

# Chinese Teaching and Learning as Second Language

## Outside China

(作为第二语言的海外汉语教学)

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As a second or foreign language Chinese is the study of the Chinese languages by non-native speakers in almost all parts of the world outside China. Increased interest in China from those outside has led to a corresponding interest in the study of Standard Chinese as a foreign language, the official languages of mainland China and Taiwan. However, the teaching of Chinese both within and outside China is not a recent phenomenon. Different Chinese languages teaching and learning started as early as in the 16th century.

It is calculated that in 2010, 750,000 people took the Chinese Proficiency Test, and 670,000 are from overseas outside China. For comparison, in 2005, 117,660 non-native speakers took the test, there being an increase of 26.52% from 2004. From 2000 to 2004, the number of students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland taking Advanced Level Exams in Chinese increased by 57%, according records. An independent school in the UK even made Chinese one of their compulsory subjects for study in 2006.

Chinese language study is also rising in the United States. The USC U.S.-China Institute cited a report that 51,582 students were studying the language in US colleges and universities. While far behind the more than 800,000 students who study Spanish, the number is more than three times higher than in 1986. The Institute's report includes graphs and details on the popularity of other languages, according to reports.

Recently China has helped 60,000 teachers promote its language internationally, and an estimated 40 million people were studying Chinese as a second language around the world at the end of 2008.<sup>11</sup>

An interesting fact is that the understanding of the Chinese language in the West countries began with some misunderstandings. Since the earliest appearance of Chinese characters in the West, the belief that written Chinese was very prevailed. Even it was said that Chinese was the language spoken before the confusion of tongues.

Attracted by these ideas, Leibniz and Bacon dreamed of inventing a *characteristics universalis* modelled on Chinese. Bacon once said:

“It is the use of China and the kingdoms of the High Levant to write in Characters Real, which express neither letters nor words in gross, but Things or Notions.”<sup>22</sup>

About the Chinese characters, Leibniz has his own hope:

“I thought that someday, perhaps one could accommodate these characters, if one were well informed of them, not just for representing the characters as they are ordinarily made, but both for calculating and aiding imagination and meditation in a way that would amazingly strike the spirit of these people and would give us a new means of teaching and mastering them.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>11</sup>I cited the information from concluding speech by Xu Lin, General Secretary of Headquarters of Confucius Institutes of China at the Fifth Confucius Institutes Global Conference in Beiji, China, in 2010.

<sup>22</sup>See “Kingdoms of Levant” on <http://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsMiddEast/CanaanIsraelites.htm>

<sup>3</sup>Cited from “The First Confront of Western Grammar and Chinese Actual Language” by Yao Xiaoping, see

During the late 16th century the serious study of the language in the West began with the missionaries coming to China. Among the first were the Italian Jesuits Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci. They mastered Chinese language without the help of any grammar books or dictionaries, and are often reckoned as the first Western sinologists. Ruggieri set up a school in Macau, China, the first school for teaching foreigners Chinese, translated part of the *Great Learning* into Latin, the first translation of a Confucius classic in any European language, and wrote a religious tract in Chinese, the first Chinese book written by a Westerner. Matteo Ricci brought Western sciences to China, and became a prolific Chinese writer. With his amazing mastery of the language of Chinese, Ricci impressed very much the Chinese scholars and was accepted as one of them, much to the advantage of his missionary work. He authored or co-authored several scientific works and they were collected in *Siku Quanshu*, the imperial collection of Chinese classics; some of his religious works were listed in the collection's bibliography, but not collected.

With the help of the Chinese Jesuits, Ricci and Ruggieri are thought to have created the first Portuguese-Chinese dictionary some time during 1583-88. Later, while travelling on the Grand Canal of China from Beijing to Linqing during the winter of 1598, Ricci completed writing a Chinese-Portuguese dictionary as well. In this latter work, thanks to Cattaneo's talent for music, a system was introduced for marking tones of the romanized Chinese syllables with diacritical marks. The distinction between aspirated and unaspirated consonants was made clear as well.

Although unfortunately neither of the two dictionaries was published, Ricci made the transcription system developed in 1598, and in 1626 it was finally published, with minor modifications, by another Jesuit Nicolas Trigault. This system continued to be in wide use throughout the 17th and 18th century. It can be seen in several Romanized Chinese texts.

Chinese grammar is another attractive topic. The earliest Chinese grammars were produced by the Spanish Dominican missionaries. The first important Chinese grammar was *Notitia linguae sinicae* by Joseph Henri Marie de Prémare, completed in 1729 but only published in Malacca in 1831. Robert Morrison's *A Dictionary of the Chinese Language*, noted for its fine printing, is one of the first important Chinese dictionaries for the use of Westerners.<sup>44</sup>

According to record, in 1814, a chair of Chinese and Manchu was founded at the Collège de France, and Abel-Rémusat became the first Professor of Chinese in Europe. In 1837, Nikita Bichurin opened the first European Chinese-language school in the Russian Empire. Since then sinology became an academic discipline in the West, with a large number of sinologists. Some of the big names in the history of linguistics took up the study of Chinese.

The teaching of Chinese as a foreign language started in China in 1950 at Tsinghua University, initially serving students from Eastern European countries. Starting with Bulgaria in 1952, China also sent Chinese teachers abroad, and by the early 1960s had sent teachers as far as the Congo, Cambodia, Yemen and France. In 1962, with the approval of the State Council, the Higher Preparatory School for Foreign Students was established, later renamed to the Beijing Language and Culture University.

According to the Chinese Ministry of Education, there are 330 institutions teaching Chinese as a foreign language or second language, with about 40,000 foreign students. In addition, there

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[https://www.google.pl/?gfe\\_rd=cr&ei=XbWNU8zIEIqRswbF9oHwAQ#q=leibniz+perhaps+one+could+accommodate+these+characters](https://www.google.pl/?gfe_rd=cr&ei=XbWNU8zIEIqRswbF9oHwAQ#q=leibniz+perhaps+one+could+accommodate+these+characters)

<sup>44</sup> "Book of Chinese Grammar System by Mr. Ma" is said to be the first Chinese grammar book written by Chinese at the late of Qin Dynasty in 1900s.

are almost 5,000 Chinese language teachers. Since 1992 the State Education Commission has managed a Chinese language proficiency exam program, for which tests has been taken around 100 million times (including by domestic ethnic minority candidates).<sup>5</sup>

Chinese language is rated as one of the most difficult languages to learn for people especially for those whose native language is European language such as English, Russian, Polish, Italian, Germany, French, as well as Arabic, Japanese and Korean.

Several major difficulties stand out as:

#### 1.Chinese characters (Hanzi)

The most traditional and authorized Chinese dictionary, *Kangxi dictionary* contains 47,035 characters (simplified Chinese: 汉字; traditional Chinese: 漢字; pinyin: Hànzì). However, most of the characters contained there are archaic and obscure. The Chart of Common Characters of Modern Chinese (simplified Chinese: 现代汉语常用字表; traditional Chinese: 現代漢語常用字表; pinyin: Xiàndài Hànyǔ Chángyòng Zì Biǎo), promulgated in People's Republic of China, lists 2,500 common characters and 1,000 less-than-common characters, while the Chart of Generally Utilized Characters of Modern Chinese (simplified Chinese: 现代汉语通用字表; traditional Chinese: 現代漢語通用字表; pinyin: Xiàndài Hànyǔ Tōngyòng Zì Biǎo) lists 7,000 characters, including the 3,500 characters already listed above.

In Gautier's novella *Fortunio*, a Chinese professor from the Collège de France, when asked by the protagonist to translate a love letter suspected to be written in Chinese, replied that the characters in the letter happen to all belong to that half of the 40,000 characters which he has yet to master.

#### 2.The tones of the Chinese language

Mandarin Chinese, or standard Chinese, has four tones (simplified Chinese: 声调; traditional Chinese: 聲調; pinyin: shēngdiào), namely the first tone (flat or high level tone, 阴平, denoted by " ˉ " in Pinyin), the second tone (rising or high-rising tone, 阳平, denoted by " ˊ " in Pinyin), the third tone (falling-rising or low tone, 上声, denoted by " ˇ " in Pinyin), and the fourth tone (falling or high-falling tone, 去声, denoted by " ˋ " in Pinyin).

There is also a fifth tone called neutral (轻声, denoted as no-mark in Pinyin) although the official name of the tones is Four Tones. Many other Chinese dialects have more, for example, Cantonese has six (often numbered as nine, but three are duplicates). In most Western languages, tones are only used to express emphasis or emotion, not to distinguish meanings as in Chinese. A French Jesuit, in a letter, relates how the Chinese tones cause a problem for understanding:

“I will give you an example of their words. They told me *Chou* signifies a book: so that I thought whenever the word *Chou* was pronounced, a book was the subject. Not at all! *Chou*, the next time I heard it, I found signified a tree. Now I was to recollect, *Chou* was a book, or a tree. But this amounted to nothing; *Chou*, I found, expressed also great heats; *Chou* is to relate; *Chou* is the Aurora; *Chou* means to be accustomed; *Chou* expresses the loss of a wager, &c. I should not finish, were I to attempt to give you all its significations.”<sup>6</sup>

There are richer and richer sources of Chinese language education recently.

Chinese courses have been promoted internationally since 2000 at each level of education. Still, in most of the Western universities, the study of the Chinese language is only a

<sup>5</sup>I cited the information from concluding speech by Xu Lin, General Secretary of Headquarters of Confucius Institutes of China at the Fourth Confucius Institutes Global Conference in Beiji, China, in 2009.

<sup>6</sup>Cited from “Compilation of Documents at Confucius Institutes Conference” in 2009.

part of Chinese Studies or sinology, instead of an independent discipline. The teaching of Chinese as a foreign language is known as *duiwai hanyu jiaoxue* (simplified Chinese: 对外汉语教学; traditional Chinese: 對外漢語教學; pinyin: Duiwài Hànyǔ Jiàoxué). The Confucius Institutes all over the world, supervised by Hanban (the National Office For Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language), are responsible for promoting the Chinese language in the West and other parts of the world. Hanban runs a Confucius Institute Online (<http://www.chinese.cn>) offering over 10,000 Chinese language learning resources.

China began to accept foreign students from Eastern Europe, Asia and Africa since the 1950s onwards. Today's popular choices for the Westerners who want to study Chinese abroad include the Beijing Language and Culture University in Beijing and the Mandarin Training Center (MTC) and International Chinese Language Program (ICLP, formerly the Stanford Center) in Taiwan. The latter was especially popular before the 1980s when mainland China had yet to open to the other parts of the world.

Many online courses in Standard Chinese, Cantonese and some other dialects are available through commercial, governmental and nonprofit web sites catering to speakers of English, French, German, Polish and over a hundred other languages. Free and Paid-for courses are also offered via podcasts. Software is also available to help students pronounce, read and translate Chinese into English and other languages.

Chinese language education and teacher education are at a very interesting and important turning point as (Mandarin) Chinese language change its role from being a language learned by non-native speakers (adults typically) for literary, political, and historical scholarship, primarily, to one now being learned on almost every continent of the world for a much wider range of purposes: for oral or written communication in commercial, academic, touristic spheres, and within diaspora families and communities, as well as for other scholarly purposes.

Chinese is being learned in the 21st century in both formal and informal educational contexts by people representing a much wider range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds and age groups than ever before. With the intense globalization and human migration taking place within and beyond the Asia-Pacific region, an appreciation of multiple languages and cultures and an ability to communicate effectively with people across languages, cultures, communities, and new digital media is crucial. Two of the languages generating the most international interest at present in the Asia-Pacific context are English and Chinese. Chinese (Mandarin)<sup>7</sup> has become an important global or world language, used widely for communication in both Asian and non-Asian regions and among people from many different ethnicities and language backgrounds. With the growing number of speakers and users of Chinese language around the world, in face-to-face, online, and other mediated interactions, the impact and reach of Chinese has grown significantly and so too have the possibilities for teachers and learners of Chinese as an international language.

Since 2004 up to 213, the National Office of Chinese Language Council International (“Hanban”), based in Beijing, has established 1106 Confucius Institutes or Confucius Classrooms worldwide to promote the teaching, learning, and testing of Mandarin as a foreign language (FL) for business and other purposes (e.g., tourism, academic study). Mandarin Chinese is therefore gaining momentum internationally as a more widely studied language by students from non-Chinese ethnic backgrounds. According to Chinese government information, approximately

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<sup>7</sup>Here Mandarin Chinese means standard Chinese. There are countless dialects in Chinese, and now standard Chinese is taught at all the Chinese classes in China.

30 million people were studying Mandarin as a FL worldwide earlier this decade but that the number would soon rise to 100 million. Mandarin is being acquired and used by many tens of thousands of Chinese children in diaspora contexts worldwide as well as by FL learners and the number of HSK test-takers has grown exponentially over the past decade.

According to Hanban, “the Confucius Institutes, supported directly by the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban), are non-profit educational institutions, devoting themselves to promoting understanding of the Chinese language and culture, to enhancing exchange of different cultures and to deepening friendly relationships with other nations.”<sup>8</sup>

Now there are Confucius Institutes in almost every country in the world, and there are four Confucius Institutes in Poland so far. Take Confucius Institute at Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan for instance. Confucius Institute at Adam Mickiewicz University, co-operated by Adam Mickiewicz University and Tianjin University of Technology, China, aims at promoting the teaching of Chinese language, cultural communication and academic studies.

Various in-service and pre-service programs for teachers of Chinese are also increasing to meet the demand for qualified teachers at all levels, from preschool or kindergarten through university, and beyond. Everson and Xiao introduced in their book *Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language*, that “2,400 American high schools were interested in offering the Advanced Placement [AP] program in Chinese language and culture, but could not because of a lack of certified Chinese teachers”.<sup>9</sup>

Recent North American census data show that “Chinese” (all dialects) is now the most widely spoken home language after English and French in Canada and after English and Spanish in USA. Its local status adds to the utility of learning Chinese as a valuable community language as well as a language for international communication. For example, in Vancouver, Canada, 2000-3000 students a year are enrolled in Mandarin language courses at the University of British Columbia; children can learn Mandarin and English at a public Mandarin-English bilingual elementary school; and there is growing demand for instruction in Mandarin in other public schools and colleges, trends reported elsewhere as well (e.g., in Toronto, New York, and Los Angeles). Nearby, in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada for example, twelve public schools currently offer English-Mandarin bilingual curriculum to nearly 2000 students (5 elementary schools; 4 junior high schools; 3 senior high schools). The growth in the number, level and range of learners of Chinese has many implications for both curriculum development and teacher development.<sup>10</sup>

In the past, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) often constituted an expensive and novel alternative to the traditional language laboratory; but it was often just a new means of practicing old-fashioned decontextualized mechanical pattern drills. However, digital tools have changed greatly allowing many new possibilities. CALL obviously represents a large, lucrative/expensive, and potentially dynamic environment for FL education and for teacher education. Some of the most impressive features of CALL and Web- and Internet-based learning are as follows:

(1) students’ exposure to meaningful, current texts and learning tools in the target-language (oral and written) can be greatly enhanced and can be directed by the students’ own interests and needs;

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<sup>8</sup>See “Confucius Institute Prospectus” on Hanban’s website:

[http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciusinstitutes/node\\_10961.htm](http://www.hanban.edu.cn/confuciusinstitutes/node_10961.htm)

<sup>9</sup>Cited from “Compilation of Documents at Confucius Institutes Conference” in 2011.

<sup>10</sup>Cited from “Compilation of Documents at Confucius Institutes Conference” in 2012.

(2) learners can be linked to other users (and learners) of the FL, thus increasing their motivation as well as opportunities to negotiate meaning and multiple registers of discourse through their existing or shared linguistic means;

(3) many of the materials can be accessed with minimal cost to the user, provided that computers with internet access are available;

(4) through firsthand encounters with multimedia and other human/material resources, students have more opportunities to engage with their own and other cultures more deeply and more immediately. In these ways, students engage in the “5 Cs” described earlier from ACTFL guidelines.

It is suggested that CALL for Chinese language teaching, along with suggested programs and websites for Chinese teaching materials, such as those that can convert orthographies in one direction or another (character-pinyin), or can calculate the frequency of particular words and characters, which may help teachers decide whether to teach a particular vocabulary item. Tools also exist to help teachers gloss characters in texts with pinyin (above or below the characters). Furthermore, concordances can be used to illustrate both for teachers and students the usage of a particular linguistic item or character in its naturally occurring discourse context, according to various kinds of text styles and modes (e.g., oral, written; essays, news items, novels). Various Chinese pod casting sites also exist for Chinese language teaching and learning.