

KONFERENZBERICHTE

Hanzi Renzhi: How Western Learners Discover the World of Written Chinese

Mainz, 24.-26.8.2005

Chinese Reading Specialists Meet in Germany

On August 24-26, 2005, an international interdisciplinary conference was convened in Germersheim, Germany, under the theme "Hanzi Renzhi: How Western Learners Discover the World of Written Chinese". Set in the idyllic wine growing area of southwest Germany at the School of Applied Linguistics and Cultural Studies, Johannes Gutenberg-University of Mainz, scholars from all over the world gathered to discuss the importance of Chinese literacy development for meeting the challenges presented by an ever more accessible global community. This brief report is included in this issue of the JCLTA¹ at the request of conference attendees who voiced with urgency the need for maintaining the momentum and scholarly activity generated by this conference, with the hope that colleagues across the world will join and continue this important discussion.

For those of us in the United States who almost daily read articles in newspapers about the growth and demand of Chinese languages programs, or initiatives such as the AP Chinese Curriculum or the K-16 Chinese Flagship initiative, it is obvious that Chinese language education is finally beginning to be taken more seriously by leaders in government, education, and business. Similarly, scholars outside of the United States have also been more vocal in stressing the importance of Chinese language learning, and have commented on the fact that Chinese seems to have reached increased prominence in the last 25 years, achieving a higher international recognition among world languages. Clearly, issues of how best to tackle the challenge of teaching Western learners to read in Chinese figure very prominently in the overall educational enterprise. The conference at Germersheim took an interdisciplinary approach to addressing the issue of Chinese reading development among Western learners, and addressed a variety of topics, such as:

- Addressing the reading of Chinese from a first-language (L1) perspective. Papers from the discipline of cognitive psychology were presented that analyzed brain-imaging and eye-tracking data, thus providing a fascinating look at how readers process alphabetic and logographic writing systems in different ways. These studies are extremely important as they provide us with insights into the processing of graphemic, phonological, semantic and interpretive information across different writing systems. Eye-tracking research among L2 learners of Chinese was also discussed to demonstrate how foreign language readers of different proficiency levels cope with reading in Chinese.
- More global issues that need to be confronted in Chinese language learning, such as the lopsided ratio of numbers of Chinese speakers in the world vs. the number of foreign language learners; the time needed to reach advanced skill levels, and the emphasis on oral

¹ Gemeint ist der Erstdruck in: *Journal of the Chinese Language Teachers Association (JCLTA)*, February issue, Vol. 41, #1 (im Druck). Nachdruck des Beitrags mit freundlicher Erlaubnis.

communication in our courses with literacy in some settings still being attached to literary and historical research.

- The important issues surrounding vocabulary development. With it being no secret that vocabulary knowledge is a significant predictor of reading comprehension in all languages, papers dealing with how learners tackle the issue of character learning were well represented. These papers were highly informative in that they synthesized past research in JCLTA and other journals, presented new research findings, or established what the presenters felt were important theoretical foundations for understanding the L2 Chinese reading processes. Papers in this area thus presented theories of how Chinese learners develop orthographic awareness; detailed the salient aspects of Chinese script that need to be considered if we are to understand character acquisition; described how a meta-knowledge of the systematic nature of Chinese character construction is crucial for successful character acquisition; explained how learners seem to develop vocabulary knowledge and how it relates to reading comprehension; provided estimates of the size of learner vocabulary to deal with authentic Chinese texts; and discussed the importance of taking into account character frequency.
- Pedagogical issues, principles, and programs for developing good readers of Chinese. Issues that were discussed include developing strategies among learners for memorizing characters that took into account specific characteristics of character components; acquiring a strong foundation in the spoken language before attempting character learning; employing new computer approaches to teaching Chinese characters; employing systematic methods of teaching Chinese characters to develop intensive reading skills; considering the roll of mnemonic techniques used by learners to memorize characters; and exploring the connection between Chinese character teaching techniques and its relationship to vocabulary teaching.

To gain a better appreciation and understanding of the full scope of this conference, you are urged to visit the conference website at: <http://www.fask.uni-mainz.de/inst/chinesisch/hanzirenzhi.html> where more information about the content of the papers can be found. In addition, the proceedings of the conference are currently being edited and will be published in 2006, thus adding a very special volume to the CFL reading literature. Because of the conference's success, plans are being discussed to continue the conference on a bi-annual basis, with the next meeting to be held in France. All the participants are extremely grateful to Professor Andreas Guder of the Department of Chinese, School of Applied Linguistics and Cultural Studies, and his tireless staff for the wonderful planning, organization, and hospitality extended to all of us lucky enough to attend the conference.

Michael E. Everson

Arbeitskreis Ostasien in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geographie (DGfG): Tagungsbericht

Trier, 6. Oktober 2005

Der Arbeitskreis Ostasien in der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Geographie traf sich am 06.10.2005 zu seiner fünften Sitzung in Trier, die diesmal im Rahmen des Deutschen Geographentages stattfand. Einer Einführung in das Anliegen und das Programm des Arbeitskreises durch Winfried Flüchter (Universität Duisburg-Essen) folgten fünf human-geographisch ausgerichtete Beiträge speziell zu China.