In this paper, I examine and compare the reading performance of four university students from China and the United States of America. This involves examination of the influence of cultural background on students' comprehension of two expository texts on the Chinese New Year and Thanksgiving Festivals, the way they monitor their comprehension, and the strategies used to construct main ideas. In addition, the influence of the think aloud technique on recall and comprehension will be examined. Following are the hypotheses of the study:

1. Chinese students will recall more of the familiar text (Chinese New Year) than American students and less of the unfamiliar text (Thanksgiving).
2. American students will recall more of the familiar text (Thanksgiving) than Chinese students and less of the unfamiliar text (Chinese New Year).
3. Chinese native speakers will be able to make more accurate predictions than American native speakers relating to the Chinese text.
4. American native speakers will be able to make more accurate predictions than Chinese native speakers relating to the American text.
5. The discourse type (collection of descriptions) will affect quantity and quality of idea units recalled.

Before further information is provided about this research study, I will revise the use of the think aloud method in L1 and L2 reading comprehension research.

Reading is a hidden process that often goes unnoticed in the classroom. It is complex and involves several cognitive processes that cannot be directly observed and thus it is a difficult task for psychologists
to choose an appropriate method to examine it. The difficulty is due to the fact that all the psychological processes important to comprehension are internal to the mind. Based on the assumption that good readers are aware of the cognitive activities that occur during reading and that they realize that reading is a problem-solving process, the thinking aloud technique was believed to be a useful research tool for studying the cognitive processes in reading comprehension.

The think aloud technique, developed by Newell and Simon (1972), has been used to study the reading process by a number of L1 and L2 researchers (Olson, Duffy, & Meck 1984). Using the think aloud method in first and second language research surely helps us see whether L1 and L2 readers use similar processes and resources for solving comprehension difficulties they perceive. The think aloud method also helps get insight into the control processes, usually referred to as metacognition. The cognitive processes involve thinking about what one is doing while reading; an ability that requires the individual to observe himself or herself. Despite its limitation, the think aloud method is still considered a good tool for understanding the learning process. Loxterman et al. (1994: 364) conclude that the effect of merely asking students to stop and reflect suggests that thinking aloud holds promise. The usefulness of the technique also led Ann Raimes (1985) to say that thinking aloud was simply too good a tool not to be used.

**Main Idea Construction**

The schema theoretic approach views reading as the active construction of meaning. The reader integrates new knowledge derived from text with his/her background knowledge in ways that make sense. The schema sometimes does not account for incoming information and therefore is either rejected or modified and the search for a more adequate schema starts. So, monitoring one’s comprehension will eventually lead to effective reading. Monitoring and self-regulation of cognition require continuous evaluation of one’s understanding of a text. It also requires readers to take corrective actions when they encounter comprehension problems.

One of the major skills in the process of constructing meaning presented above is how to construct a main idea. This becomes a