
Reflections on Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language

TZU YIU CHEN
chentzuyiu@ub.edu

Different ways of thinking in Chinese

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Justifications and the theories

- ❖ The transference of the mother language
- ❖ The different way of thinking between Spanish culture and Chinese culture
- ❖ Some examples in Chinese as Foreign Language (CFL)
- ❖ Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey's Communication Style Theory (1988)
- ❖ Hall's Culture Dimension Theory (1990)
- ❖ Cultural differences in ways of thinking in teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) (Jia, 2014)
- ❖ Chen's (2019) Chinese Intercultural Competence Scale (CICS)

A general comparison between Chinese culture and Western culture

Aspects	Chinese culture	Western culture
Value perspective	Group harmony is emphasized over personal success.	Individualism and independence prevails. Personal goals are important.
Thinking style	Synthesis and intuition are emphasized.	Logic and objectivity
Cultural context	High cultural context	Low cultural context
Cultural value	Collectivist	Individualistic
Interpersonal communication style	With a courteous, humble and modest manner. Communication is reciprocal. Silence is part of communication.	Personal opinions are directly expressed. Communication is achieving objectives.

Table: Differences between Chinese culture and Western culture

Ways of thinking and (non-)verbal communication in Chinese as Foreign Language

- ❖ how a word (玩, wán) can be interpreted under different contexts
- ❖ how they express agreement and disagreement (ambiguity, appointment)
- ❖ how they use verbal and non-verbal messages to express themselves (yes or no, perhaps)

1. High context and without strict logical grammar rules

- ❖ Chinese is a language that places huge emphasis on context, without strict logical rules. Many words, sentence patterns, and texts in Chinese are semantic rather than grammatical combinations.
- ❖ For example, the word 玩



2. Clarity vs ambiguity

❖ Foreign friend: We can meet this Sunday.

Chinese: OK, let's make an appointment then.

Foreign friend: So it's decided then?

Chinese: (Pauses for a while) Let's talk about it later.



Why Chinese speakers say thing with ambiguity?

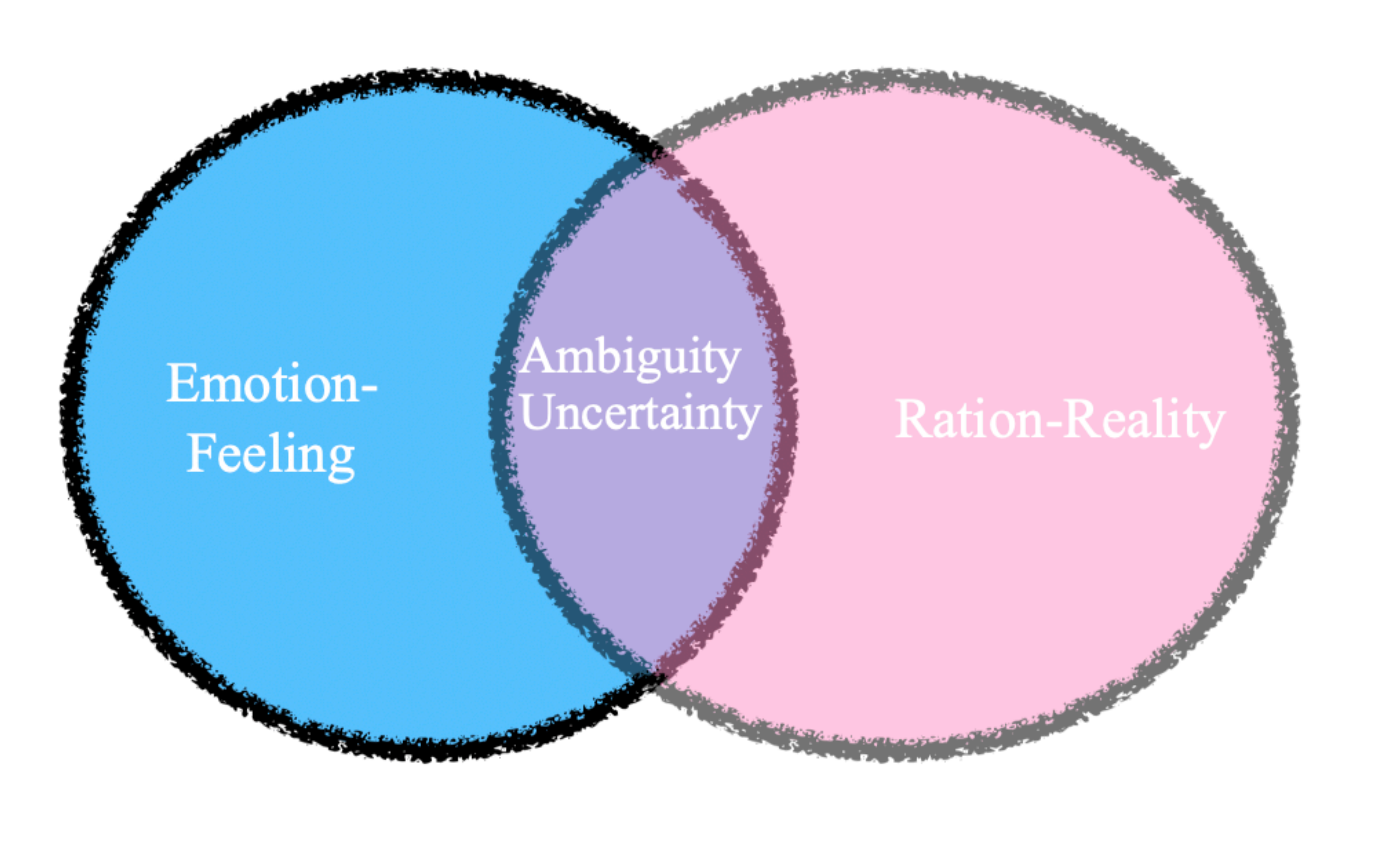
3. Truth vs feeling

- ❖ Generally speaking, western culture, which emphasizes **self-worth**, places more emphasis on the realization of **personal interests** when dealing with affairs, while Chinese people always focus on the **whole**, pay attention to **human relationships (harmonious)**, and advocate that individual interests should be subordinated to **group interests**.

3. Truth vs feeling

- ❖ The way to express opinions for Chinese people can confuse foreign students.
- ❖ An either-or, black-and-white way
- ❖ Example: corrections for students homework.





Difficulties on cultivating IC in CFL classroom in Spain

- ❖ For CFL teachers
- ❖ For curriculum/syllabus
- ❖ For textbook
- ❖ For language barrier

Conclusions

- ❖ Cultural differences in ways of thinking play an important role on language acquisition and intercultural communication. Sometime could cause cultural misunderstandings and potential problems.
- ❖ In CFL, recognise and understand these cultural differences can help learners' to improve their intercultural competence.
- ❖ There is no culture superior to another. It just because, in certain way, our culture background determine the way we express.
- ❖ For a language like Chinese, which lacks strict logic and emphasises meaning, it is particularly necessary for teachers to cultivate cultural conscious on it.

Publicaciones

- ❖ Chen, T. Y (2023). The Chinese Intercultural Competence Scale and the External Factors of Spanish as a Foreign Language (<https://immi.se/intercultural/article/view/Chen-2023-3>)
- ❖ Chen, T. Y (2022). Developing an intercultural competence instrument in foreign language teaching context: a study of Chinese students of Spanish as a foreign language (<https://www.immi.se/intercultural/article/view/1184-Chen-61/139>)
- ❖ Chen, T. Y (2020). La diferencia entre la competencia comunicativa y la competencia intercultural en la enseñanza/aprendizaje de lenguas extranjeras (<https://es.scribd.com/document/638165016/competencia-comunicativa-vs-competencia-intercultural>)
- ❖ Chen, T. Y (2020). Estudio descriptivo sobre la competencia intercultural de los estudiantes sinohablantes (<https://www.sinoele.org/index.php/83-numeros/sinoele-20/375-2-encuentro-on-line-entre-profesores-de-espanol-a-sinoha>)
- ❖ Chen, T. Y (2016). Competencia cultural de los alumnos del departamento de español en las universidades taiwanesas: referencia cultural adquirida en su último año de carrera (https://www.sinoele.org/images/Revista/14/Suplementos/ChenTzuYiu_Suplementos_SinoELE_2016_14.pdf)



Thank you for your attention