

PREFACE

SCENE 1: A Chinese-language teacher is having dinner with her students in a local Chinese restaurant. The teacher introduces the dishes: “This is *mapo doufu* and that is *gongbao jiding*.”

SCENE 2: “Students, we will watch a video clip of Beijing opera for the rest of today’s class.” Students cheer as the teacher talks about face painting and other special characteristics of Beijing opera.

These scenes, so familiar to Chinese-language educators, demonstrate teachers’ admirable efforts to stimulate student interest in Chinese language and culture. However, if these exciting activities are not supported by a curriculum with excellent cultural pedagogy, they may create the impression that culture in language learning is merely a bonus or hors d’oeuvre, an expendable fifth skill tacked on to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Experienced teachers and mature students should also raise such questions as What more should students learn about Chinese culture beyond spicy *mapo doufu* and the striking face painting and costuming of Beijing opera? How can we move from *incorporating* cultural activities to *integrating* cultural knowledge in the language curriculum? Can we provide advanced students with a course focusing on both linguistic and cultural competencies? *Cultural Chinese* attempts to provide answers to these operative questions as a textbook with a new approach to cultural integration and immersion.

This approach distinguishes itself by treating the exquisite connection between language and culture in a systematic and structured manner. Admittedly, Chinese-language education has always contained a cultural dimension, but language and culture often blend in relatively divergent ways. At the elementary and intermediate levels, students learn Chinese behavioral patterns and lifestyles; everyday language is tinged with cultural bits and pieces. Advanced textbooks often endow the study of language with a social hue, dealing with societal development and issues in China such as housing and employment. Culture, however, is often seen merely as information conveyed by the language, and not as a feature of language itself; cultural awareness becomes a separate educational objective from language. Instead of taking culture as a set of behavioral practices or social conditions, *Cultural*

Chinese seeks to identify and lend insights into the very fabric of Chinese culture that governs personal behavior and directs social dynamics.

In this book, then, culture assumes a unitary relationship with language and becomes the very core of language learning, by transitioning from context into text. Each of the nine lessons features a distinctive topic of Chinese culture, which serves as an important portal to Chinese perceptions and perspectives. The topic of each chapter is illustrated by three texts: the main text begins with a brief introduction of the topic, and is followed by two historical or mythological stories that bring to the fore certain elements of Chinese culture. An additional ministory 小故事 challenges students' abilities in cultural interpretation. The twenty-seven stories herein are ones with which every educated Chinese person is familiar. A section on knowledge 小知识 adds interesting information to the main text, equipping students with basic references of Chinese culture, from the Four Treasures of the Study 文房四宝 to the Four Books and Five Classics 四书五经 of Confucianism. Together, the three texts allow learners to increase their knowledge of the people's way of life, values, and attitudes, and how these manifest themselves or are couched in linguistic forms. The exercises are also intertwined with facets of culture. Questions often include analyses of the cultural implications of linguistic choices and show that culture has come to color language in many and varied ways. As a whole, *Cultural Chinese* aims at shedding light on the inner cohesion of language and cultural pedagogy while enriching and giving deeper meaning to what is dubbed "communicative competence."

We would like to thank Chen Xuelun, a renowned artist in Shanghai and a life-long friend of ours, for the excellent illustrations he made for this book. With his profound knowledge of Chinese culture and superior artistic talent, he has created nine works of art that will establish lively and memorable images in the reader's mind. We are especially pleased that our friendship with Xuelun has not only endured across decades and thousands of miles, but also flourished with our collaboration on this project.