Unit 4, Aikaterini Fragkou

**Deborah Fallows says in the subtitle of *Dreaming in Chinese* that it is about "Lessons in Life, Love, and Language." Choose one of the three topics and write an essay of approximately 700 words explaining what Fallows learned about it from her study and use of Mandarin.**

For some individuals, especially educators, learning is the central theme of life. In the previous chapter, the focus was the understanding of self- directed learning through an individual’s life. This paper will turn the focus on the understanding of new culture through the learning of this culture’s language. In *Dreaming in Chinese*, Fallows who is the author of the book, spent three years in China with her journalist husband. Her method of getting under the skin of the country was to immerse herself in Mandarin. The paper’s goal is to explain what Fallows learned about language through her learning and use of Mandarin.

Before moving on to the analysis, it is crucial to mention the reason why language is chosen among life and love. It is chosen because Chinese language- Mandarin- unfolds many aspects of culture, love and life in China. This paper will illustrate this argument with direct references of Farrows’ book. She uses key phrases and concepts of Chinese language to unlock societal aspects- idiosyncrasies of the Chinese view of the world- that surprised her.

In Mandarin language many words entail luck, which reveal a characteristic of its culture. Chinese are interested in ensuring good luck. For instance, Fallows states that a clock is never appropriate as a wedding gift because the word ‘clock’ has the same sound as the word ‘end’ (Fallows D.: 45). Language, also, helped Fallows and the readers of her masterpiece, learn what are the basic patterns of Chinese learning setting. Studying language, made her learn the phrase ‘now study, now sell’ (Fallows D.: 47) which provoked many implications for their educational system. Chinese place importance to use on the spot what you have learned.

Part of understanding a nation’s language, especially when a person lives in that place, entails the use of its maps. Fallows wrote that Chinese maps are quite dysfunctional in their use. She found Miranda who explained her that Chinese people do not use maps because they do not move from their place quite often and therefore there is not much development on the construction of sufficient maps (Fallows D.: 99). Reading maps became part of Chinese language as well as culture. Up until now, it is obvious that in her book, a strong introduction is being made to a foreign culture through its analysis of language.

As is it also mentioned above, Chinese people want to ensure good luck, not only in their cultural traditions but also, in their use of language. This is particularly stressed in the simple and easy talk that Fallows had with Sasha, a working girl from China, who wished her to be fortunate (Fallows D.: 125). In contrast with the West, in Mandarin is not a mere wish for good luck but a wish for profound and almost perfect happiness (Fallows D.: 125). Lastly, what actually Fallows learned about language from her study of Mandarin is that language unfolds and reveals many aspects of its culture and ideology. By learning the Mandarin language, Fallows exposed, in her book, a mix of memoir, history and cultural study of China.

Moving towards the end of the paper, it is worth noting, that a tool for understanding Chinese language is the body language used quite extensively by Chinese. It is a way to support the gaps that their language has. For example, Chinese feel uncomfortable with the word ‘no’ during a conversation; furthermore, they prefer to use a certain gesture and face expression instead (Fallows D.: 161). Mandarin language taught Fallows that by learning, she revealed many aspects of their culture, life and love. This may come in contrast with what Wayner argued for the effectiveness of learning a foreign language through the web (Wayner P.: online).

To conclude, the purpose of this paper was to illustrate that Fallows, author of the book *Dreaming in Chinese*, learned language from her study and use of Mandarin. Her study of that language disclosed many aspects of Chinese culture and life. It also demonstrated, as an overall argument, that learning a language and living in the country where it originates, is much more beneficial and effective for the better understanding of the language per se.