Chinese in 2008: An Expanding Field

The first National Conference on Chinese took place in Washington, D.C. on April 17 – 19, 2008. Organized by Asia Society and the College Board, with assistance from a number of sponsoring and collaborating organizations, this event marked a milestone in the history of language education in the United States. Although historically Chinese has not been widely taught in American schools, interest is growing dramatically. Increasingly leaders in the public and private sectors are recognizing the rise of Asia as one of the central facts of the 21st century. China, with its tremendous economic growth and emergence as a cultural and political leader, is integral to this shift. Given these changes, the task of increasing the number of American students who can speak Chinese proficiently and can demonstrate an understanding of Chinese culture is crucial. What progress has been made in the teaching of Chinese over the past three years and what are some of the challenges that need to be addressed?

Progress since 2005

In 2005, Asia Society[1] convened a group of national experts in Chinese and world language education to consider the status of Chinese in American schools and examine what would be needed to expand opportunities for students to learn the language. The seminal report, *Expanding Chinese Language Capacity in the United States*[2], called for efforts to expand the number of school programs, create a supply of qualified Chinese language teachers, and develop appropriate curriculum materials and assessments, including technology-based delivery systems. There are no official counts of schools offering Chinese, although at that time, unofficial surveys estimated that 263 schools were teaching the language (See http://askasia.org/Chinese). Similarly, while there was no comprehensive survey of the number of K-12 students studying Chinese, a 2000 study estimated that approximately 24,000 students in Grades 7-12 nationwide were studying Chinese[3]. In higher education, a 2002 survey indicated that there were 34,153 students studying Chinese, less than three percent of total enrollment in foreign languages[4].

Since 2005, there has been significant growth:

- In 2006, at the higher education level, there were 51,582 students learning Chinese, a 52 percent increase over 2002 [5].

- At the K-12 level, student enrollment data is not available, but recent data collected by the College Board from various sources indicates there are 779 Chinese programs. Among them, 444 programs are offered in public schools (57 percent), and 335 programs (43 percent) in private schools[6]. Although this number (779 schools) is not comprehensive, as compared to the 2004 Asia Society data (263 schools), this is a growth of about 200 percent.

This unprecedented expansion is not coming from a single driver but from multiple sources. For example, many municipal and state governments are moving forward fast, recognizing the study of Chinese language and culture as an economic competitiveness strategy and a way to develop the global competence of their future workers. Chicago and Los Angeles, for example, each has a plan to make Chinese one of the "commonly taught" languages in their schools. At the state level, Kansas, Ohio, Oklahoma, Minnesota, North Carolina, Wisconsin, and Utah are making the instruction of Chinese a priority of their world language programs. At least eleven states now have a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with China or Taiwan to pursue cooperative educational agreements and bring guest teachers to their schools. [7]

The federal government has invested in seed funding for Chinese language programs around the nation through the National Security Language Initiative[8] (NSLI) that was enacted in 2006, a joint initiative of the Departments of Education, State, and Defense, and the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. The Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) of the U.S. Department of Education[9] funded 70 Chinese language programs and 3 States (Ohio, North Carolina, and Wisconsin) in 2006 and 2007, totaling approximately $13 million dollars. In 2007, 944 high school students and 427 high school teachers participated in 25 summer Chinese programs supported by the STARTALK[10] Program. In 2008, STARTALK is expected to support 55 Chinese programs, projected to service 1,884 students and 688 teachers nationwide[11]. The National Security Education Program supports four Chinese Flagship Programs[12], which aim to produce "global professionals" who speak Chinese at high levels of proficiency. Finally, the Department of State offers a range of study abroad programs for students and teachers.

Non-governmental organizations such as the College Board[13] and Asia Society have played important roles in the expansion of the Chinese field. In a 2004 College Board survey, nearly 2,400 high schools indicated that they would like to offer the AP in Mandarin[14]. The College Board's

decision to develop a Chinese Advanced Placement (AP) Course and Examination (Mandarin) put Chinese on equal footing with more commonly taught languages like French, German, and Spanish, signifying the importance of the language. In 2007, the first year in which the AP Examination was offered, 3,261 students took the exam. To build a solid foundation for the future of AP Chinese, the College Board is working closely with the Office of Chinese Language International Council (Hanban[15]) on a series of initiatives to support the growth of Chinese programs in K-12 schools. Asia Society has been actively engaged in building the field through an electronic clearinghouse, monthly e-newsletter, the creation of a handbook, *Creating a Chinese Language Program in Your School*, technical assistance to schools, and through working with six universities as well as with the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) at the University of Maryland to create and enhance teacher training programs.

Hanban has been instrumental in establishing more than 40 Confucius Institutes at U.S. universities. Like the Goethe or Cervantes Institutes or Alliance Français, the main purpose of the Confucius Institutes is to promote and offer the study of language and culture. Hanban also implements the Chinese Guest Teacher Program in collaboration with the College Board. This program has brought more than 150 guest teachers from China to help alleviate the shortage of Chinese language instructors in the United States; these teachers now teach more than 11,000 students in 31 states[16]. Hanban also sponsors the Chinese Bridge Delegation Program, through which 1,200 administrators, principals, and school board members have visited China and its schools[17].

Finally, a host of activities by individual universities, independent schools, business and engineering schools, and professional language organizations have provided programs for students and professional development activities for teachers. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages and the Chinese Language Association of Secondary-Elementary Schools (CLASS) are two prime examples. In addition to the sheer growth in the number of programs and ferment of activity, there are a number of innovations in language learning. For example, there is increased use of technologies like Skype, podcasts, television, and computer based programming. There has also been a greater emphasis on immersion experiences through partnerships with Chinese universities, and a small but growing number of programs that link language learning directly to professional training in business and engineering schools. The increased awareness and demand by parents, students, educators, political and business leaders, and heritage communities

makes this a time of enormous opportunity – a time to invest in building U.S. human capital for the global age.

What Are the Challenges Facing the Field?

As highlighted above, from 2005-2008, there has been an enormous outpouring of interest and activity. Many new seedling programs for beginner Chinese have been established, but for these programs to grow strong and bear fruit will require serious attention to essential ingredients in their environment. Among the critical infrastructure challenges are:

1. Lack of national coordination of efforts. Without serious and systematic attention to the next phase of growth, there is a danger that these programs could fail to thrive. We need to move from this "let many flowers bloom" phase of disconnected initiatives and lack of fundamental infrastructure to the development of *language learning systems*[18] that will give students and schools the incentive and opportunity to make the continuum of proficiency and literacy development a reality.

By *language learning systems*, we mean the sustainable development of the supply and demand of students, teachers, curriculum, materials, assessment, and the training, funding, and support needed for individual language proficiency and societal language education capacity. We must address the issues of over supply of certain components, the gaps that remain unfilled, and the connectedness of learning systems that allow synergy to flow and resources to be leveraged.

An adequate infrastructure is essential for any field but especially for the introduction of a world language that is categorized by the Foreign Service Institute of the State Department as a Category Three language (meaning that it takes 2,200 hours to reach the same proficiency as 575-600 hours of instruction in Category One languages such as French or Spanish).[19] This National Chinese Language Conference marks the first time all key stakeholders in the Chinese field have come together to explore further collaboration to build the infrastructure of the field.

2. Lack of teacher education capacity and teacher certification mechanisms. Quantity and quality of Chinese language teachers remains the key bottleneck in building capacity. This gap needs to be urgently addressed. Anyone in the field of Chinese education readily recognizes the shortage of teachers. A deeper structural problem, is the availability of teacher training faculty and the small number of institutions of higher education that are able and willing to offer rigorous yet flexible teacher education programs capable of servicing the needs of diverse teacher candidates. In addition, the absence or complexity of state-by-state teacher certification or licensure requirements

has been widely recognized as a national problem that will require a concerted effort from national professional organizations working with multiple states.

As a response to the teacher shortage, a small number of initiatives are underway. The states of New Jersey, Minnesota, Utah, and Wisconsin, among others, have established alternative route licensure programs or heritage language teachers' certification programs. Fifteen states allow the use of Oral Proficiency Interview and Writing Proficiency Test developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages to accredit teacher candidates' language ability[20], instead of requiring them to obtain more than 30 credits in the study of that language. This trend illustrates that states are responding to the influx of prospective teachers who are heritage or native speakers of critical languages, whose preparatory needs are vastly different from traditional graduates of teacher education programs. The College Board, National Council of State Supervisors for Languages, and Hanban have been working collaboratively to bring guest teachers to schools, another example of how the United States is trying to respond to the demands for more Chinese language programs. In addition, Asia Society is coordinating the efforts of six universities under the Freeman Foundation's Chinese Language Teacher Preparation Initiative.[21] The National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) under the auspices of STARTALK, plans to hold a certification summit in the near future, with the goal of facilitating a national dialogue in removing barriers surrounding teacher certification. In a few years, these initiatives will contribute tremendously to building the capacity for Chinese language teacher training.

Related to the teacher shortage is the lack of a critical mass required before an institution of higher education will offer a full-fledged teacher education program. Often, a prospective Chinese language teacher may be the only one in his/her geographical area, and may have difficulty in accessing a meaningful teacher education or training program due to financial or scheduling factors. Technology has the potential to bring and enhance pedagogical training to prospective and in-service teachers. Having distance or web-based training modules or programs would significantly enhance the capacity for teacher training. Some discussions on this topic are taking place among Asia Society, NFLC, STARTALK, Confucius Institutes, and other institutions of higher education.

3. Lack of capacity for early language learning. In other developed countries, language learning begins in elementary school, when research shows that it is most effective. For students learning Chinese, a tonal and Category Three language, elementary programs would be particularly useful but they are still very small in number. The national data of immersion schools collected by the Center for Applied Linguistics indicate that, among the 308 two-way immersion programs

documented, only six are Chinese-related: three Cantonese/English, two Mandarin/English, and one multiple Chinese dialects/English.[22]

Public interest in early language learning is on the rise. A 2007 Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup poll showed more than 72 percent of parents who have children in public schools believe that instruction in a second language should begin in elementary school.[23]

Clearly there is a need to connect this growing interest with researchers and institutions of higher education – to develop research-based programs and the support systems for them. This would include the preparation of teachers who can teach both the elementary curriculum and Chinese as a world language, the development of age-appropriate curriculum, materials, and assessment, and awareness and support from schools, teachers, and parents. Because this is a huge area of need in which the United States is a relative novice in terms of expertise and experience, that the CAL data showed that we only grew from one program in 1962 to a mere 330 in 2007 in 45 years[24], a concerted effort in Chinese could serve as a model for all world languages.

4. Lack of K-16 articulation leading to the attainment of high language proficiency. Another glaring gap is that, while K-12 schools are stressing standards-based learning and instruction, few university Chinese language programs pay attention to the National Foreign Language Content Standards[25]. The focus of instruction in these two educational sectors is thus distinctively different, which produces students with different domains of strength and weakness. With the development of the AP Chinese course and exam, this issue has become even more apparent. Since the AP program provides high school students with an opportunity to do college-level coursework, it requires that colleges and high schools work together to ensure logical and sufficient course sequences for students to continue their studies smoothly after high school. The big question facing the field is not which approach is better or worse. Rather, both K-12 and higher education need to analyze the conditions in which they teach, and carefully compare and contrast the needs, abilities, motivations, linguistic achievements and other gains of their students. It is only when we have a deep understanding of what we could possibly achieve that we are able to respond accordingly.

In addition to the K-12 and tertiary disconnect, another serious difficulty is the broken pipelines along the K-12 passage itself. The majority of students do not have the opportunity to receive a "start early and stay long" language education that is meaningfully articulated to develop high proficiency in that language. For example, a large number of Chinese language programs in high school are of two years in length, and not connected to university programs. In many

instances, a student will repeat the beginning level course in middle school, in high school, and in university again for various reasons. There are also students who studied Chinese in elementary school, but must wait until high school to study Chinese again. This point is reiterated in the 2006 MLA study, which compared enrollment figures for introductory (first- and second-year) versus advanced language study in institutions of higher education. The study found, "students are nearly five times more likely to be enrolled in a first- or second-year course than in advanced language study".[26] The lack of a vision and articulation result in a waste of time, effort, and energy.

In short, in order for students to develop the cross-cultural communicative competence required by the demands of the 21st century, strong support must be in place. The need for more research, pedagogical skill development, best practices, curriculum, materials, and assessment for the learning and teaching of Chinese in the global age crosses the entire field from K-16 and even to graduate study and work. This means we must deal with the challenges discussed above about early language learning. Heritage language students and communities, have not been part of the discourses for Chinese language learning in the United States, but must be included. The "drill and kill" approach or the "training of Chinese scholars only" mentality must be changed to reflect the goals of the majority of students who are learning Chinese today. Along the K-16 language learning system, there must be multiple entry and exit criteria, benchmarks, and performance-based assessment that measure learning outcomes for students of heritage and non-heritage backgrounds.

5. Lack of opportunity and access to learn. In this global age, receiving an education geared toward developing students' global competence is the new *basic* education for *all* students. Chinese language programs in the United States are concentrated in metropolitan areas and selected schools. Urban and rural areas experience difficulty in attracting Chinese language teachers, which is compounded by the teacher shortage. This poses a threat to both equity and quality.

In this age when technology is widely accessible, quality Chinese language programming via distance or web-based learning is a desirable and feasible solution. Technology cannot replace a good teacher and the face-to-face interactions that are essential for language learning and use, nonetheless, it has the capability to either bring an opportunity to learn to students in areas where Chinese language teachers are not available, or enhance learning beyond the walls of a classroom. It can also connect students to native speakers to increase their cross-cultural competence, albeit virtually. To date, only a handful of states have even basic programming online in Chinese for high school students.[27] Asia Society and the National Foreign Language Center in collaboration with the Council of Chief State School Officers are discussing the possibility of developing a multi-state

consortium of a high quality online Chinese language learning system that leads students to Advanced Placement and high proficiency, while increasing the feasibility for every state to tap into that resource to offer the opportunity to learn.

Conclusion

This report has described the status of Chinese language in U.S. schools in 2008 and has laid out the critical issues that must be addressed collectively by the field. As this report makes clear, there have been considerable achievements in the Chinese language field since 2005. Anyone in the field should feel proud of the work, which has established Chinese as an increasingly important world language in American schools. To address the disparity between the rapidly growing interest and the lack of infrastructure to sustain high quality programs, however, we need a long-term commitment to the future.

The expansion and strengthening of capacity in Chinese language will require innovations and investments similar to those in other fields deemed important to the nation. The National Defense Education Act, passed in 1958 after the launching of Sputnik, supported a range of strategies to meet science and foreign language needs including teacher training, scholarships for language study abroad, and seed funds for language programs in K-12 schools. Today's economic competitiveness and national security challenges mandate a larger pool of highly proficient speakers of a wider range of world languages, including Chinese. The time is right for our national language investments to go beyond the current concentration on higher education to include K-12 schools. We need to begin language study in the early grades, use more intensive research-based approaches, build on the communities of heritage-language learners, and profit from the new advantages created by technology, easier travel and virtual connections to schools in all Chinese-speaking regions.

In this dynamic time when interest in Chinese is at an all-time high, it is important that we take a systemic approach to strengthen and sustain the field. We must take an ecological view in developing the field, ensuring that both micro and macro environments are hospitable for the Chinese seedlings[28]. In a few years, we must be able to produce learners who are globally competent, with the ability to communicate and interact successfully with Chinese speaking people around the world. To achieve this goal, there needs to be comprehensive intentional and purposeful dialogues, research and best practices extending from early language learning to graduate study and to work.

The purpose of the report is to stimulate broader discussion and action to support the continued expansion of our capacity in Chinese, a language we as a nation can no longer ignore.

What we call for now is the development of *language learning systems*. At the micro or individual student level, this includes the opportunity and supports to learn through meaningful curriculum, instruction and assessment, while receiving recognition or credits to enable him/her to move from one proficiency level to the next. At the macro level, this entails expanding and strengthening Chinese language capacity on the school, local, state, and national levels. The time is right for building U. S. human capital to meet the demands of this interconnected world.

Endnotes

[1] Asia Society website: http://www.AskAsia.org/Chinese and http://www.AsiaSociety.org/Education

[2] http://internationaled.org/Chinese%20Lang%20Mtg%20Report%20081005.pdf

[3] Jamie B. Draper and June H. Hicks, *Foreign Language Enrollments in Public Secondary Schools,* Fall 2000 (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2002).

[4] Elizabeth B. Welles, *Foreign Language Enrollments in United States Institutions of Higher Education,* Fall 2002. (Modern Language Association: Association of Departments of Foreign Languages, 2004), http://www.adfl.org/projects/index.htm.

[5] Nelly Furman, David Goldberg, and Natalia Lusin, 2007. *Enrollments in Languages Other Than English in United States Institutions of Higher Education,* Fall 2006. Web publication by the Modern Language Association at http://www.mla.org/enroll_survey06_fin.

[6] Unpublished study, the College Board, April 2008. Data source: The College Board, Asia Society, The Office of Chinese language council International-Hanban, National Council of State Supervisors for Languages, National Association of Independent Schools, 2007.

[7] National Council of State Supervisor for Languages survey shows that the following states have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with China or Taiwan: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Ohio, Oklahoma, Utah, and Wisconsin. Visit NCSSFL at http://www.ncssfl.org.

[8] NSLI National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) www.ed.gov/about/inits/ed/competitiveness/nsli/index.html

[9] Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) www.ncela.gwu.edu/oela/OELAprograms/4_FLAP.htm

[10] STARTALK Program www.nflc.org/projects/current_projects/startalk; or www.startalk.umd.edu

[11] See STARTALK Website in reference No. 10.

[12] National Security Education Program (NSEP): www.ndu.edu/nsep
The Chinese Language Flagships: www.thelanguageflagship.org

- Brigham Young University, chineseflagship.byu.edu
- Ohio State University and Ohio Public Schools, chineseflagship.osu.edu, and k12chineseflagship.osu.edu/index.html
- University of Mississippi, www.olemiss.edu/depts/modern_languages/NFLP.html
- University of Oregon and Portland Public Schools, http://casls.uoregon.edu/flagship, and http://casls.uoregon.edu/ppsflagship
- Arizona State University, http://chinaflagship.silc.asu.edu/

[13] The College Board, http://collegeboard.org.

[14] The College Board, unpublished study, 2004.

[15] Office of Chinese Language Council International (*Hanban*), North America: www.hanban.ca, or www.hanban.org

[16] See No. 6, the College Board study.

[17] See No. 6, the College Board study.

[18] Shuhan C. Wang, "Building Societal Capital: Chinese in the US," in *Language Policy*, (2007) 6:27-52, Springer 2007. Last accessed 10 April 2008, at http://www.springerlink.com/content/r8767671502m858n/fulltext.pdf.

[19] The Foreign Service Institute (FSI) of the Department of State has compiled approximate learning expectations for a number of languages based on the length of time it takes to achieve Speaking 3: General Professional Proficiency in Speaking (S3) and Reading 3: General Professional proficiency in Reading (R3). See more detail at http://www.nvtc.gov/lotw/months/november/learningExpectations.html).

[20] See the fact sheet for states that recognize the ACTFL OPI and WPT at http://www.actfl.org/files/public/StatesUsingOPI_WPTforCertificiation.pdf.

[21] Freeman Foundation's *Preparing Chinese Language Teachers Initiative* askasia.org/chinese/programs/teachers/freeman.htm. The six universities include:
New York University, steinhardt.nyu.edu/dclt
Rutgers University, http://wli.rutgers.edu/wli.php?page=chinese
University of Pennsylvania, www.gse.upenn.edu/degrees_programs/eld_secondary.php
George Mason University, gse.gmu.edu/programs/foreignlang
Rice University, www.gscs.rice.edu/scs/Teaching_Chinese
University of Hawaii, www.chinesestudies.hawaii.edu/confucius/program/CLTE/index.html

[22] Two-Way Immersion, Center for Applied Linguistics see http://www.cal.org/twi/directory/language.htm, retrieved April 9, 2008.

[23] Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup poll, 2007. Table 39. http://www.pdkintl.org/kappan/k_v89/k0709pol.htm, retrieved April 9, 2008.

[24] See Reference # 22.

[25] *Standards for Foreign Language Learning the in the 21st Century.* (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project. Lawrence, KS: Allen Press, Inc. 1996, 1999, and 2006)

[26] Modern Language Association press release, *New MLA Study Shows Significant Increases in Foreign Language Study at U.S. Colleges and Universities,* November 13, 2007. Access at: http://www.mla.org/pdf/release11207_ma_feb_update.pdf

[27] As of April 2008, states that offer online or virtual courses in Chinese include:

- Florida and Kentucky: Developed virtual Chinese Levels 1 & 2, share courses
- Michigan: Michigan Virtual University, in collaboration with Confucius Institute at the Michigan State University, developed 3 levels of online courses in Chinese
- North Carolina: Developing an online Chinese program from Levels 1-4 through AP for HS students, funded by a FLAP grant
- Utah: EdNET offers online learning in Chinese via Brigham Young University
- Virginia: Chinese 1-3

[28] Shuhan C. Wang, "The Ecology of the Chinese Language in the United States," in A. Creese, P. Martin and N.H. Hornberger (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Language and Education*, 2nd Edition, Vol. 9: Ecology of Language, 169-181. Springer Science+Business Media LLC, 2008.