions on prompting students learning and improving teachers teaching (Yang, H.Z., 1999).

- **The testing studies**

  As for the testing studies in China, there are huge differences from that of the west, whatever from the numbers of researching findings, studying manners, studying objects or studying

- The developing trends of testing in China

From the view of the development of the testing history, the tests originated from the examinations of schools, and are perfected by the social examinations. The school examinations emerged together with school education. It is a major method to measure the teaching quality and to evaluate the teaching achievements.

Although language testing is an important part of language teaching, in the previous language teaching practice, due to overweighing the final evaluation, the function of testing was broadened limitlessly; sometimes testing even became the only evaluative manner for language teaching and learning, which is the main reason for the occurrence of “exam-oriented education” in China (Gao, S.L. 2006). Therefore, it is necessary to undertake research on how the teachers utilize the formative assessment to get the feedback, so as to guide their teaching, and also to research how the students use the formative assessment to adjust their study strategies and to improve their study methods.

In the traditional teaching evaluation process, people only pay attention to the mid-term examinations, end-term examinations and national examinations. From the 1990s, researchers and scholars in the west realized the importance of the formative assessment of the second language teaching area. The concept of “formative assessment” was first raised by Scriven in 1967. The formative assessment highlights all kinds of changes in the developing process of the people or the thing, even the tiniest change.

In the classroom teaching evaluation system, besides the traditional testing methods like reading tests, answering questions, dictation, translation or some quizzes, some new evaluation strategies should also be adopted, for instance, using questionnaire, organizing a debate, etc.

The developing trends of the tests in the West are like this: the theoretical construction is diverse; the testing system is not only based on the modern linguistics, education metrics, psychology, and also focuses on the new testing theories constructed by the basic information technology; researchers pay more attention on the study of the testing process, rather than the testing results (Gao S.L. 2006).

China has its own national conditions. There are definitely a lot of differences with regards to the education ideal, education purpose, the objective of talents training, testing methods and testing goals between the West and China. The testing scholars should learn from the good testing experience of the West, meanwhile, they should also consider China’s national situation.
Chapter IV

Problems of English Education and Testing in China

Reviewing and comparing the development of language testing in the West and in China, problems in language education from the layer of objectives, contents, method, etc. will be found. It is also necessary to probe their reasons.

4.1 Problems of English Education in China

4.1.1 Problems of English Teaching and Learning Objectives

Because the CET or TEM certificate is not only the requirement to obtain the Bachelor degree diploma for the undergraduate students, but it also has become the prerequisite for employment, lots of students aim at “passing” the CET or TEM when learning English just for getting a certificate instead of developing their English proficiency. The heavier the social weight a public test carries, the more it becomes a high-stake test, which results in “teaching to the test”, “coaching test-taking strategies” etc., instead of normal teaching in the classroom. The test designers’ original intention may thus be forgotten. Students often complain that test contents do not reflect the material that they have been learning in the classroom. They often feel somewhat cheated when they have put forth a great deal of effort and then take a test that does not offer them the chance to show what they have learned.

In addition, English education has its own problems in the educational contents, in the aspect of curriculum setting, teaching methods and materials, and teacher training which caused high investment and low efficiency in China’s English language education.

4.1.2 Problems of English Educational Contents

4.1.2.1 The Traditional English Teaching Mode

The most obvious feature of the traditional College English teaching mode is “teacher-centered” (Hu and Che 2005). The teachers instruct, explain and ask questions, while the students memorize, imitate and answer questions. The knowledge points what the teachers teach in classroom are stipulated by the teachers’ guide books. How to make the students memorize the knowledge points is the most important thing for the teachers. From the aspect of teaching content, the
comprehension of words, sentence types and syntactic construction are what the teacher believes to be most important, and they ignore the training of the students’ initiative on study by themselves. Consequently, the students rely too much on the teachers. There are two main results for this: the students don’t like to think about questions by themselves, and they don’t have enough chance to practice their capability on English communication. Analyzing the traditional teaching mode can help us to know more about why the Chinese students are good at writing, reading, but not at speaking and listening.

The situation has improved year by year. More colleges have been introducing multimedia teaching if their financial condition permits them to, which can help the students to enhance their synthetic English competence, especially their communicative ability.

4.1.2.2 The Overused or Abused Tests
As mentioned, the College-Entrance Examination is the most prestigious and important way to select students for higher schools. Therefore, it directs classroom teaching and learning to the examination-driven mode, the aim of the senior school teachers is to help the students get higher score in the College-Entrance Examination, rather than helping them to improve their proficiency of the knowledge. The situation is similar to that in the universities: whether the students can pass CET (College English Test)/ TEM (Test for English major students) - but not only for English exams - or any other national examinations is what the professors and students care most about, instead of their real ability of using the knowledge what they should have had in hand after studying lessons in schools.

A number of exams are valued by parents and schools as incentives and evidence of progress and achievement of teaching and learning. Because of the overemphasis of the society on examination qualifications, tests are often overused or abused. As a result, students, while bemoaning tests, are still busy sitting many tests for certification of professional competence. Meanwhile, excessive tests may deprive students of their desire to learn for pleasure and rid them of interest in English, thus leading many to be fed up both physically and mentally (Tian Q. and Wang Y., 2002).

4.1.2.3 Serious Disjointed English Teaching in Secondary and Higher Educations
The Chinese government’s strategy for foreign language education permeates the national curricula of educational institutions at all levels. Approved and issued by the Ministry of Education, it is reflected in the form of required levels of proficiency in English, length of school and required courses. In China, education is
compulsory between the ages of six and fifteen. Since English has long been an obligatory subject in high schools, anyone who completes only compulsory education in China has had at least three years in English language training. In the mid-1990s, it was decided that English teaching should begin in grade three of primary school wherever conditions permit. That decision extends the length of training in English to seven years for those who decide to end their education at the age of fifteen. Thus, a student has learned English for at least 13 years till the graduation from college. Considering that Chinese students have devoted more and more time to the study of English, the achievements in English teaching and learning are not satisfactory. It is because English education at the various levels of education in China has not yet been made into a continuous and coordinated process. The teaching of English in primary schools, high schools and colleges was designed separately, instead of being regarded as a connected sequence. Consequently, there is no easy transition from an earlier stage to a later one. In addition, there are frequent and tedious repetitions in courses and in textbooks adopted at different levels, which can turn out to be a waste of time for the students (Fan, W.F.2000).

Since different curriculum standards, requirements, and syllabus of English are made and implemented in primary schools, high schools and colleges, a repetition of teaching contents, the wasting of time, and the excessive burden of students due to a lack of overall planning and general consideration has been caused. For example, it is regulated in the Senior School English Curriculum Criteria that the teaching aim is to train the students’ integrative language competence, which is also put forward in the College English Curriculum Requirement with the particular emphasis on the listening and speaking skills for the college students. In the former, it is required that the English vocabulary for an excellent student of senior school should be up to 4500 and 3300 for common students. For the college students after so many years of English learning, the requirement of vocabulary is also 4500 which is the basic requirements for a graduate (Fan, W.F.2000).

4.1.2.4 The Limitation of Teaching Materials
During the years from 1985 to 1994, the Institution of National Higher Education organized the work of the compilation of four series of textbooks and established the National College English test system of CET-4 and CET-6. All the textbooks are focused on intensive reading, which takes up most of the time in classroom with regards to studying vocabulary and grammar (Shu, D.F. 2004). It is in the belief that, if the materials are challenging and provide the students with as much input of information as possible, they can pass the exam more easily. Therefore, the modes of discourse are almost unitary expositions and argumentations with the topics of politics, economy, culture, science and technology. It is a shame that teachers only
have to consider the difficulty of the language to meet the requirements of CET-4 without taking account of the needs and interests of the students.

The existing textbooks overemphasize the language forms but neglect language use, which are actually language-based. The text itself is intended to show how the structures are formed and how they work. The post reading comprehension questions are designed to check how well the students understand the challenging language points. The related exercises are concerned with the language points in the text in the diverse ways ranging from vocabulary, phrases, and sentence pattern to grammar, usage and collocation (Shu, D.F. 2004).

*The National College English Syllabus* (1996) has formulated the direction of teaching objective and the proficiency the students desire to achieve, which requires the students to obtain a greater reading capacity, the elementary level of writing and speaking and the use of English as a tool to obtain information needed for their future specialties, and also to lay a solid foundation for raising their level of English. The existing textbooks are the reflection of the syllabus with reading capacity as the central concern, which caused the imbalanced development of the four skulls.

4.1.2.5 The Problems in Teacher Training

There is an apparent need to upgrade teachers’ professional competence. Without qualified teachers, no matter how good the curriculums, syllabuses, textbooks and tests are, the development of English teaching will be handicapped and the quality compromised.

There are large numbers of English learners in China, so there is always a severe shortage of English teachers. This has been a long-term problem in colleges and universities. According to the survey, the ratio of the number of English teachers and students in colleges is 1:130, and the most worrying statistic is that 73.2% of college teachers only have achieved a bachelor’s degree, or even a qualification below, which has caused the unqualified and low-level English proficiency of the teachers and thereby prevented the development of English teaching (Shu, D.F. 2004).

Teacher training has been a long-running problem in China. Some Chinese universities actually employ native speakers for the teaching of foreign languages. Yet, the overwhelming majority of teachers of foreign languages in China is of Chinese origin and has been educated domestically. The problem with regards to teacher training is two-fold: the number and the qualification of teachers. On one hand, it seems that three hundred universities offering a four-year bachelor’s program in English can never turn out enough graduates who are willing to work in schools to meet the need for teachers of English. On the other hand, every year,
numerous teachers simply turn their backs on teaching for better-paid jobs in foreign or joint-venture companies. Since a college teaching position now requires at least a master’s degree, there is a strong and steady demand for teacher training at the graduate level. It is indeed a tremendously backbreaking job to train enough qualified teachers of English quickly enough to further improve the quality of the present faculties in educational institutions in China.

4.2 Problems of English Language Testing in China

The grammar-translated method has been used for a long time for English language teaching in China. The understanding of grammar knowledge and the differentiation of the meaning of words are emphasized (Hu, H. 2007). From the end of 20th century, the communicative testing system became increasingly important. The communicative testing system focuses on the competence of completing a communicative task rather than mastering some skills or points of language knowledge. Relevant people have come to realize the importance of this testing system and use it more frequently than before. For instance, pre-scientific tests, psychometric-structuralist tests, integrative-sociolinguistic tests and communicative tests occupy a proportion respectively. This reflects the improvement of the understanding for language ability of the educators. Nevertheless, there are still some stubborn problems of the English language testing in China.

Firstly, for English education in China, the method of evaluation is monotonous (Tian, Q.and Wang, Y. 2002). People take it for granted that a test, especially a written test, is the only measure instrument. English language ability can only be approbated by tests like the Matriculation English Test, CTE and the tests designed by teachers in the middle or at the end of terms which have the similar format.

However, according to Bachman’s arguments, forms of testing must consider authenticity which includes situational authenticity and communicative authenticity. The closer the test tasks are to real-life situations and communication, the more accurate the test results are. Therefore, the monotonous written tests employed by English education in China cannot guarantee high authenticity in testing.

Secondly, test results are the sole criterion of assessment (Tian, Q.and Wang, Y. 2002). In China, test results play a decisive role in all phases of education. Test scores instead of integrated inspection on students’ ability decide students’ destiny. For example, an annual College Entrance Examination is the most important examination for all Chinese students, teachers and schools. The importance of the test is in the test results, the sole element determining whether or not the student
can enter a college, how good a college he/she can enter, the teacher’s achievement in teaching and the school’s reputation etc.

In fact, test scores are only one of many factors that determine students’ ability. Huang, Q.Y. (2004) advocates the rationality of American assessment criteria that takes three elements into consideration—students’ usual performance, extracurricular activities and test results.

Thirdly, the rules of testing forms and contents are over-explicit. In order to get high marks in testing, many books are published to induce the rules of testing, like CET. According to the induced rules, mechanical training of doing exercises is followed. Some authorities are especially involved in testing. Because of the monotonous testing requirements in China, rules are easily handled by both testees and teachers. Thus, the quality of tests is poor.

4.2.1 Unilateral Understanding towards Testing Objectives

The College English Syllabus (2009) points out that great emphasis should be placed on students’ communicative competence, with the teachers trying to encourage the students to use English more frequently, and to guide the students to participate in more communicative activities whether school or outside. The College English Tests Band 4 Syllabus (1994) claims that the purpose of this test is to examine the abilities of using the English language and to examine to what extent the students understand the grammar structure and words uses. In other words, if we have a theoretical system of language teaching on the one hand, but we implement the tests through another theoretical foundation on the other, such testing will not provide effective and real feedback on teaching (Hu, H., 2007). For example, we use the grammar-translated method in teaching English, but we examine the students’ abilities of using language to communicate in testing, which leads to the English testing that is discordent with the English Teaching Syllabus and language teaching theories. Such a situation is very bad for the English language teaching.

Testing is an important part of the whole teaching activities, which should be an effective method to implement the objectives of teaching. But because of the historical background in China and the stress of entering a higher school, the positions of testing and teaching are reversed. People regard the testing results as the evaluative basis, and they think the scores are the only evaluative standard on measuring whether the students are successful or not. Many people even hold the idea that passing a high language test can prove the candidates have already mastered that language. Therefore, in the teaching process, the tests are regarded as
the teaching objectives because the teachers want to raise the students’ scores and
the passing rate of some English language tests. And the testing contents become
the teaching and learning content for the teachers and students. Then, teaching is
discords Syllabus and Textbooks; cultural background and explanations of texts,
and the classroom activities are always omitted; students’ competence in various
aspects of English language is ignored, etc (Tian, Q.and Wang, Y. 2002). All of these
phenomena are not good for the training of students’ communicative abilities.

4.2.2 Unscientific Language Testing Method

With the development of teaching and testing theories, more and more Chinese
experts (Li, Y.Z.1997; Yang, H.Z.1999; Shu, Y.X. 2001; Hu, H. 2007.) are beginning to
consider that scientific testing requires the integration of reliability and validity.
Reliability means the stability or consistency of test scores. Validity means the
degree to which the test actually measures what it is intended to measure. High
reliability requires scientific testing. Language lacks authenticity if it is divided
into pieces as many separate skills. High validity demands diversity of testing
content, and the context and entirety of language. Reliability and validity are a
contradictory unity. Any scientific tests should possess high reliability and validity.
The testers should find an optimum balancing point, in order to guarantee that the
tests have higher reliability and validity at the same time. Such tests can examine
the real language competence of students. Yang, H.Z. (1999) argued that validity is
the core problem of testing; if the reliability is quite high, but the test does not
measure what it is intended to measure, then validity is not high enough with
regards to such tests. Only the language tests directed by validity could have a
positive influence on language teaching. At present, many testing contents are
divorced from teaching contents, which cannot measure the students’ integrated
language competence in practice. In addition, lots of teachers lack systematic
testing knowledge and there are many possible consequences of this: their
assigning of tests is random and blind, the scoring method is too simple and the
analysis of testing results is rough. Hu, H. (2007) finds out that, “in current testing,
the examination on grammar and function words occupies a large proportion of
scoring distribution, which forces the students to learn grammar and function words
first, then to study the notional words that possessing communicative function. The
situation is against the natural language learning order of human beings”. Consequently, the students who have good scores are not good at using language in
practice. It’s impossible to use such unscientific tests to measure the real levels of
students and to provide beneficial feedback for language learning.
Chapter V

Rational Reforms of Teaching and Constructing Tests

5.1 Rational Teaching Reforms

Rational reforms of English education are systematic projects involving the educational notions, teaching methods, roles of teachers and learners, text books and syllabus, teaching circumstance and tests. The absence of any element will destroy the comprehensiveness of the reforms because of the interaction of these elements.

5.1.1 Educational Notions

Educational notions are the psychological background of educational activities. Guo, L. (2005) stated that any educational activities cannot exist without educational notions whether we realize or not. Educational notions penetrate into the educational activities constantly. Therefore, changing educational notions is the most important step in educational reforms.

Traditional educational notions in China are teacher-centered (Guo, L. 2005). Teachers are responsible for the selection of teaching contents and the impartment of the knowledge to students. Students are put into the position from which they are able to absorb what the teachers teach passively. Under the notions, learning is a process of knowledge accumulating for students and testing becomes a tool to measure the levels of knowledge accumulation.

With the development of society, more and more talents with integrated abilities are demanded. Therefore, teaching is not only to enlarge the knowledge accumulation for students, but also to bring up specialists with the ability of self-learning, ability of research, ability of organization and ability of knowledge-application. With all these abilities, they can apply what they have learned to jobs and meet the demands of the society. In a word, the center of modern educational notions is to train the comprehensive abilities of students.

From the perspective of English education, the educational notions should be changed from focusing on linguistic knowledge to focusing on language use which enables language learners to communicate inter-culturally.
5.1.2 Teaching Mode

Besides educational notions, teaching mode is also a vital aspect of teaching reform. Current Chinese English education is known to be inefficient and time-wasting, and students cannot use the language fluently in real communication. The phenomenon has something to do with the traditional teaching mode. It is surveyed that 87.2% of teachers teach new words and grammars by explaining (Zheng, S.T. 1996). That is to say that English classes are still “explanation-centered”. The existing teaching mode is described as the relationships between “cup and kettle” (Mao, Y.Q. 2002): Teachers are the owners of knowledge while students are the containers. The process of teaching and learning is the process of engrafting actively and receiving passively. The traditional teaching mode restrains the development of education.

Learning is an interactive process. Abraham H. Maslow’s Needs theory states that human beings have the need of social interaction, and education is a kind of practical activity of interaction (Yang, C.Y. 2004).

However, the traditional teaching mode is “teachers’ explanation-centered” in which teachers mono-directionally impart knowledge to students. This “engrafting instruction” has the properties of strong authority of teachers, speediness of imparting knowledge but little feedback, thereby resulting in the aloof and impersonal relationships between teachers and students.

The bidirectional interaction between teachers and students is mainly displayed by teachers’ questioning and students’ answering. In this mode, teachers and students can communicate easily, but students do not cooperate with one another. The two modes above have the commonness that teachers are mouthpieces of students and they have absolute authority, and students have no communication and cooperation among themselves. Thus, students can feel no pride, responsibilities and duties as members of a group.

Currently, educational reformers, like Zheng, S.T. (1996); Shu, D.F. (2004), etc., advocate the tri-directional or multi-directional interaction between teachers and students in teaching and learning. Tri-directional interaction means the interaction between teachers and students and students themselves. In the tri-directional mode, the degree of students’ participation into teaching activities is highly raised. No longer as objects of receiving knowledge, students become the subjects of teaching activities. By discussing problems and mutual encouragement, students can have the ability to think through and solve problems independently and enhance their ability of language use and communication. Multi-directional interaction means that teachers, as members of the group, communicate with students equally. Surveys demonstrate that the changing from mono-directional and bi-directional interaction
to tri-directional or multi-directional interaction in classes can create relaxed, happy, active and cooperative teaching and learning circumstances which will benefit students when they enter society to communicate and apply their knowledge.

English teaching reforms emphasize the ability of language use and communication. Thus, the tri-directional and multi-directional teaching mode can help students practice what they have learned and create many chances for them to communicate with one another.

5.1.3 Textbooks
Reforms of teaching have new claims for language communicative competence. Therefore, the reforms of text books are imperative. However, the past and existing text books pay more attention to words, grammars and phonetics.

In the early 1970s, a British linguist, D.A. Wilkins (1972), preliminarily proposed a functional or communicative definition of language that could serve as the basis for developing communicative syllabuses for language teaching. After that, more European scholars put forward new proposals of syllabuses and textbooks of language education, represented by J.A. VanEk and L.G. Alexander (1980), and H.G. Widdowson (1979). They believed that the designing of textbooks should consider the needs of communication as its starting point. The language units for training the communicative competence are discourses. Teaching activities should center on discourse analysis about communicative programs like medicine, education and physics etc., but not simple words, sentences and dialogues.

5.1.4 Teaching Means
Apart from the elements mentioned above, teaching means should also be improved. The means of chalks plus text books entail that teachers can no longer meet the demands of educational development. In my opinion, there are two main negative consequences: Firstly, such means are harmful to students’ learning interest. Secondly, it also limits the teachers’ performance in class. Modern multi-media teaching method should not only be introduced into English education, but also be used more in English classrooms. Because multi-media can provide ample learning resources, renew materials quickly and constantly, and raise the learning efficiency.

5.1.5 Teacher Roles
In teaching activities, teachers as participants play a leading role. Facing the
challenges of teaching reforms, teachers should realize the roles they should play. Breen and Candlin (1980:99) describe teacher roles in the following terms:

The teacher has two main roles: the first is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The one is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group. The latter role is closely related to the objectives of the first role and arises from it. These roles imply a set of secondary roles for the teacher; firstly, as an organizer of resources and as a resource himself, secondly as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities.... A third role for the teacher is that of researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities.

On the basis of Breen and Candlin’s theories, teacher roles can be explained in further detail according to my own understanding, and also suggestions for English teachers can be put forward as follows:

- **Organizers**
  
  College English curricula are to help students to form the abilities of language use. In order to achieve the goal, teachers are required to be active participants and researchers in curricula designing, curricula implementation and evaluation. As organizers of curricula, teachers should establish aims, select and arrange contents, implement designedly and evaluated the achievements of the curricula according to the practical situations of the specific groups of students. In the process of implementing, teachers should adjust, complete and improve the existing teaching plans. In addition, for language learning, circumstance is very important. Teachers should put it into consideration in order to arouse students’ learning interest.

- **Cooperators**
  
  In reforms, students should change from the passive absorbers to active participants who have the abilities of self-learning and cooperative learning. In this process, teachers play a key role by enlightening and cooperating. On the other hand, in the process of teaching reforms, every teacher is groping for improvements. Cooperation, communication and work share among teachers will draw the strong points of others to offset one’s own weaknesses, which will result in the improvement of teaching ability and the development of language education.

- **Learners**
  
  Nowadays, the rapid development of society demands that everyone must learn constantly.
Language teachers should renew their knowledge with the self-learning ability consciousness and ability to participate into heated competition. This is also the demand of teaching reform and the appearance of new objectives and problems in education.

Researchers
Modern educational technology and reforms force teachers to change from teach-book-smith to research teachers. With the ability of research, they can solve the problems in the process of reforms and push the course of reform.

5.1.6 Student Roles
In the 1980s, American psychologist Carroll (1980) put forward the cognitive teaching method which is student-centered. He emphasized the intelligent function of human’s brains and considered language learning to be intelligent activity. He argued that in language learning students should be in the position of center. Thus, they can active in finding rules of language and mastering linguistic knowledge by observation and analysis. In addition, British educator Corder (1976) also advocated that language education must be student-centered, and teachers and texts books should be adjusted according to the needs of students.

Based on the student-centered theories, students should play the related roles of learners, cooperators and creators.

Learners
As students, their key role is to be learners. Students should make judgments on advantages and disadvantages of language learning, natures of language learning, elements and resources of language learning, ability of language use and testing and the types of learners themselves belong to, etc. All these judgments are based on their acquaintance with language learning and their self-controlling ability. Based on these judgments, learners should make decisions on contents and methods of learning, aims and testing of achievement and plan-making in learning, etc.

As learners, students should have full autonomy which also should be respected by teachers in the process of language learning and teaching.

Cooperators
First of all, students are the cooperators of teachers in the process of learning. To complete the tasks of teaching and learning, it is necessary for students to cooperate with their teachers. And the harmonious cooperation between students
and teachers can arouse their initiative to facilitate the progress in language teaching and learning.

To be cooperators also means that students should cooperate with one another. Cooperation can push effective communication, positive competition and reciprocal inspiration in gaining knowledge and solving problems.

- Creators

As active learners and cooperators, students’ communication with their knowledge and ability of language use is a process of creation. In this process, they use what they have learned from teachers and re-arrange linguistic materials to realize the creativity of language and their ability of creation. Besides, the comprehension of linguistic information can also reflect the creative ability of students. Through creation, students can really become utility-type talents who can apply what they learn to real life.

5.2 Rational Reforms of Testing Construction

Testing is an important link in the process of teaching and learning. It can help to achieve educational aims and evaluate achievement of education. In the process of reforming, testing should reform from paper designing, testing methods and results evaluating of testing, in addition the correct understanding on the real objectives of testing is also quite important.

5.2.1 Proper Understanding of Language Testing Purposes

Learning language knowledge is merely a method, whereas training language communicative ability is the real purpose of testing. Students enter in the classroom with their existing knowledge; they are dynamic and thoughtful subjects of study, rather than simple information recipients. Luo Shaoxi points out: “Teachers should take into account the effectiveness of evaluation, not just the performance of the students in the assessment” (Luo, S.X. 2003). Testing is a way of providing information, the feedback of it is to serve the research and the teaching, and to provide a scientific basis for evaluating the effect of teaching and learning. Testing should start with its content, methods and result evaluation, in order to establish an accurate and fair evaluation system. Educators must learn the theoretical knowledge of testing consciously, and they should be aware that the objectives of testing are to provide useful feedback for learning. They should also know how to guide students to self-assessment and self-reflection, in order to help them to become independent
learners. What the educators should do is to strive to speed up the transition of language learning methods from understanding style to utilize style.

5.2.2 Reform the Testing Items to Improve the Reliability and Validity

In the test designing process, reliability and validity are the core problems. Testing contents must truly reflect the syllabus, and combine the knowledge and skills, subjective items and objective items, discrete testing and comprehensive testing organically. In terms of different teaching objectives, open and diversified testing methods should be used and the principles of “the testing purpose is to provide useful feedback for students” should be implemented. The teachers should analyze the test results scientifically. Depending on different testing objectives, teachers can arrange reasonable subjective tests and objective tests.

5.2.2.1 Scientific Test Designing

In testing, items in the paper are vital and the foundation of educational evaluation. The quality of testing is related to the quality of each item in the paper. Therefore, testing items should be judged and evaluated by experts rather than gathered casually and roughly. Paper designing should put some aspects into consideration.

Firstly, paper designing must be in accordance with the teaching syllabus. The contents must have spreadability and emphasis. And the degree of difficulty should be close to students’ real levels.

Secondly, testing items should mutually independent (Hu, H. 2007). That is to say, the response of students’ to one item should not be influenced by another one.

Thirdly, the proportion of objective and subjective items should be rational. Subjective tests lie in examining the language using abilities of learners, proposition is relatively simple, but the validity is quite high. However, subjective tests are influenced greatly by individuals (levels of awareness and knowledge, and objective consistency, etc.), the answering contents of the candidates lack of control, therefore, the reliability is difficult to guarantee; Objective tests are easier to control in terms of the language points which are expected to be examined, and the content coverage is extremely wide, thus the reliability is good. But it is difficult to accurately reflect the true level of language proficiency of students, thus the validity is low. Objective tests can only check the candidates’ receptive skills such as listening and reading; subjective tests can examine the candidates’ productive skills such as speaking and writing (Hu, H. 2007).

The essence of language indicates that all the language skills are not isolated in
real context. Students need to apply the receptive skills and productive skills to complete communicative tasks. Therefore, when the teachers design the tests, they should reduce the proportion of objective items appropriately. On the basis of previous frequently used items as grammar, vocabulary and reading comprehension, more writing, translation, essay questions items should be added.

Appropriate arrangement between objective and subjective items can contribute to testing both knowledge and ability.

5.2.2.2 Openness of Testing Methods
Nowadays, testing focuses on written forms which are comprised of many objective choice questions. As a result, many students become good at multi-choice questions. In order to train the ability of language use, testing should have the properties of openness and diversity. For example, written testing combined with oral testing, open-book testing combined with close-book testing, etc.

5.2.2.3 Rational Assessment of Students’ Achievement
According to theories of modern education measurement, assessment of students’ achievement in learning is one of the most important components of education. However, many English teachers in China cannot evaluate students’ achievement scientifically. For example, in one semester, some teachers only give one examination, which is the only criterion of assessment. And some schools regard the CET Band4/6 as the criteria of students’ language levels. The phenomenon results in blind competitions which break the rules of teaching measurement. In addition, according to pedagogical psychology, testing results are influenced by external circumstance, psychological and physical states, etc. Testing results cannot represent the language levels of students. Therefore, teachers must rationally assess students’ achievement according to both testing results and other factors.

Firstly, students’ progress should be assessed in accordance with students’ former levels. Based on their former levels of language ability, assessment can then really reflect the quality of teaching and reduce the students’ pressure brought by disparity of levels among students.

Secondly, it is necessary to implement the rational distribution of scores in testing. At present, the final examination results are considered to be the final results, which cannot reflect the students’ real achievement, and can also not facilitate teaching and learning.

The evaluation and assessment of students’ achievement should cover three aspects: knowledge, skills and attitude. Therefore, teachers should put many elements into the results of evaluation, for example, students’ preview before
classes, performance in classes, homework and interaction between teachers and students and students themselves. This method can wholly reflect their achievement.

Teaching and learning should be reformed systematically. In the process of reforming, the important step is the theoretical construction which will guide the reforms macroscopically. Based on the theoretical construction, reforms should be put into practice in class, thereby implementing the reforms of teaching mode, roles of teachers and students, text books, teaching means and testing, etc.
Chapter VI

Conclusions

The main idea of this thesis is to review and compare the development of language testing in the West and in China, problems of English education and testing. On that basis, reforms in English education are carried out from the theoretical construction and practice in classroom.

First of all, the thesis probes the concept of testing, and the testing in EFL teaching and learning in China, in which I elaborate upon the relationship between teaching and testing, learning and testing, teachers and testing, students and testing. Then testing strategies are emphasized, which are absolutely important in constructing and interpreting tests.

Going over the development of language testing, there are differences in the West and in China. In the West, language testing has four periods: pre-scientific period, psychometric-structuralist period, integrative-sociolinguistic period and communicative period; while in China, language testing can be divided into the period of focusing on translation, period of focusing on writing and reading, and period of integrated testing. By comparison, the developments of language testing in the West and in China are similar in that they gradually diversified theoretical foundations, original intentions of implementing tests and non-theoretical influential forces. On the other hand, they have some differences. Firstly, testing plays different roles in the West and in the East. Secondly, testing focus on different aspects for evaluating students’ achievement.

By reviewing and comparing the development of language testing in the West and in China, the problems of English teaching in China are found from the view of language testing. English education in China has some problems in the layer of intention and motivation, and also in the layers of contexts and methods of evaluation.

Then, based on the information regarding the problems of English language education and testing in China, it is necessary endeavors to construct and develop further methods of language testing in China. Firstly, to develop language testing, it is important to carry out the theoretical construction by clarifying the concept of language testing, testing strategies, and relationship among students, teachers and tests, and paying attention to types of testing. However, in practice, the reforms are a systematic project; every aspect of teaching and learning must be taken into consideration including educational notions, teaching mode, text books, teaching means, teachers, students and testing constructions.
By comparing the language testing systems in the West and in China, the weakness of English teaching and learning can be reflected, which could provide strong basis for reforms of English education in China.
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Appendix:

Abbreviations

CET  College English Test
CET 4  College English Test Band Four
CET 6  College English Test Band Six
EFL  English as a foreign language
TEM  Test for English Majors
TEM 4  Test for English Majors Band Four
TEM 8  Test for English Majors Band Eight
TOEFL  Test of English as a Foreign Language