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硕士学位论文

圣经文化图式空缺与英语阅读障碍问题分析

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摘 要

语言总是承载具体的文化。当英语学习者进入高阶段学习时，其英语阅读的障碍已不再是词汇语法方面，而在于对不同文化的理解。根据图式理论，阅读是读者所具有的背景知识与文本信息相互作用的过程。Carrell 和 Eisterhold (2006) 指出，导致一个读者出现某种内容图式空缺的原因之一是因为该图式是反映某种特定文化的，而这种文化在该读者文化背景中不存在。

目前，已有许多关于英语阅读与文化之间的关系的研究。但提起圣经文化，人们却对它敬而远之，在课堂上更是被排在外。主要就是因为它与宗教有关-----是基督教的正典。

《圣经》是西方文明的基础，影响深远。对西方人来说，《圣经》是一些核心观念的源头，是道德信仰，法律规范，价值观和世界观的来源。本文从政治，法律，经济，哲学，文学，艺术等角度分析了圣经文化在英语国家的体现和深刻影响。旨在说明既然语言是文化的载体，那么，英语语言也不可避免地带有深深的圣经文化痕迹。如果英语读者在圣经文化方面存在图式空缺的话，势必阻碍其阅读理解。

国内外有许多关于文化图式在英语阅读中重要作用的研究。在我国，已有不少关于圣经文化在英语学习中的积极作用的论文发表。并且我国《高等学校英语专业英语教学大纲》(2000) 已经将对圣经文化的学习规定为英语教学内容的一部分，部分重点高校已率先开设了圣经文化课程。

为了解英语专业的学生是否存在圣经文化方面的图式空缺，如果有的话这种空缺是否影响其英语阅读，以及学生对圣经文化在英语阅读中的作用的认知如何。作者于 2007 年 5 月份在不同的时间，以不同的方式对河南师范大学英语专业大三某个班的 50 名学

生分别进行了两次测试，希望通过测试中为英语专业阅读教学的改善提供依据。

通过对结果的分析发现：

(1) 英语专业的学生的确存在圣经文化方面的知识空缺，并且这种空缺影响他们的阅读理解。

(2) 经过两次不同类型的测试，大多数学生能够认识到圣经文化在英语阅读中的重要作用，并且对该文化持比较开放和客观的态度。同时也表达他们希望在英语阅读中能了解更多的圣经知识以减少来自这方面的阅读障碍。

(3) 圣经文化属于宗教文化的观念依然令少数学生担忧对该文化的接触将给人的灵魂带来毒害。因此这些学生对圣经文化持非常谨慎保守的态度。

鉴于学生的反应，一些尝试性的建议被提出以便为英语阅读教学提供参考。比如：

(1) 开设相关的圣经文化课程；(2) 鼓励学生在日常生活中重视对圣经文化的积累；(3) 充分利用多媒体设备；(4) 有效利用文学资源；(5) 使教师知识结构合理化，并加强对学生学习观念的引导，等等。

关键词：文化图式，空缺，圣经文化，态度，英语阅读

Abstract

A language always carries with it specific culture. When English-learners get into advanced learning stages, their barriers in English reading will not lie in the lexical or grammatical level, but in the understanding of different cultures. According to schema theory, reading is an interactive process between reader's background knowledge and the text. Carrell and Eisterhold (2006:80) pointed out that one of the most obvious reasons why a particular content schema may fail to exist for a reader is that the schema is culturally specific and is not part of a particular reader's cultural background.

Many researches have been done on the relationship between English reading and culture from different aspects, but speaking of biblical culture, people always stay far away from it and it is always ignored in Chinese classes, just because it is related to religion -----it is the canon of Christianity.

The Bible is the foundation of western civilization. It is very influential and pervasive. For western people, the Bible is the headspring of some core concepts. It is the source of their ethics, beliefs, law principles, values and world views.

This thesis analyzes the wide reflection and deep influence of biblical culture in English countries from the point of view of politics, law, economy, philosophy, literature and arts, etc., in order to point out that, as language is always the carrier of culture, in the nature of things, English language inevitably wears deep biblical marks, then students' schema slots from biblical culture (if there are) must obstruct their English reading.

On the role of cultural background knowledge in English reading, there have been many researches, and in China, there have been some researches on the positive role of biblical culture in English learning. Besides, the "*English Syllabus for English Majors in Institutions of Higher Learning*" (2000) has prescribed biblical knowledge as part of English teaching. Some key universities have taken the lead in setting courses on biblical culture.

In order to find out whether there are some slots from biblical culture in English majors' cultural schemata, whether the slots (if there are) affect their reading comprehension and to learn about students' attitudes towards the role of biblical knowledge in English reading, two tests were conducted in May in 2007, aiming to find out some enlightenment for the teaching of English reading through the results of the

tests. One class of English majors from Henan Normal University were chosen randomly to take part in this tests. They are 50 juniors in all. The tests were carried out twice at different time in different ways to the same group of subjects.

Through the analysis of the results of the tests, the major findings are as follows:

Firstly, schema slots from biblical culture exist indeed in English majors and affect their reading comprehension, but sometimes, the students were not clear about their knowledge structure. They could not realize the gap in their knowledge. Secondly, after the two tests in different ways, the importance of biblical culture in English reading is realized by most students. Most of them hold an open and objective attitude towards it, and expressed their expectation for more knowledge in this field to assist their reading. Thirdly, exclusive attitudes towards biblical culture still exist in a few students. The idea that biblical culture is a kind of religious culture makes them worry it will do harm to people's soul.

In view of students' responses, some tentative suggestions are put forward for the improvement of the teaching of English reading: (1) Setting curricula related to biblical culture; (2) Encouraging accumulation of biblical knowledge in daily life; (3) Making full use of multimedia equipment; (4) Applying literary resources efficiently; (5) Rationalizing teachers' knowledge structure and strengthening the guidance to students' learning beliefs.

KEY WORDS: cultural schema, slots, biblical culture, attitudes, English reading

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Chapter One Introduction

A language is always carrying with it specific culture. When English-learners get into advanced learning stage, their barriers in English reading will not lie in the lexical or grammatical levels, but in the understanding of different cultures. In English reading, the ignorance of different cultures will cause obstacles in comprehension. However, for years, the teaching of reading for English majors in universities tends to emphasize the role of linguistic knowledge but ignore the transmission of English cultural knowledge. Most teachers always emphasize such concept in the teaching of English reading as: remember as many new words as possible, and master as many grammatical conceptions as possible, so as to have your reading proficiency improved. Of course, vocabulary and grammatical knowledge are important components for English learning, but in reality, many students describe their experience in English reading like this: each word and grammatical point in the text are familiar to them, but they do not understand what it is saying. Famous anthropologist Malinowski (1923:305) has suggested that: “Language is essentially rooted in the reality of the culture.” He believes that an understanding of a language is impossible without constantly relating it with the culture in which it is operative. Therefore, learning language divorced from culture is imperfect and violates the rules of language learning.

Many researches have been done on the relationship between English reading and culture from different aspects, but speaking of biblical culture, people always stay far away from it, and exclude it in Chinese classes, just because it is related to religion -----it is the canon of Christianity. For a long time, religion for Chinese students is the upside worldview, and a kind of illusive reflection of the reality. Religion is always compared to spiritual opium. Students even take religion as equally as superstition, so biblical culture, as a kind of religious culture, is naturally neglected.

However, religious culture is also a kind of culture, a kind of spiritual culture, and has a deep influence on people’s ideology. Biblical culture is a culture that permeates every aspect in western society and presents itself in daily life in various ways. Language transfers culture. So in English reading, it is impossible to escape from the influence of biblical culture.

The Bible is a collection of literature by ancient Hebrew through generations. It is not only a book recording religious doctrine, but a famous literature works with deep philosophical connotation. It is the

titbit in the treasury of world's literature. Many famous writers and philosophers draw spiritual nutrition from it.

Biblical culture affects western people's value standards, thinking methods, behaviors, and even their social structures. Research shows that, if you ask the successful leaders in educational and business fields which book influences them the deepest, a quarter of them said "*the Bible*". Almost every family in the English-speaking countries has the book of Bible on the bookshelf. Many English words and allusions originated from the Bible, for example from the King James Version (KJV), have penetrated in people's daily speeches and become important components of English language. For example,

Judas' kiss;

The tower of Babel;

An eye for an eye;

God bless you!

The salt of the earth;

Adam and Eve;

Not know sb from Adam

.....

Maybe, some students think, even if they do not know the biblical stories, they can still understand the meaning. As a matter of fact, many allusions do not expose their deep significance in the surface, even if they know each word well, they may still misunderstand them. For example,

"Can't you see the writing on the wall?"

At first glance, it is a simple interrogative sentence, even the pupils can say out its literal meaning. But in fact, it implies deep cultural connotation. "The writing on the wall" is an allusion originated from the Bible (Daniel 5:1-30). As the story goes, one day, when the king of the Chaldeans, Belshazzar, and his people were drinking, a man's fingers came out and wrote on the wall of the king's palace a line of words. This troubled the king much. He called on all the wise men to interpret the writing, but no one could understand it until Daniel came, who was said to be a great wise man. The writing meant the king was at the end of his life because of his disdain to God. As expected, the king died at that night. Then there is the allusion in English "the writing/ handwriting/ finger on the wall", which means "the sign of disaster or

misfortune”. For example, the sentence “He saw the writing on the wall for the British car industry several years ago.” means he has foreseen the car crisis of England.

In the same way, when reading the sentence “The doctor had told the grandfather many times that he needed an operation, but being a doubting Thomas, he refused till it was too late”, those who do not know the biblical story will feel puzzled with the idiom “doubting Thomas”. In fact, this idiom is originated from the New Testament (John: 20). Thomas was one of Jesus’ 12 disciples who did not believe in Jesus’ resurrection. Now, “doubting Thomas” is used to refer to the skeptical person who refuses to believe in others easily. So the sentence above means the grandfather always doubted about the doctor’s words about his illness, and refused to accept the operation. In the end, he lost his life.

Here we can see, in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) reading, a complete comprehension cannot be realized only by knowing the words or understanding the grammatical conception, but involving background knowledge which goes far beyond linguistic knowledge (Patricia L. Carrell and Joan C. Eisterhold 2006:73).

Schema theory, an important theory in language learning, tells us that a text only provides directions for listeners or readers as to how they should retrieve or contrast meanings from their own, previously acquired knowledge. This previously knowledge is called the reader’s *background knowledge*, and the previously acquired knowledge structures are called *schema* (quoted in Patricia L. Carrell and Joan C. Eisterhold, 2006: 76). Schema theory emphasizes that “comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader’s background knowledge and the text. Efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one’s own knowledge. Comprehending words, sentences, and entire texts involves more than just relying on one’s own linguistic knowledge”, and “a reader’s failure to activate an appropriate schema (formal or content) during reading results in various degrees of noncomprehension” (Patricia L. Carrell and Joan C. Eisterhold, 2006:76-80). Schema theory researches also show that the greater the background knowledge a reader has of a text’s content area, the better the reader will comprehend that text (Taylor 1979; Stevens 1980). It implies that some students’ apparent “reading problems” may be of insufficient background knowledge (Patricia L. Carrell, 2006: 244).

The final aim of English reading is to realize the cross-cultural communication. With China’s opening to the outside world, there are more and more opportunities to contact the western culture, especially for

English majors. For western people, the *Bible* is the source of some core concepts, and the source of their ethics and beliefs, law principles, values and world views. What's more, culture always represents itself through language. In EFL reading, if readers lack biblical cultural schema in mind, the schema slots will block their comprehension, and the interaction between the information in the text and readers' background knowledge can not be realized, as a result, misunderstanding or the breakdown of understanding will happen. So certain knowledge of biblical culture is necessary for English reading. Guo Lianfa (2004) has said, "...the influence of the Bible on western culture cannot be underestimated. Knowing biblical knowledge and understanding its cultural connotation can not only help readers read the Bible with great interest, but also help them know more about western culture, and it is also very useful for students to master and apply English language at a higher level."

In China, there have been some articles talking about the positive role of biblical culture in English learning, but many of them illustrate it theoretically, just to draw people's attention. What are the situations in reality? This is what the author tries to find out. So in this thesis, the author aims to answer the following questions with the help of the results of the tests:

(1) Are there any schema slots from biblical culture in English majors? If there are, do they affect their reading comprehension?

(2) What attitudes do English majors hold towards the role of the knowledge of biblical culture in English reading?

(3) In view of the results of the study, what implications can be got for the teaching of English reading?

The author hopes that the study can provide some useful enlightenment for the teaching of English reading. The whole thesis includes six chapters:

Chapter one is the introduction of the thesis, illustrating the background of the thesis, purposes, research questions and objectives.

Chapter two discusses the relationship between schema slots and English reading, and the reflection of biblical culture in English reading from the aspects of physics, economy, philosophy, literature, arts, and so on. It aims to point out that slots from biblical culture may obstruct reading comprehension.

Chapter three is a survey study. The study is in the form of test with 50 English majors in Henan

Normal University involved. The study is done to find out whether biblical culture affects their English reading comprehension, and to learn about their attitudes towards the role of biblical culture in English reading. An analysis of the results is followed.

Chapter four summarizes the main findings, followed by some pedagogical implications.

Chapter five is the conclusion. Some limitations are pointed out, and the implications for further studies are discussed.

Chapter Two Biblical Culture and English Reading

2.1 Brief Review of the Development of Reading Models

Since the 1960s, reading has attracted many cognitive psychologists and psycholinguists. Since the birth of Gough's (1972) information processing approach in reading, reading process is vividly called "*bottom-up model*". Readers are first regarded to absorb text information passively. They respond to the stimuli of the printed symbols, from the letters, words, to larger language units, for example phrases and sentences. According to bottom-up model, meaning is in the lines, and can be gained by decoding the language units literally bit by bit. In this model, the readers only react to the language forms, and neglect the context and other factors, so it underestimates the readers' active and dynamic role in reading process.

Goodman's (1967) statement of "reading is 'a psycholinguistic guessing game'" brings another reading model's birth-----"*top-down model*", a psychological model which depends on the syntax and semantic knowledge that has already existed in the reader's mind. Reading is considered to be a series of cognitive activities including sampling, predicting, testing and confirming. Top-down model emphasizes what the reader brings to the text, and indicates that reading is driven by meaning, and proceeds from whole to part. According to this model, reading comprehension is realized mainly through the knowledge related to the text which the reader has already accumulated. It is obvious that this model puts too much emphasis on reader's background knowledge.

Since the publication of Rumelhart's (1977) "*Towards an Interactive Model of Reading*", the *interactive-model* has become the main melody in reading research. This model emphasizes the interaction of reading processing and noted that reading is not a passive process, but an active or interactive process. It holds that there is an integration of bottom-up and top-down processes. During reading, the reader and the author interact through the text, and the three parties construct meanings creatively. The interactive approach covers both perspectives and better reflects the nature and process of reading.

Though not all the models are perfect, we can clearly see that, all of them except bottom -up model speak of the importance of background knowledge. In spite of being a little exaggerative, it is enough to show that the role of background knowledge in reading has long been recognized and valued.

2.2 Cultural Schema and English Reading

2.2.1 General Review on Schema Theory

Researches on schema theory show the importance of background knowledge within a psycholinguistic model of reading. The term *schema* first appeared in philosopher Kant's (1781) writing, while Sir Fredric Bartlett (1932) is usually acknowledged as the first psychologist to use the term schema in the sense that it is used today (quoted in Patricia L. Carrell and Joan C. Eisterhold, 2006:76). The role of background knowledge in language comprehension has been formalized as schema theory (ibid).

According to schema theory, comprehending a text is an interactive process between the reader's background knowledge and the text. Efficient comprehension requires the ability to relate the textual material to one's own knowledge. When we use the term comprehension, we mean the interaction of new information with the old knowledge. "To say that one has comprehended a text is to say that he has found a mental 'home' for the information in the text, or that she has modified an existing mental home in order to accommodate that new information" (Anderson and P. David Pearson 2006:37). Accordingly, for the readers to understand the texts correctly, two conditions are indispensable: one is that the reader must have the schema or background knowledge corresponding to the text or conformed to the writer's; the other is the reader activates the schema successfully. On this point, Christine Nuttall (2005:7) has given his argument: "The way we interpret depends on the schemata activated by the text, and whether we interpret successfully depends on whether our schemata are sufficiently similar to the writer's." No matter any one is absent, the understanding will be obstructed.

Schema theory shows that the process of interpretation is guided by the principle that every input is mapped against some existing schema and that all aspects of that schema must be compatible with the input information.

Rumelhart calls schemata "the building blocks of cognition", noting that they are the fundamental elements on which all information processing depends. He pointed out that they are used in interpreting sensory data, in retrieving information from memory, in organizing actions, in determining goals, in allocating resources, and in guiding the flow of processing in the system. He furtherly noted that "any device capable of all these wondrous things must be very powerful indeed" (Rumelhart, 1980:34). In fact,

here he summarized the functions of schemata.

As to the category of schemata, many scholars have tried to classify it, such as Carrel (1983), Cook (1994) and Howard (1987). Generally speaking, people are used to dividing schemata into three types: linguistic schema, formal or rhetorical schema, and content schema.

(1) Linguistic Schema

Linguistic schema refers to the knowledge of language about phonetics, grammar and vocabulary as well as the cohesive devices of the language such as substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, lexical cohesion and intersentential linkage, and their functions across sentences and paragraphs and so on. It involves decoding and processing the written language itself. Linguistic schema can reflect a reader's mastering of language knowledge. Carrell (1988:4) has noted that linguistic schema is the reader's prior linguistic knowledge. Linguistic schema is the prerequisite of formal or rhetorical schema, and content schema.

(2) Formal Schema

Formal schema is also known as textual schema. According to Carrell and Eisterhold (2006:79), formal schema is "the background knowledge of the formal, rhetorical organizational structures of different types of texts such as differences in genre, differences in the structure of fables, simple stories, scientific texts, newspaper articles, poetry, and so forth. Our schema for simple stories, for example, includes the information that the story should have, minimally, a setting, a beginning, a development, and an ending." In brief, formal schema refers to the organizational forms and rhetorical structures of written texts. Generally, the writer organizes various contents and all kinds of concepts applying these rhetorical structures, makes them interact with each other, and transmits text information to the reader. A text with a coherent structure is easier to understand than that with a loose structure. Because the reader can predict the following contents with the help of appropriate rhetorical structure already built in the reader's mind, for example, the comparative, or cause and effect structure.

(3) Content Schema

According to Carrell and Eisterhold (2006:79), content schema is "the background knowledge of the content area of a text. For example, a text about washing clothes, celebrating New Year's Eve in Hawaii or Halloween in Carbondale, or about the problems of nuclear breeder reactors, and so forth." They can be the knowledge about people, the world, culture, and the universe. Content schema or background

knowledge is formed in different cultural environments.

Schema theory research shows that the greater the background knowledge a reader has of a text's content area, the better the reader will comprehend that text. It also implies that insufficient background knowledge may obstruct normal reading comprehension.

For example, a student who has no background knowledge about the biblical story "the tree of knowledge" will have some difficulty in understanding the sentence: "She couldn't distinguish the right from the wrong before she ate the fruit of the tree of knowledge".

We know that, language is not only the simple combination of vocabulary, grammatical conception and sentence structures, but also the bearer of culture. So, to some extent, content schemata can make up for the lack of language schemata, thus help readers to understand texts by constructing schema, choosing information and removing ambiguities. Further evidence from such studies also suggested that readers' content schemata affect comprehension and remembering more than did their formal schemata for text organization.

Theories and practice all prove that content schema is very important in reading. The author, according to her own teaching experience, found that the lack of corresponding background knowledge is most students' biggest barrier in English reading. Therefore, the accumulation of background knowledge is what the students need, and also what should be paid attention to in the teaching of English reading.

2.2.2 Cultural Schema

Culture is a complicated social phenomenon, which includes everything in society and plays an important role all the time. No matter in what ways the researchers define culture, there are something common in their definitions. Generally speaking, culture reflects every aspect of a group or society, for example, living habits, social customs, people's beliefs, values, thinking patterns, and so on. It includes material and spiritual facets, and is formed in a long course from generation to generation. The omnipresent quality of culture leads Hall to conclude that "there is not one aspect of human life that is not touched and altered by culture", and "you touch a culture in one place and everything else is affected" (quoted in L.A. Samovar et. al 2004:34, 46).

Cultural schema is all the knowledge concerning culture. As a matter of fact, it belongs to content schema. Cultural schema theory presents a cognitive approach to the question of how cultural knowledge is

represented and how their representation facilitates the use of knowledge (Rumelhart, 1980:34).

Cultural schemata, just as Bedir (1992:8) defines, is “..... the background knowledge about cultural aspects of the language being learned.....”. Yule (1996:87) gives the definition of cultural schemata as the “pre-existing knowledge structures based on experience in a particular culture”, and he also points out that cultural schemata are developed “... in the context of our basic experience”. Cultural schemata are culture-specific world knowledge. They are conceptual structures which enable an individual to store perceptual and conceptual information about his/her culture and make interpretations of cultural experiences and expressions.

Language and culture are closely related. English reading does not only involve language itself, but also its culture. Carrell and Eisterhold (2006:80) pointed out that, “One of the most obvious reasons why a particular content schema may fail to exist for a reader is that the schema is culturally specific and is not part of a particular reader’s cultural background.” Studies by Steffenen, Joag-Dev and Anderson(1979), Johnson(1985) and Carrell (1981) show that the implicit cultural content knowledge presupposed by a text interacts with the reader’s own cultural background. The texts which are based on one’s own culture are easier to read and understand than syntactically and rhetorically equivalent texts based on a less familiar, more distant culture. Johnson’s (1982) studies also implied that a text on a familiar topic is better recalled by EFL readers than a similar text on an unfamiliar topic.

Cultural schemata are derived from social structure, salient rituals and a host of other cultural phenomena. Moreover, cultural schemata can be instantiated in various cultural artifacts, such as painting, rituals and narratives (Sharifian, 2003). Idioms, proverbs or popular sayings are another instantiation of cultural schemata as they are packaged with cultural wisdoms and express culturally constituted understandings. Cultural schemata, which are also called cultural models, are a kind of framework with both cultural and national features. They are schematic representations of generic concepts distributed among cultural members. For example, “white” in China means “ominous”, but for an American it means “pure or holy”. Speaking of wedding, the Chinese people have a schema about “red” in their mind-----red bottom drawer, red carpet, red double “喜” , and so on; But western people think of “white” -----white bottom drawer, white full dress, and so on.

As schema theory implies, reading involves the interaction of the information of the text and the

background knowledge previously acquired by the reader. Reader's background knowledge, especially cultural background knowledge, is quite important in processing reading materials when he applies schema theory to reading comprehension. Such as the following two "simple" lines from Robert Frost's *"Stopping by Wood on a Snowy Evening"*. They are widely taught in western middle schools:

Whose woods these are I think I know.

His house is in the village, though.

In understanding the meaning of the lines, background knowledge seems rather important. Just as Thomas G. Devine (1986: 28) comments, "Complete comprehension is possible only to readers who include a thorough knowledge of the economy of New England agriculture in their heads. Urban children without this kind of information in their long-term memories need to have it supplied by teachers or to infer it on the basis of other appropriate knowledge they possess." It indicates that a reader's background knowledge, namely, cultural schema in his mind is sure to affect reading comprehension.

The awareness of the role of background knowledge, especially in cultural aspect, leads to a series of studies that demonstrate the effect of readers' cultural background knowledge on reading comprehension, for example, Steffenson, Joag-Dev, and Anderson (1979), Johnson (1981), and so on.

2.2.3 Schema Slots and English Reading

Christine Nuttall (2005:7) noted that: A schema (plural schemata) is an abstract mental structure. It is abstract because it does not relate to any particular experience, although it derives from all the particular experiences we have had. It is a structure because it is organized; it includes the relationships between its component parts. On this point, Anderson and Pearson (2006) hold the similar view.

In the structure, there are a lot of slots, which can be filled with a greatly wide range of stimuli. J. Mandler (1979) noted that a schema is a cognitive structure, including two parts: slots and default values. Slots are those correlated and orderly knowledge items, and default values are the things used to fill in the slots at normal conditions (quoted in Duanmu Qingyi, 2004:178-181). Each slot is a context gap prescribed by language items (Duanmu Qingyi, 2004:178-181). For example, in the sentence "He lost", the gap here needs a corresponding noun to fill in. When new information and existing background knowledge are matched and fit into the appropriate slot, the schema can be activated. In English reading, the key point is to activate the schemata, sometimes, the schemata are activated, but the network of schemata is not linked

up, then the comprehension barriers still occur. No matter the word, or phrase, or sentence is familiar or not, if the information is not understood, it can be thought the schema slot exists (Duanmu Qingyi, 2004: 178-181). Carrell & Eisterhold (1983: 553-573) pointed out that “A reader’s failure to activate an appropriate schema (formal or content)... during reading results in various degrees of noncomprehension.” When the schema gets activated and is used to interpret some events, the slots are “instantiated” with particular information.

Patricia L. Carrell and Joan C. Eisterhold (2006:81) pointed out that, “Second language readers attempt to provide schemata to make sense of texts, and they do so persistently .However, these efforts will fail if the reader cannot access the appropriate existing schemata necessary to understand a text.” That is, appropriate existing schemata are especially important for the reader to understand a text. If there are slots in the course, the comprehension will be obstructed. On the other hand, even if there are some schemata, but they cannot be activated by the reader, the fully understanding will still be in the air. In the teaching of reading, the teacher’s help is very useful. For example, through pre-reading discussion, the students may be reminded of corresponding information which has existed in their mind but they don not know, because “sometimes students may not realize that they have prior knowledge on a particular subject, but as they listen to other students share information, they come to realize that they indeed know something about the reading topic” (Neil J. Anderson, 2004:14).

Sometimes, the reader may mistake the schema in his mind as the one similar to the present text information, if so, noncomprehension or misunderstanding may occur. For example, when a Chinese reader, who has no schema of “yellow” in American culture, reads “yellow pages”, he may think these are about filthy, obscene, or vulgar contents. In fact, “yellow pages”, in America, refers to a useful book which can be found in most American homes printed yellow in cover with all kinds of telephone numbers rather than a filthy book.

To sum up, successful reading needs appropriate existing schemata, if there are slots in the schemata and they cannot be insantiated with particular and appropriate information, comprehension will be obstructed.

2.2.4 Researches on Cultural Schema in English Reading Abroad and at Home

Recent years, the importance of cultural background knowledge in reading comprehension has been the common agreement in linguistic and language teaching fields. Linguists abroad and at home have conducted many experiments on the role of cultural background knowledge in reading comprehension.

Steffenen, Joag-Dev and Anderson (1979) prepared two passages in English which described the weddings taking place in America and India respectively. Twenty Indian students with English as the second language and twenty American students with English as the first language took part in the study. They were asked to read the passages and recall the details. The results show that the subjects can read the passage describing his own cultural customs in less time, understand the contents more accurately and recall the main ideas of the story better than when reading the passage not describing his own cultural customs. For example, when reading the sentence "After two days of marriage, she was taken to Nagpur, and her father-in-law accompanied her", the Indian readers can realize naturally that the bride's being taken to Nagpur is to live with her parents-in-law according to Indian marital customs. But the American readers regard this action as the bride's going to spend their honeymoon there. Here it can be seen that reader's cultural background knowledge does affect the reading comprehension and the reconstruction of the text.

Carrell (1987) conducted an experiment with twenty-eight Arabians who are Moslem and twenty-four Latin Americans who were Catholic as the subjects. They all had high or intermediate English levels and had attended the English-strengthening programs organized by a university. The subjects were asked to read two passages about Islam and Catholicism respectively, finish multiple choice questions and write out from memory the contents of the passage after reading. The rhetorical form of each passage was strictly organized. The analysis to their recalling strategies and scores of reading comprehension indicates that testees' cultural background knowledge previously acquired affects their understanding and memorizing of the texts. Familiar contents and similar cultural characteristics are easier to understand and remember than unfamiliar contents and dissimilar cultural characteristics. The results also suggest that reader's content schemata influence reading comprehension more than formal schemata.

Kang (1992) also carried out an interesting research and checked readers' ability to percolate information from second language texts through certain cultural background knowledge. Korean graduates who have learned advanced English read the story and answered related questions. An oral test evaluating their understanding and reasoning abilities indicated that cultural background knowledge and inferring strategies affect the understanding of the text, though how to affect comprehension is unclear. This also supports the claim that cultural schemata facilitate the comprehension of the text.

Rumelhart in his paper *Understanding Understanding* (1984) mentioned one of his experiments about "the story of oil crisis". The American testees were asked to read the following short passage which does not contain any clue to activate certain schema:

Business had been slow since the oil crisis. Nobody seemed to want anything really elegant any more. Suddenly the door opened and a well-dressed man entered the showroom floor. John put on his friendliest and most sincere expression and walked toward the man.

Results suggest that most subjects can activate the schema of "a dealing of motorcars", because the experience of buying car is very common and familiar to them. And it is not difficult for them to think of the influence that oil crisis has brought to the selling of motorcars. This also proves that culture determines life experience and its meaning, and the experience and meaning, the other way round, determines the contents and forms of the schemata in our minds.

In China, a test on the role of cultural background knowledge in English reading was carried out by Lv Ming (2006). In his study, thirty subjects were involved ----- ten people with Euramerican cultural background, ten Chinese sophomores of non- English major, having passed the CET - 4, and ten Chinese second-year postgraduates of English major. They all read two passages about Hallowmas and Mid-Autumn Day, with corresponding English and Chinese versions attached. After reading they finished ten multiple choice questions and then were interviewed. The results reflected that cultural schemata played a key role in understanding the two passages. The readers who did not have corresponding cultural schema relevant to the text are blocked in understanding the materials.

Other teachers and researchers who are interested in this field also illustrate the importance of cultural schemata in reading theoretically. (e. g. Xu Zhimin, 2003, etc.)

A considerable amount of experiments and theories all proved that cultural background knowledge

plays an important role in successful reading comprehension, and the lack of it will obstruct normal comprehension. For example, influencing reading validity and speed; obstructing the inferring to text meaning; and affecting the reconstruction of the text.

2.2.5 Current Problems of Cultural Knowledge Teaching in English Reading Classes

A good understanding of English materials does not depend on the firm linguistic knowledge, but also the relevant cultural background knowledge, and the ability to activate the cultural schemata. Considerable evidence has proved that cultural background knowledge does play a key role in reading comprehension. We can say that cultural background knowledge is indispensable for efficient reading. In China, since the 1980s, scholars have begun to discuss the role of cultural knowledge in English learning. For example, the book *“Language and Culture-----Contrastive of English and Chinese Culture”* by Deng Yanchang and Liu Runqing (1989) is regarded as the first one on culture. Later, the publication of two collections *“Culture and Communication”* edited by Hu Wenzhong, and *“Culture and Language”* by Wang Fuxiang and Wu Hanying can prove well that the study on language and culture has become a focus in linguistic research field.

Though the importance of cultural knowledge has been realized earlier, the practice of putting culture learning into action grows very slowly. In the practice of the teaching of English reading, the students are often told that “Enough vocabulary and grammatical knowledge ensure high scores in English reading.” But at the same time, many English teachers feel puzzled when they see the students still make mistakes and cannot get high scores even if they have no reading difficulty in vocabulary and grammatical knowledge. They always think it is because the students don't have a good command of language knowledge, then they strengthen the students' language knowledge furtherly. As a result, the students' study burden becomes greater and greater, on the other hand, students begin to feel tired of studying. In fact, the problem is that when vocabulary and grammatical knowledge are emphasized, the role of cultural background knowledge is veiled. When involving some aspects of culture, the teachers just mention it in a few words. And the topic is always about the customs or traditions like “greetings, folklores, festivals, rituals, foods, fashions, etc.” ----- these simple and superficial examples. However, as English majors, it is

far from enough.

2.3 Necessity of the Knowledge of Biblical Culture in English Reading

Liang Shuming (1994), who made great contributions to the studies of Eastern and Western cultures, divided culture into three layers -----superficial layer, intermediate layer, and deep layer. The deep layer is the spiritual life, such as religion, philosophy, value systems, science and art. They are less tangible and more abstract. It hides in the spiritual world of people. Samovar L.A (2004) set forth three origins of the deep structure of culture: they are worldview (or religion), family, and history (including nation, government, and society). Among the three origins, worldview plays an important role in the arising of people's beliefs and values, and is the core of language and culture; Religion is the predominant element in the core. World view, according to Samovar (2004), is a culture's orientation toward God, humanity nature, questions of existence, the universe and cosmos, life, death, sickness and other philosophical issues that influence how its members perceive their world. There is a common understanding that world view influences all aspects of perception and affects people's beliefs and value systems, as well as the thought way. A world view can even influence the social economic and political life of a nation.

Samovar (2004) noted that, "Religion gives us our world view..... in a host of ways, and religion has provided the peoples of the world with advice, values, and guidance since antiquity". Britain and America are always regarded as the main English countries, where Christianity is the mainstream religion. Take America as an example, it is estimated about 86% of the American believers call themselves Christians (quoted in Larry A. Samovar 2004: 93-94). The canon of Christianity is the Bible. In some degree, the thoughts in the Bible determine the way of people seeing the society and world.

The American ideological authority Michael Novak (quoted in Wen Jun: 2004) once said, among the three systems of politics, economy, and culture in America, Christian spirit is the core of cultural system.

As Chinese English readers, they are sure to contact the western culture, in which biblical culture is very popular. Not knowing the biblical culture, they can not grasp the essence of English culture. But for readers in China who live in an environment where religious culture is not paid much attention to, they are easy to ignore the importance of biblical culture and may have a hostile attitude toward it. As a result, the schema slots from biblical culture may become great obstacles in their reading.

The Bible holds all aspects of western culture, from physical, conventional, to psychological culture. It is the source and the myth of western culture. From the point of religion, the Bible can help us understand the faith of the believers and can find the source of the believers' doctrine (for example, the concept of resurrection), ritual and ethics that explain many central issues in western countries such as debates on capital punishment and nuclear warfare. The Bible is also the source of western customs, literature and arts. For example, in the Bible, we can find the origin of Christmas day and Christmas gifts. And almost all the writers in the western countries absorb "nutrition" from the Bible by applying allusions, thoughts, and prototypes, and images. So to have some biblical knowledge is necessary for us to understand western culture.

To have biblical knowledge does not mean to believe in Christianity. Through the Bible, we can have a deeper understanding to western history, geography, politics, economy, values, world views, perception of ethics, literature and arts. Recently in China, the active role of biblical culture in English learning has received more and more concern from teachers and researchers. Many articles supporting the role of biblical culture in English learning have come out gradually.

Zhang Yali (1999:46-48) expatiated profoundly the deep influence of the Bible on English language from the point of view of its origin, literary value, and its influence on literators. He furtherly pointed that lacking the background knowledge on the Bible would cause misunderstanding or noncomprehension in reading. Guo Lianfa (2004:28-29) emphasized the importance of biblical culture in understanding western culture and in English learning. Zhu Shuzhen (2004:62-64) discussed the pervasion of biblical culture in English language and also mentioned this point. She said, the Bible is just like a big tree, with exuberant branches and leaves, only by knowing the big tree and its branches better can learners master and apply English more efficiently. Liu Zhi (2005) analyzed fully the biblical context of American culture, and suggested that, as biblical culture is very popular, it is of course necessary for English learners to have some knowledge of it, which is very useful in English learning. Chen Lan (2006), in her master's thesis, discussed her experiment and efficient results on introducing biblical culture to high school English teaching. Zhou Tianxue (2006), in her master's thesis named "*The Road to Western Culture*", discussed the significance and value of the Bible for Chinese English learners and emphasized importance of knowing biblical culture in understanding western culture.

The most important value of culture is that it determines the perception of the world. When students are reading, they unavoidably encounter some difficulties from different cultures. For readers of senior classes in the university who have mastered the basic linguistic knowledge, most difficulties and misunderstanding can be traced to cultural differences. Through the Bible, readers can have a deeper understanding of western culture. And this can, in some degree, make up the slots of their cultural schemata. Fortunately, the *“English Syllabus for English Majors in Institutions of Higher Learning”* (2000) has stipulated that the contents of western culture should be included in the courses of English major, and biblical knowledge is prescribed as part of English teaching contents. It is clear that biblical culture has been placed formally in the teaching programme, and the learning of western culture has been an important aim that can not be neglected in the teaching of English reading. In China, some key universities like Beijing University, and Shnanghai Foreign University have taken the lead in setting up courses on biblical culture.

It can be affirmed that the learning of biblical culture has received much emphasis from Chinese educational field. We can not leave it as a slogan, or leave it enjoyed only by students in certain universities. It should be shared by more students. Doing this can help realizing the educational aim of cultivating English elites with solid professional English knowledge and broad cultural knowledge. This is also the author’s intention in this thesis.

2.4 Biblical Culture and Christianity

Christianity is one of the world religions. In it Jesus is worshiped as the Christ. Together with Buddhism, and Islam, they are called the Three Great Religions in the world. It is said that Christianity originated in the 1st century A.D., and was created by a Nazarene -----Jesus, a Jew. It went round all over the Roman Empire in the late Roman period, and was acknowledged as the state religion of the empire in the 4th century A.D., which laid the foundation for Christianity to become the dominant religion in the west. Christianity has a long history and rather influential power. It permeates many countries in the fields of history, culture, politics, economy and customs of the western countries and plays an important role in the formation of the traditions and models of western ideology and culture.

The data reported in 2000 implies that, among more than 6 billion of the world population, about one

third of them are Christians, (and among the world believers, about 40% are Christians, here Christians include Catholics, Protestants, and Easterns). From the amount of believers and the distribution of them in the world, Christianity is the largest religion.

From the point of view of religion, Christianity derives from Judaism or Hebrew culture, so it came into being mainly by inheriting Hebrew culture and absorbing some Greek culture. It also benefits from the ancient Babylonian culture, ancient Egyptian culture, ancient Persian culture, and ancient Roman culture. Christianity stresses more on “original sin”, and warns world people with the notion that “those who are sinful deserve punishment”, many other religions also include this point. According to Christianity, all the people are sinful since they were born, because human ancestors Adam and Eve stole and ate the fruits in the knowledge trees, all people got into deep evil. We can find what the whole Old Testament records is about human evils. According to Christianity, only Jesus Christ can save the people, and help them break away from the evil. In Christianity, human beings can be saved. Therefore, the greatest moral value of Jesus’ tears, lifeblood, suffering, and self sacrifice lies in his helping human beings get rid of the wickedness in their soul, turning the darkness into brightness, and devil into angel. This is the best embodiment of Christian spirit.

The Bible is the canon of Christianity. It consists of 39 books of the Old Testament written in Hebrew, and 27 books of the New Testament written in Greek. It serves as written centerpiece of Christianity and is considered by Christians containing the revelation of God. The word “*Testament*” means “agreement”-----namely, the agreement between God and Man.

The Old Testament, according to its contents, includes four categories:

Law: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. They are also called Pentateuch.

History: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, 1 Chronicles, 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther.

Prophecy: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

Poetry and Wisdom: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs.

For Jews, the Hebrew Bible, or Old Testament, is an important document that lasts thousands of years and offers guidance to the present and future. Its books were written, revised, edited and reedited

between approximately 1000 B.C. and 100 A.D.. The contents involve the creation of the world, stories of the life and history of the early men and of the ancient Hebrews, who entered Canaan in about the 18th century B.C.. The basics of the *Old Testament* are the idea of the sacred agreement between God and Hebrews. God promises the Hebrew Patriarch Abraham to give his descendants the land of Canaan forever in return for their loyalty. The covenant is renewed when God gives Moses the Ten Commandments and promises favor to those who keep them (Zhang Congyi 2004:149-150).

The *New Testament* can be divided into four categories:

Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

History(of the Apostles): Acts28

Twenty one Letters

Revelation22

In the books of the *New Testament* which was written originally in the 1st century A.D., the four Gospels record the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. They reflect the early Christian belief that Christ is the beginner who fulfilled God's promises. It presents the events of Christ's birth in Bethlehem, his preaching mission, and his Crucifixion and Resurrection. Generally speaking, it is thought that the *Old Testament* describes the events before Christ was born; and the *New Testament* begins with the events after his birth: his suffering, resurrection, and ascending to the heaven. The writing of it lasted about 1500 years, and it is said, by more than 40 authors, who lived in different periods with different professions and status, and in different writing background. (Surprisingly, the contents of these books are so harmonious, echo with each other, and are in an integrated mass.)

Christ in the Bible performed miracles to show God's power. The authors of the Bible used historical details in support of the doctrine that Jesus is a divine mediator between God and man. He prophesies the triumph of good over evil at the last judgment and the coming of a new age (Zhang Congyi, 2004: 149-150).

It is generally supposed that the Bible is an encyclopedia, recording every aspect of western culture, and bearing enormous influence on the politics, economy, philosophy, literature and arts of western countries.

2.5 Influence of the Bible on English Language

The development of English language and English- American culture are deeply influenced by the Bible.

The Bible has more than 1400 versions of different languages. The English version adopted commonly now is King James Version (KJV) or Authorized Version (AV) (1611). The translation of it was authorized by King James I and translated by 54 scholars in seven years (1603-1611). It has been enormously influential in the development of the English language.

The Bible covers a wide range of contents and spread all over the world, one of the reasons owes to the characteristics of its language style and contents. Though the ancient original text is hard to understand, the versions that were perfected gradually expose its attraction, for example, the popular King James Version. British historian T. B. Macanlay once said, provided that all the materials written in English were destroyed except the Bible in English version, then this book alone can sufficiently display all the beauty and power of English language (quoted in Ma Qian, 1996:354-355).

English Bible draws narrative prose, poetry, and allegory together. It spreads the Christian doctrines, beliefs, and ethic concepts to English countries and other areas in straightforward but profound language. For many years, it was read, and cited smartly. Guo Lianfa, who takes the Authorized Version as an example, said, "The charm of the Bible lies in its pithy writing style, artful diction, profound connotation, strict and precise structure."(Guo Lianfa 2004:28-29). For example, in Exodus(20:13-17) , God told Moses to pass His words to the people of Israel on Mount Sinai, "Do not put anyone to death without cause; Do not be false to the married relation; Do not take the property of another; Do not give false witness against your neighbour," These sentences are all very short ones with negative forms, similar structures, concise but are very deep and comprehensive.

Anyone who has read about the Bible will find that: an obvious characteristic of its language is the deep implication. Just as Ye Shuxian (2003) said, "the extreme subtlety of its language is the applying of parables, which has become the important source of western literary language". One of the most renowned critics since the twentieth century, Canadian Northrop Frye, calls the Bible "Great Code"(1982). He found that the languages in the Bible are in parable or symbol from beginning to end. These parables, metaphors, or symbols correspond to each other, and connect one another implicitly into an abundant and complete

code system, which provide the prototypical base for the construction, imagination, and expression of western literature. (Ye Shuxian 2003: introduction).

From Jesus' preaching in gospels, we can have a general picture about this point. According to the Gospel, Jesus often preaches in metaphorical way ("and without a parable, he does not speak to them" Matthew13:34). Because many people turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the events in the heaven (Matthew13:13). The metaphors such as sowing seeds (Matthew 13:1-9), mustard seed (Matthew 13:31-32), lost goat (Matthew18:10-14, Luke15:1-7), wanderer (Luke15:11-32) can be found in his instruction everywhere. The metaphors are said to validate the prophet's words. "I will open my mouth in parables; I will utter things which have been kept secret from the foundation of the world." (Matthew13:35). These metaphors transfer holy words by common words, using the earthborn things to allude to the supernatural heaven.

The Bible, taking advantage of its exquisite expressing skills, leads Christian tenets, beliefs, and ethical conception to penetrate into people's worldly life. The metaphorical characteristics of English Bible leave many valuable stories, parables, phrases, proverbs, which greatly enrich English language itself.

Firstly, some vocabulary from Bible, after evolvement, wear new or broader meanings and many derivatives occurred. They are very popular in daily life and have become an indispensable part of modern English. For example, *devil* refers to wickedness, and inhumanity. It is transformed to refer to energetic, able-minded and impulsive person and can also be used as verbs, meaning afflicting, making fun of, or ill-treating. Then occurred the derivatives: *devil-may-care*, *devilish*, *devilry*, *bedevil*, *devilmint*, *devil-box*, *she-devil*, and so on. Other words like "*creature*" from "*Genesis*" referring to everything that God created, now refers to common living things. The word *Manna* comes from "*Exodus*". When Moses led the Israelite out of Egypt, they were short of grains, and at this time food came down from the heaven, they ate them and called this "*Manna*". Now "*Manna*" refers to something met by chance and inspiring. The original meaning of *deluge* is the waters ordered by God, now refers to flood on the earth.

The words listed above were only religious words, but now they and their derivatives are used in daily life and have more lively meanings and more frequent application.

Secondly, a great number of allusions become part of modern English. Many of them take a person, an animal, a place, a plant, or even an event as the symbols to represent certain kind of persons, special

meanings or to express some reasons. For example:

A land flowing with milk and honey (Exodus: 3-8): According to the Bible, the land flowing with milk and honey is a nice place awarded to the Israelite by God besides the Eden. It located in Canaan. It is said that the place was one of the earliest headstreams of human agriculture, with favourable natural conditions, suitable for farming and grazing. The wandering Israelite were yearning for this place all the time. "*A land flowing with milk and honey*" now refers to rich, fertile, or abundant place.

The tower of Babel (Genesis 11), according to the Bible, was built by Noah's offspring to see what the heaven was like. Their recklessness irritated the Lord, who mixed their languages, scattered them from over the surface of the earth. Therefore its name is called Babel, meaning disturbance. *The tower of Babel* currently refers to dreams impossible to come true.

Lot's wife: Originated from *Genesis* in the Bible, When the Lord began to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, he sent two angels to urge the goodman Lot and his family to flee and warned them not to turn their head back. But curious to see what was happening, his wife looked back behind him, and she became a pillar of salt. (Sodom and Gomorrah are two cities destroyed by Lord because of its sinful residents.) *Lot's wife* is used to refer to those who are too curious.

Example: *Curious as Lot's wife, Helen can't get along well with her classmates.*

Fig leaves were the leaves to cover up their embarrassment by Adam and Eve. Now implies something to maintain grace.

Some expressions from the Bible have become popular idioms and are widely used in daily English, for example,

Apple of the eye (Psalms 17, Deuteronomy 32): now often means treasurable things.

A fly in the ointment (Ecclesiastes 10:1) : sb./sth that spoils , to a greater or less degree, an otherwise perfect or very satisfactory situation, state of affairs; a blot on the landscape. For example, *Apparently they don't like Lennie, neither do I. He is the only fly in the ointment around here, as far as I'm concerned.*

A drop in the ocean (Isaiah: 40: 14-15): something very small compared with something larger that is required. The origin of the expression shows the insignificance of the earthly nations when compared with the greatness of God.

The leopard cannot change his spots (Jeremiah 13:23): the basic character or nature of a person or

institution that cannot be changed

Money is the root of all evil (2 Timothy 6: 11-12): it is not money itself, but the love of money that is condemned by Paul in this letter)

A scarlet woman (Revelation 17:3-6): a sexually promiscuous woman; especially a prostitute.

A man after his own heart (1 Samuel 13:14): the kind that someone likes most, because they share the same ideas.

Some expressions originated from Bible have been used as maxims for persuasion or encouragement. For example,

Pride goes before a fall;

Treat others in the same way as you would like to be treated.

A tree is known by its fruit;

Better is a neighbor that is near than a brother far off.

When words are many, sin is not absent.

All who take the sword will perish by the sword.

.....

All these allusions have become widely known and used. They may be bolted out at any time from a British or American speaker. And for readers, they may read them at any English text. Because of the authoritative status of the Bible in western countries, allusions from the King James Version sometimes have a special power. They appear in written and spoken English frequently, shape a kind of folk moral conception, and, in some degree, affect people's action criterions.

From above, we can feel the deep influence of Biblical culture on English language. The English speakers or writers are used to citing the expressions in Bible unconsciously. These expressions always inform some reasons, providing the readers with enough thinking space. And the English readers can find endless cultural connotation from these seemingly simple stories. No wonder Guo Lianfa(2004:28-29) said, "Knowledge of biblical culture can help us understand and know more about western culture, and are useful for us to grasp and apply English at a higher lever."

Here we can conclude that the occurrence of the allusions from the Bible in English reading materials from time to time is not surprising, and that they baffle the readers who are not familiar with their deep

meanings is inevitable.

2.6 Reflection of Biblical Culture in English Reading

Biblical culture, as the body of western culture, infiltrates into every corner of western countries. As Chinese English-readers who have no chance to immerge in real English environment, they can experience this from several aspects through their reading. Western politics and law, economy, philosophy, literature and arts, and daily life are all influenced by biblical culture.

Generally speaking, British and American culture is always regarded as the representatives of western culture, therefore the author here takes British and American culture as example to illustrate the reflection of biblical culture.

2.6.1 Politics and Law

(1) Politics

The influence of Bible on western politics embodies in such aspects as presidential inaugural, foreign policy, the ideology in democracy, freedom, and human rights, and so on. Here we do not care it is reasonable or not, just let's feel the Bible's influential power.

Take America as example, Professor Dong Xiaochuan(2000:4) summarized the position of religion in America as follows:

Religion is the spitual consolation to Americans, a kind of national ideology, the uniform ethics and values of the nation, the additive of political life and spiritual support.

In the Bible, there is one concept "the elects", which is originated from the old Testment. It means that God chose the Ephraim and favored them with the Happy Land Canaan. Influenced by this, the Americans call themselves "the elects by God". Thomas Jefferson(1743-1826), in his inaugural in 1805, said, God has regarded our predecessors as the chosen people, led them away from the native land, and settled them in a land with living requisites and comfortable conditions everywhere(quoted in Li Mingjian 1997:31).

The conception of "elects by God" leads Americans to think that they bear the endowed mission to educate and save the weak countries. Driven by this thought, American leaders propagate "American

democracy” by foreign expansion, political intervention, economical aid, and even military pressure. The conception of “love” in Bible makes them even think that every believer should learn to love all other people. And his activity should embody God’s glory and realize God’s will. So they think to help people in other countries to gain freedom and democracy is their obligation. This conception provides a “reasonable” excuse for interventionism. After the “Cold War”, American foreign decision-makers pushed their “freedom” and “democracy” to every corner of the world. This kind of American-centered ethnocentric culture dominates American foreign policy. In the shadow of “sacred mission”, all the strategies and behaviors in their foreign affairs become holy, legal, and reasonable (LiuZhi, 2005:86-90). From the point of Christianity, American foreign policy finds its best evidence. When American president William McKinley talked of the affair of occupying Philippines, he said, “In fact, I didn’t want to take Philippines, but when it is favored as a gift by God, I really didn’t know what to do.....I had seeked help.....and paced in the White House until the deep night.I had prayed, kneeling on the floor, and asking the omnipotent God again and again. In the end, I heard a voice from God one night. I didn’t know how the voice came, but it did come.....that is to take Philippines. We have no other choice. We should educate the Philippine, and improve them. We will make them civilized, and converted. We will do all we can for our Philippine friends with God’s grace.” (Michael Novak, 1974:154). America’s foreign expansion is considered finishing God’s orders.

American presidents’ speeches also manifest the shadow of biblical culture. Professor XiongLi (2006) in HuBei Institute for Nationalities analyzed the speeches of ten American presidents after WW II and found that biblical culture is adequately reflected in their speeches. For example, G .W. Bush in his inaugural in 1989 said,

..I have just repeated word-for-word the oath taken by George Washington 200 years ago; and the Bible on which I placed my hand is the Bible on which he placed his

- *My first act as President is a prayer:*

Heavenly Father, we bow our heads and thank you for your love.....

At the end of their inaugural, presidents like to impetrate God’s blessing, and appeal to action in God’s name. This phenomenon is very common in the inaugurals. For instance:

(1)Let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking his blessing and his help, but knowing that here on

earth God's work must truly be our own (Kennedy, 1961).

(2)...with God's help, we can and will resolve the problems which now confront us. God bless you, and thank you.(Reagan,1981).

(3) And now, each in our way, and with God's help, we must answer the call,

Thank you and God bless you all (Clinton, 1993).

This kind of ends adapt to listeners' taste of worshipping God. It is easy for the leaders to reach their political aims (Xiong Li, 2006: 95-97). Dwight Eisenhower, after being elected, professed that, to admit the God's existence is of the first importance of American style. Without the belief to God, American political system will be impossible, neither is American life style (Lv Rujun & Xin Shijun).

During W. W. II, British premier Churchill, in his speech (1940), also recurred to God's name to encourage his soldiers. He said, ".....you ask: what is our policy? I say, it is to wage war by land, sea and air, war with all our might and with all the strength *God* has given us, and to wage war against a monstrous tyranny never surpassed in the dark and lamentable catalogue of human crime. That is our policy."

In running for presidents, each American president knows clearly the importance of striving for the supports from Christians, especially the Protestants. They quote the Bible as much as possible to express their piety, using the religious credendums to illustrate the political opinions.

Anyhow, in western countries, running for president and presidential inaugural always wear obvious religious meaning. But it doesn't mean that all the audience and leaders are Christians. In fact, some presidents themselves do not believe in religion. Their behaviors cannot be only regarded as a reflection of religious superstition, because it often goes beyond the religious border. No matter what identities they have, they have been used to speaking of God at any time. Religious culture is a special culture in western countries and is the reflection of its historical origin (Xiong Li, 2006: 95-97).

Besides in the fields of running for president and presidential inaugural, when involving the justice of human rights and democracy, the Americans also like to take advantage of the theory in the Bible "God loves every person and confers rights on each person. In order to protect these rights, we need democracy and freedom." According to the Bible, God created people following his image, humans have rights and dignity that can not be deprived. The essence of the theory of human rights is to ensure each person's rights, no matter man or woman, old or young, and weak or strong.

On the problem of freedom, it is also related to Christianity. In their minds, humans were created by God, so people are to glory in finishing God's mission. Each man should have enough space to display his ability and reach a consummate state. So men must have freedom.

To sum up, in American people's minds, many of their systems are the best, because these systems reflect God's will. We don't care whether it is reasonable or not. The influence of biblical culture has been rather obvious.

(2) Law

In western countries, God's shadow, expressions and images can be found everywhere. There is no exception in law.

Moses's *Ten Commandments* and other religious rules are the base of the laws and ethics in the middle ages in Europe. When judges in courts are sentencing a case, the Bible is usually used as their ground.

In America, the origin of constitution has its firm religious foundation-----that is the theory of Christian covenant. The Protestants absorbed the thoughts of the covenant in the Bible, and believe all nations have covenanted with God. The law was enforced through organized government to punish illegal conducts (Alexander de Conde 1965:4-5). Based on this thought, early in 1620, the Protestants who reached North America signed the famous "May Flower" in God's name, which is the earliest embodiment of religious covenant that transformed into political agreement. It laid the foundation for the formulation and the issue of laws later on. After that, North American colonies signed many treaties and statute laws. These early colonial law documents should be regarded as the rudiment of modern constitutions. At that time, many of the North American leaders looked on "American constitution" as a kind of social covenant, a fundamental agreement which standardized the mutual rights and obligations between citizens and states in an eternal way (Li Zuoheng, 2004).

The influence of the Bible on law can still be seen in modern life. On the stone above the seat of the American chief justice is carved the "Ten Commandments" of the Bible, guarded by the "American Eagle". In the front hall stands the stone statue of Moses. Before holding the cases, the court will always begin with this prayer: "God bless the United States of America".

The words "In God We Trust" occurs in the broad seal, on the stone wall of the Capitol, etc.. These are all the results and embodiment of the inheritance and evolution of Biblical culture.

2.6.2 Economy

According to the Bible, men were created in God's image, and to glorify God. In virtue of this, every person has freedom by nature, and the freedom helps him develop himself fully. So people have the freedom to choose their professions according to their interests and ability, and have the freedom to engage in economic activities. Therefore Americans implement liberal economy or market economy, only by which do they think their people have enough free space to develop themselves and to glorify God.

There was an interview on Chinese America-visiting scholar, the vice-president of America Purdue University Yang Fenggang in the magazine of "Southern People Weekly" in March, 2007. When asked about the relationship between religion and American market economy, Yang's analysis was like this: Market economy has been in America for more than two hundred years. One of the important reasons why it can grow successfully is the existence of churches everywhere, which purifies human's spirits, and tames the bruteness of capital. If there were no churches, American market economy will have been crashed. (Rao Zhi, 2007 on line)

In western countries, there is a fact that the companies grow bigger and bigger. In fact, it is just also the result of the influence of Christian culture on people's minds. Affected by Christian ethics, all the people believe that they are called up by God, and this conception is accepted commonly. So they all work hard in order to glorify God. To them, their hard working is keeping to God's will. It is found that the western people earn money by any kinds of means. In some sense, their purpose of making money is not for enjoyment or splurge, but for the capital accumulation and reinvestment.

2.6.3 Philosophy

The Bible itself contains profound and complicated philosophical thought, reflecting the accumulation and coagulation of the thoughts of different national traditions in different periods. In philosophical history, even the scholasticism which had a dominant position in the Middle Ages regarded the Bible as the truth, and the philosophers' task was to annotate and elucidate the Bible.

In late of western ancient times, and the period of the formation and prosperity of mediaeval society, the Bible's special position imprinted the western philosophy with far-reaching biblical conception and value system. The lansign systems and conception it represents have influenced the value judgment of

western philosophy, and exerts a subtle influence on western people's thinking manner, even today.

From the point of view of religion, the influence of the Bible on western philosophy is that, it puts forwards philosophical questions on the origin, development and end-result of life and cosmic. It collected many religious ideas and mythical materials from ancient nations. The thoughts and philosophical bud from Hebrew, Babylon, Egypt, Persia, Plaestine, Greece and Rome can be seen in the lines of the Bible now and then, which bring people speculation and enlightenment. For example, the myth of Creation and the legend of Flood in Babylonian epics, conception on resurrection, judgement after death, life in the hell in Egyptian religion, and the thoughts from other ancient countries involving the assumption about the world's fountainhead and beginning, they all reflected ancient people's contemplation on human nature and fate, and brought forward the basic questions on how and why the cosmic and humans came into being, and where they would go. These early thoughts enriched and spread Jewish religious views, and on the other hand, laid the foundation for western philosophy in the cosmology and philosophy on life, and also made preparations for the the formation of western philosophy in religion, human life, and history.

In the Bible, all kinds of arguments about "God's existence", and the relationship between "individual and general" show the power of logic, which plays an important role in the development of dialectics in western philosophy. The thought on incarnation in the Bible, from the point of view of philosophy, probed into the the dialectic and unified relationship between abstract and materiality, this and that, infinity and finity, and eternalness and impermanency. The praise on God, on everything created by God, and on believers' spirits, in some degree, promotes and influences people's understanding on "beauty" from the point of view of philosophy. And the presentation of "original sin" and "degeneration" formed the ethics of "good and evil", and "guilt and punishment" in western philosophy.

Many of the concepts, stories, and parables in the Bible provide western philosophy with rich contents from different aspects and different levels.

In a word, the basic philosophical questions discussed in the Bible have profound influence on western civilization and philosophy.

2.6.4 Ideology

Christianity is the dominant world view found in western society. The ideas embodied in the Bible imprinted in western people's ideology and become very influential.

First, Christians believe strongly in organized worship as a means of proclaiming God's message.....the French historian de Tocqueville pointed out over two hundred years ago that Americans had a large series of networks and associations that went well beyond their family unit. Perhaps the stimulus for such behavior can be found in Christianity .In the East, one's spiritual life is conducted in solitude; in the West, God's message is shared with others (L. A. Samovar, et al 2004:93-94).

Second, Jesus preached a system of ethics that has lasted for two thousand years. Words and phrases such as commandments, right and wrong, good and evil, morals, and ethics are central to Christianity. And of course, the central ethics Jesus taught was *love*. The following ethic on love may be the most repeated in history: "Love your neighbour as yourself"; "What you would like people to do to you do to them." They have almost lived in everyone's heart.

According to the Bible, all the people on earth are God's children. 1 Corinthians (8:6) said, "But to us, there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him." In John (3:16), recorded:"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life", which embodies the gist of the Bible. God is regarded as the one who loves the world people like a father. There is a hierarchic relation between God and people----- that is owner and servants, which can not be reversed. And all the people are equal like brothers and sisters before God. Because men were created and loved by God, men are to glorify God. Each person who believes in God should learn to love others, and his behaviors should reflect God's glory and realize God's will.

Third, the western concept of the importance of the individual can be linked partially to Christianity. The Christian tradition begins with the assumption that the world is real and meaningful because God created it. Human beings are significant because God created them in his image. Each person is important to him.

After the Protestant "individual" idea came into being, the teaching "God loves men" is especially emphasized as "God loves EACH man in the world". This thought deems that each person was created by God, and each person's value and fortune are concerned about by God. Jesus said, God didn't want to lose any one of His lambs. If, among a hundred lambs, one is lost, He will get it back. Jesus's words were the theoretical basis of the thought "God loves EACH man in the world". Each person is the carrier of God's

love, and the realization of individual blessing is the embodiment of God's love. Individual, therefore, is the purpose of the world.

That the western people advocate individualism maybe originated from this. So in English, there is the proverb supporting individualism "He travels fastest who travels alone."

Of course, advocating individualism is not to seek satisfaction for oneself at the cost of others, but means everyone's benefits and rights should be respected.

Sometimes, the Chinese people feel puzzled when communicating with western people who value individualism and finding them ready to help others and respecting others' rights and privacy. It is just because they do not understand the essence of individualism.

Fourth, influenced by the thought of "original sin", in time conception, Americans have a strong orientation toward future. It is contrary to Chinese traditional conception of past orientation and that human nature is good. The idea of "original sin" stimulates them to go forward vigorously and courageously and make more progress in order to reduce their "sin". They all have a strong sense of time, each minute is important to them. They like to do things strictly according to their schedule. For a brighter and better future, they even do not care what kind of means they choose. They believe that: Going forward, happiness is waiting there for them, or else, they will return to the original sin. Therefore, in the west, sayings on evaluating time are also very popular among people. For example,

Take time while time is, for time will be away.

Lost time is never found again, and what we call time enough always proves little enough.

Punctuality is the soul of business.

Their future orientation toward time makes them care much about efficiency, change, renovation and progress. The sayings "Quick at meal, quick at work; Quick feet and busy hands fill the mouth." is a witness of this conception.

2.6.5 Literature and Arts

(1) Literature

The *Bible* has enormous influence on the art and literature of western civilization.

The *Bible* itself possesses high value in literature. Poesy like Psalter, Song of Songs, and

Lamentations emanate full-bodied literary atmosphere, and bring profound influence on literature. It is regarded by people as a special magnum opus which exceeds all other western literary works.

The subject matters, stories, and allusions from the Bible influence western literature greatly. Works with biblical subjects occupy a large proportion.

In "*Divine Comedy*" by Dante, with Christian heaven and hell as the subject matter, theological thought is the guiding ideology. In it, many characters were mentioned, such as Adam, Abraham, Noah, Moses, David, Jesus, Peter, Jacob and John. The sermons, symbols, revelations, and gospels are all delineated and presented.

The title of "*The Sun Also Rises*" by Ernest Hemingway is quoted from Ecclesiastes (1:5). Hemingway brings the preacher's words as the preface of his novel,

"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose..... All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it.....and there is no new thing under the sun." (Ecclesiastes, 1:4-9).

Here, Hemingway intends to point out that the whole life is occupied, but in the end nothing is gained. People's status is of little importance, and man can not change his fate. No matter how he strives, it is useless.

The Bible is very important to Hemingway. Once he said he wrote by reading the Bible, especially the Old Testament. Faulkner also said he began to recite the Bible when he was a child, and often read the Old Testament when he grew up, so he could write with facility (quoted in Ma Qian 1996 (3):354-355).

In Walt Whitman's (1819-1892) "*Leaves of Grass*", there is one chapter named *Children of Adam* which contains 16 poems. Though there is no certain relation in structure, the whole chapter runs through with the story "Adam's Eden", which makes the contents very harmonious.

British writer Milton's magnum opuses "*Paradise Lost*", "*Paradise Regained*" and "*Satan Agonistes*", wear deep biblical theme. In "*Paradise Lost*" which originated from the *Old Testament*, the author, in an unordinary method, described Satan as a character with fortitudinous will, which shew the quality of a revolutionary persecuted in revolution.

J . Bunyan's (1628-1688) "*Pilgrim's Progress*" expresses the author's incomparable respect,

admiration and piety to God in a Christian's name, on the other hand, reflected the dark side of England at that time. It is even considered almost equally famous as the Bible.

W. M. Thackeray in his famous works *Vanity Fair*, took advantage of the characters in the Bible and the relationship among them such as David, Samson, Cain, Judah to design the figures of his novel.

Woman writer Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855) in *Jane Eyre* quoted skillfully the allusions from the Bible many times. The "fire" she described has the meaning of Jesus baptizing the world people with fire.

British romantic poet Byron's works also cite contents from the Bible. For example, in *Cain*, the characters and plots all inosculate with the contents of Genesis (4:1-16) in the *Old Testament*.

Poet John Keats (1795—1821) in his lyric "*Ode to a Nightingale*" quotes the allusion of Ruth in the *Old Testament*.

In some degree, quotations from the Bible have become western writers' priceless treasure. According to the statistic by some criticist, Shakespeare cited the Bible as many as 400 times, each play cited 14 times on an average. In Milton's "*Paradise Lost*", 913 quotations from the *Old Testament* in Bible can be found. Chaucer's works mentioned Adam 23 times, Moses 8 times, and Jesus 300 times (Yang Huilin 1991).

The strong artistic power and high aesthetic value of the Bible makes it the source of British and American literary works. The knowledge of biblical culture can help readers furtherly appreciate British and American literature, and have a deeper understanding of western culture, which, on a whole, is helpful in English reading.

(2) Arts

Christian arts, in a broad sense, include the arts in time and space. The former mainly involve Christian music and poesy; and the latter mainly refer to architecture, engraving, and painting. Music and poesy present the beauty of thoughts and arts in persistent time, painting embodies the plastic arts in plane space, and engraving shows the solid beauty. Generally speaking, the Christian arts that people often mention refer to the painting, engraving and architecture (Lab of Christianity, Institute of World Religion of China' Academy of Social Sciences 2001:277). And biblical stories, characters always become the artistic materials and themes.

It is said that, in the west, the best and most characteristic or distinctive buildings are churches. And the Middle Ages can provide the best evidence. Three types of building were very popular at that time:

Byzantine, Roman, and Gothic. During the 10th to 20th century, Roman architectures were predominant, with the characteristics of round arch. The special lines and bright ornaments produced a kind of mystery and sacred atmosphere, which implied the greatness and awfulness of God and churches, and the insignificance of human beings.

The gothic architecture in the 13th century took the shape of ogive instead of round arch, and inside the buildings were decorated with anaglyph and paintings. The towering spires led your eyes to the endless heaven. It implied the yearning for God and heaven, at the same time, shew that the road to heaven was rough and far.

Engravings and paintings originated from the biblical culture could be seen everywhere in the churches. In the Middle Ages, the figures from the *Bible* were carved in the stones of cathedrals and churches, and the biblical stories were represented in frescoes on the walls and in the stained glass windows (Lab of Christianity , Institute of World Religion of China' Acadamy of Social Sciences, 2001).

In Roman period, European painting art is a kind of expression of the Christians' religious belief and feeling. For example, the cross with a lamb under it is the representative symbol of Christianity. Fish and kind shepherder are always the symbols of Christ, pigeon symbolizes Holy Spirit, boat stands for church, peacock for the eternity, and heart for the kindness. Besides, bodies of man or animal are used to symbolize different books of Gospel. For instance, man symbolizes Matthew, eagle symbolizes Mark, cattle is related with Luke, and lion stands for John (ibid).

During Italian renaissant period, paintings by the "Three Outstanding Artists" with Christian subjects all chose the Bible as its background. For example, Raffaello Sanzo(1483~1520)'s "*The Sistine Madonna*", Leonardo Da Vinci's masterpiece "*The Last Supper*", Michelangelo Buonarroti(1475-1564)'s "*Creation*" and "*The Last Judgement*".

2.6.6 Daily Life

The Bible's influence in western countries falls not only on politics, economy, philosophy, and literature and arts, but also in daily life. For example,

After the children were born, according to the religious convenance, they will be blessed and named by the clergies. And the parents like to name their children after the names in the Bible. Names like Mary,

Sarah, Joseph, David, Abraham, and Elizabeth are very popular with them.

On weddings and festivals, the western people always hold their weddings in churches; In celebrating festivals such as Christmas Day and Easter Day, activities with biblical theme are very rich. That the first day of a week is customarily from Sunday is also the reflection of biblical culture.

In oral speaking, parols like “Oh, my God.”, “God knows”, “Go to the hell”. “Don’t play God”, “I am the blessed one” etc. can be heard at any time. At one time, when talking with a foreign teacher, the author sneezed suddenly, and the foreign teacher bolted out “God bless you” right now very naturally.

In recreational field, taking America as example, there are more than 1200 broadcasting stations playing religious programmes. One in twelve television stations is religious station, and there are as many as 5000 kinds of religious newspapers and maganizes. The distribution of religious audio disc exceed the ones in Jazz, classical music and other pop music.

That the words “In God We Trust” even occur on the face of American dollars reflects biblical culture as well.

These are all the results and embodiment of biblical culture in people’s daily life.

So far, the characteristics of the Bible, and how biblical culture is reflected in western countries have been dicussed. As Chinese English readers, the way they contact biblical culture is from reading materials such as those on politics, economy, philosophy and literature and arts. From the analysis above, we see the influence of the Bible on western culture can not be underestimated. The essential value of it rests with its declaring the spiritual power, and encouraging people to be loyal to morals; and, thereby, exerting a subtle influence on people’s ideology and behaviors. To understand biblical culture can help us know more about the western culture, and is useful for English learners to master and apply English at a higher level. The Bible is just like a key to western culture. Through it, we can have an all-round understanding of western culture from the point of view of religion, history, literature, folklore, and philosophy. Consequently, have a more exact value judgement.

Chapter Three A Survey Study

Language reflects culture. The Bible has its unique characteristics and incomparable functions in embodying western cultures. Therefore, in English reading, it is natural for the students to contact biblical culture. The lack of the background knowledge of biblical culture will cause the occurring of slots in students' cultural schemata, which may become the barriers in reading comprehension. In China, many teachers, researchers, and even educational departments have already been advocating the important role of biblical culture in English learning. Then, what are the situations in reality? With this question and other related questions, the author conducted a survey study in order to find some enlightenment in the teaching of English reading.

3.1 Purposes of the Study

Lado (1961) pointed out that it was very important to test students' cultural knowledge. So the principal aim of the study is to find out whether there are some slots from biblical culture in college English majors' cultural schemata; if there are, whether they affect their reading comprehension; and to learn about students' attitudes towards the role of the knowledge of biblical culture in English reading. It also aims to find some enlightenment for the teaching of English reading. Therefore, the author intends to get answers to the following questions through the results of the study:

- (1) Are there any schema slots from biblical culture in English majors? If there are, do the slots affect their reading comprehension?
- (2) What attitudes do English majors hold towards the role of the knowledge of biblical culture in English reading?
- (3) In view of the results, what implications can be got for the teaching of English reading?

3.2 Subjects

In this study, one class of English majors from Henan Normal University was chosen randomly. They were 50 juniors in all. The reason why the author chose the juniors was that, compared with the freshmen and sophomores, they have a longer time of study in university, and have learned some related cultural

courses like “Entrance to Western Culture”, or “British and American Literature”, and so on. They should have deeper impression on western culture. Among them, 30 were girls and 20 were boys. Their ages were from 18 to 22 years old, with an average of 20 years old.

3.3 Instruments

The present study consists of two parts. The first part is about personal details, including name, gender and age. The aim is just to learn about their basic information. The second part was culture testing, which was implemented twice at different time.

According to the culture testing methods supported by Valette (1977: 263-281) and Zou Shen (2005: 438), the first test in this study took the form of multiple choice. This method is also used by most foreign teachers in culture testing (Moore, 1994).

Seelye (1974) summarized seven aims in culture teaching, and two of them are: cultural connotation of words and phrases and attitudes towards other cultures. Accordingly, the test includes 20 English sentences, and each contains an idiom (which is italicized) originated from the Bible. The subjects were required to read each sentence and choose the correct figurative meaning from the three options that were given. The idioms were chosen from the book “*Parables in the Bible*” written by Ye Shuxian, the Professor in Literary Research Institute of China’s Academy of Social Sciences, who has studied biblical culture for many years and often gives lectures to university students. The idioms in this study were from the 72 representative idioms that he collected and are widespread in English countries.

In the second test, the options were cancelled, and the same subjects were asked to read the 20 sentences and write out the figurative meanings of the idioms in Chinese or English. This test method is also accordant with what Zou Shen (2005:435) mentioned on culture testing.

At the end of each test, space was left for the subjects to give freely their opinions on the role of the knowledge of biblical culture in English reading.

3.4 Methods and Procedures

The study was finished in May in 2007, with the help of another teacher. The first test was carried out at the beginning of May and the second was conducted a month later to the same group with the aim to see whether the results are identical.

In the first test, the subjects were asked to finish them within 30 minutes. 50 test papers were handed out and 50 were collected. In the second test, the same subjects were involved to finish them within 40 minutes. In order to get valid data and avoid students' random answers, they were told the test was related to their final scores. In this test, 50 papers were handed out and 48 were collected.

3.5 Results and Discussions

Through two different tests, valid data was obtained.

3.5.1 Results of the First Test

In this test, the subjects were provided with the following sentences, and each sentence has three options followed (Here the options are omitted):

1. In this war, you are our *Moses*.
2. Several of the country's most respected doctors have stated that smoking cigarettes harms one's health, but there are still many *doubting Thomases* who are not yet persuaded.
3. *A lion in the road*, he didn't pass the examination
4. This place is thought the *Garden of Eden* by young people.
5. They think Mike's plan is *the tower of Babel*.
6. His hometown is considered to be a nice place, *a land flowing with milk and honey*.
7. What do you want if you are given *Aaron's rod* ?
8. They seek office, not to be useful to the state, but for *the loaves and fishes*.
9. They are flying flag of *dove and olive leaf* instead of war.
10. They think of themselves as *the salt of the earth*.
11. I think Jim will reform himself, but Tom won't, as *a leopard won't change its spots*.
12. The amount spent on scientific research is *a drop in the bucket*.
13. I found the house wonderful, but there is *a fly in the ointment*-----it is too far from the town.
14. This fevered hope had grown up again like *a grain of mustard seed*.
15. He saw *the writing on the wall* for the British car industry several years ago.
16. When the coach was arrested for drunken driving, the students realized that their hero had *feet of clay*.

17. John grew up in a bad neighborhood, but he grew up with *clean hands*.
18. We will never be taken in by their *Cain's* heresy.
19. One's real enemy is the *old Adam*.
20. Mrs. Smith is a friend of mine, but I *don't know her husband from Adam*.

In this test, the full mark was 20, so the scores of the subjects were as follows:

14	15	15	15	16	16	16	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	17	18	18	18	18	18
18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	19	19	19	19	19	19	19
19	19	19	20	20	20	20	20													

Table 3-1: Scores of Test One

This test provided a surprising result.

The mean score was calculated, in order to make mean better represent the central tendency of data, the data was trimmed and the values on both sides were deleted. Then the mean was got. It was 18.

From the high rate of correctness, it can be inferred that they did not have much difficulty in understanding these sentences when they were reading. Some students even said,

“Even if I do not have the knowledge of biblical culture, I can still choose the correct answers”.

They mean, whether understanding biblical culture or not does not influence their reading comprehension. The reason why they had such opinion may lie in several possibilities: First, they really understood the sentence meanings according to the contexts. Second, the characteristics of the multiple-choice questions provided help for them. Multiple-choice questions have such properties: The students may get the correct answer just by guessing when they are not sure about the correct ones, even if they do not know the right answers at all. So there might be some randomness in their choice. On the other hand, multiple-choice questions have several options, which can provide clues for their choosing and help them find the right choice. Third, in this test, there were some disadvantages in the design of the options, that was, there were only three options for each question. It was easier for the subjects to eliminate the distractors and make the correct choice.

To sum up, in this test, the subjects made satisfying results. At the same time, this kind of results made the students feel it was unnecessary to know more about the biblical knowledge, because it didn't affect

their reading comprehension much.

3.5.2 Results of the Second Test

In the first test, the subjects did very well in answering the questions. In order to see whether they really understand the sentences or not, another test was carried out a month later. In this test, the same sentences were given to the same group of subjects, but the options were cancelled, which reduced the randomness of guessing and the help from the clues. The subjects were required to read the sentences and write out the figurative meanings of the idioms in these sentences without any help.

By checking their answers in this test, another surprise was found. Among the 48 valid test papers that were collected, 3 of them were left blank absolutely and 45 subjects made answers. Their scores were as follows:

0	0	0	5	5	5	7	7	8	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	10	10	10	10
11	11	11	11	12	12	12	12	13	13	13	14	14	14	14	14	15	15		
15	15	15	15	16	16	17	17	18	18	20									

Table 3-2: Scores of Test Two

By deleting the values on both sides, the mean score in this test was 12. There was clearly a decline in the mean score compared with that in the first test.

In this test, some students read and wrote out all the meanings of the idioms in the sentences, but some idioms were misunderstood. Some students could only write out the meanings of several idioms. Of the 48 subjects, only one could write all the figurative meanings of the italicized phrases correctly. There is a sharp contrast between the results of the two tests. This is beyond the author's expectation.

The different results of the two tests prove that: whether the students can do well or not is related to the style of the questions. In the first test, influenced by the characteristics of the multiple-choice questions, the subjects might get the answers by guessing, or by the suggestion of the options. In addition, the few disturbing options reduced their difficulty in choosing. All these factors help to produce the high rate of correctness in the first test. This made them mistake that they had really understood the sentences, so that

some students could not realize the role of biblical culture in their cultural schemata and could not find their slots in the schemata of biblical culture.

The second test reflected students' proficiency in reading comprehension more accurately, because they had not any help when they were doing this. The results suggested that there were indeed slots of biblical culture in the subjects' cultural schemata. This kind of cultural slots affected their reading and brought barriers in their understanding. At the same time, the different results in the two tests also imply that, sometimes the students were not clear about their knowledge structure, and could not realize the gap in their knowledge, for example, in the first test the subjects over evaluated their abilities. That some students said they needn't know biblical knowledge and could still do well in reading comprehension is a deceptive show, but in fact, they did not really understand the meanings of the idioms.

Allusions or idioms in the Bible are always connected with a story. Most of the time, the readers can not understand them only from the literal meaning. We have the feeling that, when we are learning the Chinese idioms, if we know the story that is related to them, we can understand the meaning deeply and easily. For example, if we know the story about "Lan Yu Chong Shu", or "Shou Zhu Dai Tu", we can remember them more easily and understand it more deeply when it is used in the context. It is the same in English reading, knowing the story related to the idiom, the reader can understand the context in which it exist better.

At the end of the second test, space was left for the students to leave their opinions freely about the role of the knowledge of biblical culture in English reading. About half of them gave their opinions. Generally speaking, experiencing two tests, most of them acknowledged their knowledge gap in biblical culture and showed their expectation for the knowledge of it. The following are the records of some subjects' opinions:

Student A: In English, there are a lot of idioms or vocabulary originated from the Bible. Knowing the background of the idioms can make our reading comprehension more efficiently.

Student B: When I was reading English and American literary works, I often encountered the allusions related to biblical culture, and many works wear deep impression of biblical culture, and even some of their themes are related to the Bible. So to have certain biblical knowledge is necessary and can help us grasp the deep connotation of the works and understand the

author's intention.

Student C: *In English literature, many images are the shadows of the characters from the Bible.*

To know the characteristics of the characters in the Bible can help to understand the images in the writings when reading.

Student D: *To know some of biblical culture can help us to understand the western culture.*

Student E: *I hope English teachers introduce some biblical stories in class.*

Student F: *Sometimes I meet the idioms that are from the Bible, but I do not know their metaphorical meanings, I can only guess from its literal meaning. Of course it is not reliable. So I expect to know more knowledge in this field to reduce my misunderstanding in English reading.*

Student G: *To have some knowledge about biblical culture is helpful for English learning.*

Student H: *Biblical culture is very popular in the western countries, knowing some of this kind of culture is useful for cultural communication in the future. I think it will be better for the university to set an elective course on biblical culture.*

The opinions from the subjects in this test indicate some differences from those in the first test. Experiencing two tests, the students changed their opinions: In the first test, they thought there was no need to know biblical culture, and they took it for granted that there was no relationship between English reading and biblical culture. In this test, most of them had different ideas and held an active attitude towards the role of biblical culture in English reading. They realized that the deficiency of biblical knowledge had brought some barriers in their English reading, so they were eager to know more biblical culture, and expected it could be one of the roads for them to know more about western cultures and to improve their English reading and improve the communication with western people.

Of course, among the opinions, cautious attitudes towards biblical culture still exist in some students. For example, some students said,

“Biblical culture belongs to religious culture, so to know some of it appropriately is OK. There is no need to know too much of it.”

Some students even hold exclusive attitudes towards it. For example, one student said,

“There is no good to know biblical culture. It is a kind of religious culture after all and will do harm to people's soul.”

Students' opinions may be influenced by Chinese traditional conception that religion equals to superstition and is regarded as spiritual opium. To some extent, students' worry about the result of learning biblical culture is reasonable, because nowadays there are some unstable phenomena in the world. Some illegal people try to make trouble taking advantage of religion. But every coin has two faces. Biblical culture, as a kind of culture that is rather pervasive in the western countries, has its own attractive features. To know biblical culture does not mean to believe in religion. They are two absolutely different things. As English learners, they learn should biblical culture mainly from the point of view of culture and language learning and not to study its spiritual connotation from the point of view of religion.

English teachers should guide the students correctly in ideology and let them know that the influence of biblical culture on English exists objectively, and the influence will not disappear or be diminished because of somebody's rejection. In English reading, it is impossible to escape its influence. So to know some biblical knowledge is necessary for the students.

Chapter Four Findings and Pedagogical Implications

4.1 Main Findings

Through the analysis of the results of the tests, the major findings are as follows:

Firstly, schema slots from biblical culture exist indeed in English majors. This kind of cultural schema slots affects their reading and brings barriers in their understanding. At the same time, the different results in the two tests also imply that sometimes the students are not clear about their knowledge structure. Influenced by test style, the students may estimate their ability wrongly, and do not realize the gap in their knowledge, for example, in the first test the subjects over evaluated their abilities.

Secondly, after the two tests in different ways, the important role of biblical culture in English reading can be realized by most students. Most of them hold an open and objective attitude towards it. They can realize their deficiency in biblical culture, and find that the lack of biblical culture affects their reading comprehension. Most of the subjects expressed their expectation for more knowledge of it, and hope it becomes one of the roads for them to understand western cultures and improve their English learning, especially in English reading.

Thirdly, Exclusive attitudes towards biblical culture still exist in few students. The ideas that biblical culture is a kind of religious culture make them worry it will do harm to people's soul, so some of them are very cautious about it.

4.2 Pedagogical Implications

Combining the results in the two tests, what can be done in the teaching of English reading? In this section, the author tries to make some tentative suggestions.

Since the schema slots from biblical culture exist and affect students' reading comprehension, and most students have realized this point and have expressed their expectation for more knowledge in this field to improve their English reading, as English teachers, they have responsibility to offer help to students.

4.2.1 Setting curricula Related to Biblical Culture

Courses related to biblical culture can be opened in universities, and this is accordant with the spirit of “*English Teaching Syllabus for College English Majors (2000)*” established by Ministry of Education. According to the syllabus, biblical knowledge is prescribed as part of teaching contents for English majors. Of course, the version and materials should be selected elaborately. Among different English versions, the Authorized Version is very popular for English learning. After all, biblical contents are rather extensive, it is impossible to learn the whole book. The teachers may select some interesting and representative parts, and make some design in the organization of contents. The implementation of this needs a lot of efforts from teachers concerned.

4.2.2 Encouraging Accumulation of Biblical Knowledge in Daily Life

The teachers may encourage students to learn to accumulate biblical knowledge in different ways. As a matter of fact, the most that the students contact in their English reading is allusions or phrases related to the Bible. So accumulating biblical allusions or phrases and understanding their background is a good way for them to increase biblical knowledge. To do this, teachers may do something for them. For example, before having classes, the teacher may write a sentence including a biblical allusion in it on the blackboard and ask the students to read and interpret it. Discussion may be followed. By this chance, the teacher may provide more information about it, for example, its source, connotation, usage, and so on. Each time one or two sentences, too many will affect the normal teaching plans and also make the students tired. Gradually, students may find they have had more knowledge in this field unknowingly.

If teachers meet with some materials reflecting biblical culture, they can recommend it or provide it to the students in the form of handout.

It will be better for the students to form the habit of accumulating.

4.2.3 Making Full Use of Multimedia Equipment

In modern teaching environments, using multimedia equipment is an effective method to assist teaching, which can make the students feel they are personally on the scene. If condition permits, the teachers may offer some English movies periodically, or play some sections (for example, presidential

inaugurals), and hold discussions after watching them. For instance, to discuss the actors' lines which contain the citation of biblical allusion, or discuss the themes of the movies. It is impossible that all the movies chosen are related to the Bible, but in view of the Bible's influence in English, maybe some characters' casual oral expression reflects the biblical culture. The students should learn to keep an eye upon useful things around them.

Besides, encourage the students to use the internet resource efficiently. An Internet forum can be established. Every student can participate in it and communicate with each other freely. They can share the interesting biblical stories and opinions on it. Students can also search relevant information on the Internet freely.

4.2.4 Applying Literature Resources Efficiently

Literature works are good resources to learn western culture. Most English works are closely connected with Christianity. The teachers can recommend some representative ones to read, and help them to analyze the themes. The students may be encouraged to hold discussions after their reading.

Role play is also a good way to grasp the essence of the works. By playing the roles, the students can have a deeper impression on the themes and a real feeling on the culture the works reflect.

4.2.5 Rationalizing Teachers' Knowledge Structure and Strengthening the Guidance to Students' Learning Beliefs

As to the students' positive attitudes towards the role of biblical culture in English reading and their expectation for more knowledge in this field, the teachers should offer supports and encouragement. After all, the influence of biblical culture on English language exists objectively. For students' excessively exclusive attitudes, the teachers should offer guidance properly, and let them realize that in English reading, it is impossible to escape the influence of biblical culture. Over repulsion is no good to their study, it will cause more obstacles in comprehension.

Anyhow, anything in the world includes something essential and drabby. To absorb the essential and discard the drabby is the usual way for people to analyze things. University students are in their growing period. Their ideology is also in the development. So teachers' proper guidance to their ideology is very

necessary, or else some students may go to extremes.

Of course, to realize the aims above, the rationalization of teachers' knowledge structure and educational beliefs are the preconditions.

Chapter Five Conclusion

5.1 Conclusion

The Bible is the foundation of western civilization and permeates every corner in western society. It is very influential and pervasive. Not having any knowledge of biblical culture, the students can not have a good understanding of western culture. This thesis has analyzed its wide reflection and deep influence in English countries in details. As is known, language is the carrier of culture. In the nature of things, English language inevitably wears deep biblical marks.

In English reading, it is impossible to escape the contact with it. As a kind of culture that is very popular in the western countries, the ignorance of it must cause reading difficulty. This is a reality that must be envisaged. On the other hand, schema theory indicated that reading is an interactive process between readers' background knowledge and the text. If there are schema slots in readers' minds, the comprehension will be broken down. In this thesis, the author conducted a study on students' biblical knowledge and attitudes towards biblical culture. 50 English majors in Henan Normal University took part in the tests. Results show that, schema slots from biblical culture existed in the subjects. This kind of cultural schema slots affected their reading and brought barriers in their understanding. Through different tests, the subjects could realize the important role of biblical culture in English reading. And most of them held positive attitudes towards it, expecting to get improved in reading comprehension and in communication through acquiring more knowledge in this field, though still some students held cautious or negative attitudes. In view of students' responses, some tentative suggestions were put forward by the author in order to improve the teaching of reading.

5.2 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

Although the study contributes some useful information to the teaching of English reading, it is far from perfection. Limitations are still very obvious. Owing to the restriction of research environments and objective conditions, there is much room for further research and refinement.

(1) The Sampling

The sample size is small, and the subjects were only from Henan Normal University. If more subjects were involved, and the subjects were from more universities, the results of the study will be more representative.

(2) The Instruments

In this t, the stems of the questions were not well designed. Only twenty English sentences that contain the idioms originated from the Bible were prepared. If several passages related to biblical culture had been designed, it would be better than just preparing the twenty sentences in testing students' cultural knowledge in reading comprehension. On the other hand, the analysis of the data in the study was not detailed enough.

In further study, other aspects deserve to be given much consideration and be analyzed specifically. For example, studies on whether there is any correlation between students' attitudes and their English level, how biblical culture affects students' English reading, and how to rationalize teachers' knowledge structure in the teaching of English reading should also be very valuable. They will provide more evidence for the improvement of the teaching of English reading.

Though there are some shortcomings in the study, it provides some enlightenment to the teaching of English reading. In view of the study, if further studies were performed, there would be more referential values for the teaching of English reading.

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Appendix I

Test

A. Personal Information:

Name: Sex: Age:

B: Multiple Choice:

Read the following sentences and choose the appropriate figurative meaning of the italicized phrase in each sentence from the three options.

1. In this war, you are our *Moses*.
a. leader b. enemy c. not given
2. Several of the country's most respected doctors have stated that smoking cigarettes harm one's health, but there are still many doubting Thomases who are not yet persuaded.
a. the person who is always doubted by others
b. the one who always refuses to believe in others
c. not given
3. *A lion in the road*, so he didn't pass the examination
a. obstacles b. lazy persons c. not given
4. This place is thought the *Garden of Eden* by young people.
a. a place like a prison, no freedom b. fairyland; paradise c. not given
5. They think Mike's plan is *the tower of Babel*.
a. excellent building b. dream that cannot be realized c. not given
6. His hometown is considered to be a nice place, *a land flowing with milk and honey*.
a. a place with plenty of milk and honey b. a rich or prolific place c. not given
7. What do you want if you are given *Aaron's rod* ?
a. power b. a weapon for fighting c. not given
8. They seek office, not to be useful to the state, but for *the loaves and fishes*.
a. personal profit b. food eaten by workers in the offices c. not given

9. They are flying flag of *dove and olive leaf* instead of war.
a. peace b. representatives of animals and plants c. not given
10. They think of themselves as the salt of the earth.
a. elite of the world b. someone liked by others c. not given
11. I think Jim will reform himself, but Tom won't, as *a leopard won't change its spots*.
a. pigheaded or ramstam b. impermanent c. not given
12. The amount spent on scientific research is *a drop in the bucket*.
a. insignificant b. important components c. not given
13. I found the house wonderful, but there is *a fly in the ointment*-----it is too far from the town.
a. sth unimportant but influencing the whole
b. a disgusting insect flying around the house
c. not given
14. This fevered hope had grown up again like *a grain of mustard seed*.
a. a promising idea b. sth unimportant or insignificant c. not given
15. He saw *the writing on the wall* for the British car industry several years ago.
a. words written by someone unknown b. sth. ominous c. not given
16. When the coach was arrested for drunken driving, the students realized that their hero had *feet of clay*.
a. feet with much dirt b. weakness c. not given
17. John grew up in a bad neighborhood, but he grew up with *clean hands*.
a. not easy to be influenced by the environment b. have nothing to do ; leisurely c. not given
18. We will never be taken in by their *Cain's* heresy.
a. symbol of murdering or rebelling b. symbol of hero c. not given
19. One's real enemy is the *old Adam*.
a. too old b. the evil nature c. not given
20. Mrs. Smith is a friend of mine, but I *don't know her husband from Adam*.
a. not knowing sb. absolutely
b. persons with similar countenance so that it is difficult to tell from them
c. not given

Appendix II

Test

A Personal Information:

Name: Sex: Age:

B. Read the following sentences and write out figurative meaning of the italicized phrase in each sentence.

1. In this war, you are our *Moses*.
2. Several of the country's most respected doctors have stated that smoking cigarettes harms one's health, but there are still many *doubting Thomases* who are not yet persuaded.
3. *A lion in the road*, he didn't pass the examination
4. This place is thought the *Garden of Eden* by young people.
5. They think Mike's plan is *the tower of Babel*.
6. His hometown is considered to be a nice place, *a land flowing with milk and honey*.
7. What do you want if you are given *Aaron's rod* ?
8. They seek office, not to be useful to the state, but for *the loaves and fishes*.
9. They are flying flag of *dove and olive leaf* instead of war.
10. They think of themselves as *the salt of the earth*.
11. I think Jim will reform himself, but Tom won't, as *a leopard won't change its spots*.
12. The amount spent on scientific research is *a drop in the bucket*.
13. I found the house wonderful, but there is *a fly in the ointment*-----it is too far from the town.
14. This fevered hope had grown up again like *a grain of mustard seed*.
15. He saw *the writing on the wall* for the British car industry several years ago.
16. When the coach was arrested for drunken driving, the students realized that their hero had *feet of clay*.
17. John grew up in a bad neighborhood, but he grew up with *clean hands*.
18. We will never be taken in by their *Cain's* heresy.
19. One's real enemy is the *old Adam*.
20. Mrs. Smith is a friend of mine, but *I don't know her husband from Adam*.

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