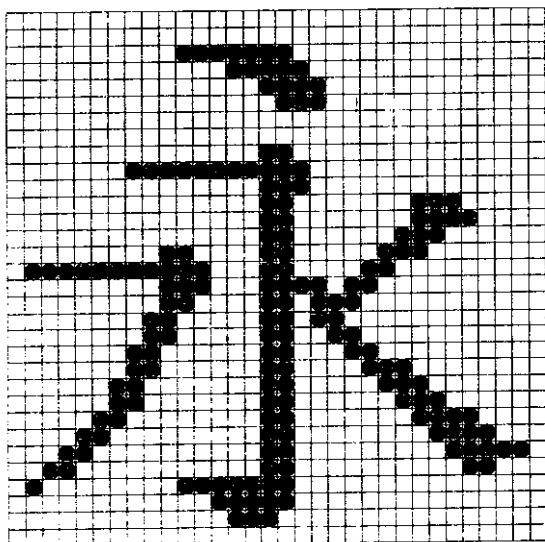


Nr. 1, Februar 1988

Chinesisch und Computer



Aus dem Inhalt:

Bericht vom Münchner Workshop "Chinesisch und Computer" * Chinesische Datenbanken * Eingabeverfahren für die chinesische Schrift * Schriftzeichen codierung * Programmlistings * Schriftzeichenerkennung * Chinesische Zeichen in deutschsprachigen Texten * Zeichen-Lernprogramm

Zu beziehen bei:

Urs Widmer, PC-Labor der Universität Bremen, MZH, 7. Ebene, 2800 Bremen 33

An MTC Case Study of International Cooperation for Teaching Chinese as a Second Language

Chen-ching Li

National Taiwan Normal University

1. Internationalization: a New Dimension of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language

The internalized motivation of students and well developed quality of teachers are always complementary with each other. Nevertheless, we tend to emphasize more stress on the dimension of the students than on the teachers. This is particularly so in foreign language teaching, regardless of teaching English or Chinese as a second language. A misleading concept that used to prevail was native speakers should be the ones capable of teaching the target language well. This is still partially so in the Asian metropolises.¹ In other words, untrained or inexperienced native speakers of English tend to make great amount of money in Asian countries. These social, economic, and educational phenomena have caught my attention to foreign language teaching in general.

The rising number of foreigners interested in learning Chinese as a second language has created an unprecedented demand of qualified teachers of Chinese since the 1970's (Li 1982). Take the Mandarin Training Center (henceforth MTC) of National Taiwan Normal University for instance. When the institute was first established in 1956, there were only 12 students. The

enrollment had grown to 560 in 1980 when this author took over the Center in the capacity of its director. Students kept coming, and by this year of 1986, there are 900 students from 40 countries enrolling to study not only Mandarin Chinese, but also the Chinese culture and other related subjects.² With the drastic increase of student enrollment, it means the greater demand of more teachers as well. It turned out, however, that there were no accredited institutions at all in Taiwan responsible for training the teachers of Chinese as a second language. Training programs glued to basic theoretical framework of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, or psycholinguistics, etc., were not available before 1984, and yet the TCSL programs kept mushrooming because Mandarin Chinese has gradually become a major language of the world since World War II was ended.³ And in view of the fact that Chinese is the language with more than one billion speakers or more than a quarter of the world's population, we can no longer neglect the reality (NEWSWEEK 1982, Nov. 15:12). The key issue is how far TCSL can go without a dynamic, theoretically based training program for the TCSL teachers. Another problem is how to augment TCSL programs in foreign universities through a joint venture internationally.

In his praiseworthy discussion in The Art of Teaching, Gilbert Hight (1950) categorically proclaimed the importance of teacher training. The need of TCSL teachers from the native soil is somewhat compatible with what Stevick (1980:16) claims that "It is we teachers who possess the information which our students are seeking about the foreign culture and about its language." It is my belief that a well programmed teacher training project is of

vital momentum to teaching Chinese as a second language on the native or foreign turf. This concept, together with the unique experience of untrained teachers teaching Chinese to foreigners at the Mandarin Training Center is very similar to the Dartmouth College Experiment implemented in the Peace Corps teachers who often displayed more enthusiasm than competence (Raissias 1983: 363-64). Although the teachers in Mandarin Training Center were well aware that they were the living model of Peking Mandarin for foreign students to learn or to imitate, they should appreciate the undeniable fact that new techniques can render the teaching activities, particularly the teaching of Chinese as a second language, more accurate and enduring, and the learning more quickly.

In spite of the success of TCSL at the Mandarin Training Center before 1980, I deemed it integral to impose an appropriate teacher training program on the experienced MTC teachers so as to enable them to effectively boost the learning achievement of international students in a larger scale.

In 1984, this "dream" was put into practice on a trial basis. For the first time in 28 years, the Mandarin Training Center was awarded a special grant for training TCSL teachers for international cooperation purposes. It was then the demand of some American universities for qualified, well trained native speakers of Chinese to teach Mandarin in the U.S. campuses so as to help boost the TCSL program on the foreign turf.

2. The In-service Training Program for Selected MTC Teachers

Once the special grant was approved by the ROC Ministry of Education, the MTC began to take actions in detailed curriculum

planning and selecting procedures.

2.1 Qualification of the Candidates

Potential, dynamic, and enthusiastic teachers who were under 40 years of age, were accepted for consideration. In addition to having at least two years' teaching experience of the Chinese language to foreign students at MTC, each of the candidates had to possess a BA degree to certify her/his academic status.

After a very careful screening procedure, 35 MTC teachers were selected to participate in the TCSL training project. All of them were also aware of the commitment that they had to learn to do all types of homework, in addition to writing research papers on TCSL. And upon the completion of the nine-month training project, they would be picked to teach Chinese as a second language in the US colleges and universities on the available basis.

2.2 Curriculum for the Training Program

In order to readily complement with the experienced TCSL teachers' professional needs, the following subjects were offered on the lecture type:

Theories of Teaching Chinese as a Second Language

Chinese Phonetics (focusing on the National Phonetic

Alphabet, e.g. ㄅ, ㄆ, ㄇ, ㄏ)

Mandarin Syntax (from the perspective of contemporary linguistic theories)

Sociolinguistics (with psycholinguistic theories partially included)

TCSL Material Adaptation and Development

Chinese Word Study (Etymology)

Guest Lectures and Practicum

This author was responsible for hiring expertise of the above courses to lecture to the trainees most of whom had never had any of the designated courses before. It was my belief then that the implementation of these subjects would definitely enhance these teachers' perception of foreign language acquisition theories through cross-linguistic and cross-cultural framework. And eventually they would be able to be equipped with the knowledge of foreign language teaching not only in the foreign countries but also on the native land as well. Also, it was my opinion then that this teacher training project would certainly upgrade the competence of MTC teachers to the maximum extent, and its impact would be predictable. Thus, for the guest lecturing, distinguished scholars in the field of TCSL were invited to share their innovative ideas with the in-service TCSL teachers.⁴

In the course of the training program, I played an active role not only as the chief coordinator for the overall program, but also as one of the lecturers on sociolinguistics and theories of TCSL. This practice is of vital importance in the Chinese cultural context. Direct involvement in the designated program by the chief administrator usually means that he cares, and as a result all the participants automatically pull their strains tightly. Consequently, the participants in the TCSL program were obliged to devote their time and energy wholeheartedly and cooperatively.

The participants attended the designated classes for the whole morning of each Saturday, four hours each. Meanwhile their original teaching responsibility continued during the weekdays.

3. Some Measurements of Achievement

As all the participants attended the training program only

four hours on each Saturday, they could readily apply what they learned from the professors' presentations to their own teaching activities designed for foreign students at the Center. A very distinct rise in morale in teaching and learning occurred on the part of the participating teachers. Like Rassias (1983:370) pointed out in his Dartmouth College experience: These teachers sharply aroused their students' interest in the Chinese language, along with the belief that knowledge in a foreign language makes one a better informed person. In other words, both the students and the participating teachers attained a high morale level that had never happened before. And in return, the achievement of these teachers had had a great impact on those other MTC teachers who did not attend the program for one reason or another.

Part of the achievements of the program could be reflected from the students' responses in general. The MTC students demonstrated higher morale in these teachers' classes. Certainly, it is the training that made the differences.

In addition, I personally observed that many of the teachers drastically changed their approaches to teaching right after the training program. It is predictable that their students directly benefited from them. And this was what I had envisioned long before 1984. My conviction was that teacher training was extremely important for cross-linguistic and cross-cultural learning.

Other measurements of the project can be observed by American universities becoming interested in hiring these trained teachers to teach Chinese on their campuses. As of October 1986, there are seven teachers employed to teach in the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, University of Illinois, Chicago, Duke University, William College, State University of New York,

Potsdam, and University of Wisconsin, Riverfalls. Two other teachers were hired to operate TCSL program in Japan and Korea.

I have also recently heard that some European universities have shown interest in hiring these trained teachers to teach there. Evidently, the success of this internationally oriented program has been overheard by many foreign academic institutions that are concerned about the improvement of TCSL in the higher learning institutions.

At this stage, we are in the process of considering operating another phase of the similar teacher training project to help teachers inside and outside the MTC. In this way, we can meet more international needs as well.

4. Future Perspective of International Cooperation for TCSL

The TCSL teachers "exported" overseas and employed by American colleges and universities have been highly appreciated for undertaking teaching responsibilities successfully. These teachers are sent abroad subject to the approval of the ROC Ministry of Education on the cost-sharing basis. In other words, both the American colleges and ROC Ministry of Education bear partial responsibility of their salary and subsidies, such that these teachers from MTC entitle the position and monthly pay equivalent to those of assistant professors while they are in the United States.

According to our reports from the cooperating U.S. colleges and universities, the teachers coming out of the MTC training program have activated the motivation of learning Chinese as a second language in their campuses. Schools such as University of Massachusetts, Amherst and University of Wisconsin have had drastic increase of enrollment in Chinese language program

because of the dynamic performance of the MTC teachers who work hand in hand with their American counterparts.

There are more and more colleges and universities in America and Europe showing interest in hiring the MTC-trained teachers, following the examples of the aforementioned American colleges.

For the MTC itself, however, it benefits tremendously from this special in-service training project. Many of the teachers who did not participate in the training program have gradually adopted renewed innovative teaching strategies, exemplifying those who participated in the training project.

As the necessity of using Chinese as a medium for communication increases globally it can be envisioned that more and more qualified teachers who have received professional and academic training will become the "wanted" ones for teaching Chinese as a second language overseas. This prediction is justifiable according to the surveys of Huang (1985:553-54) and Ning (1983). One way to supplement this international need is to adopt more international cooperation projects such as the one experimented successfully at the Mandarin Training Center in 1984. Through the in-service TCSL teachers' re-training project, those potential teachers will be able to improve their teaching skills, and more international students will substantially benefit for academic purposes. Likewise, international and inter-personal harmony can be thus reinforced based on this MTC model of cooperative TCSL project which can eventually claim a great deal of cross-linguistic and cross-cultural significance.⁵

NOTES

¹This reference is taken from a feature report depicting English-speaking people teaching the English language in Tokyo, Japan. "...In some areas, American servicemen, businessmen, or housewives take on a night-class once or twice a week to supplement their incomes." Teaching English has become a booming business in Japan. This report was published in the Asian Magazine, July 17, 1983.

²The Mandarin Training Center of National Taiwan Normal University is a non-degree seeking, and non-profit making institution. It offers various courses at different levels, ranging from elementary to advanced. Flexibility of courses and materials has characterized the Center's program, with well-trained teachers provided. There are about 300 different kinds of materials offered for students to choose according to their own proficiency. This flexibility has been possible because of the small class size which has been divided into three categories: individual tutorial classes, 2-student classes, and 3-5 student classes. No classes have more than five students. Thus "individual attention" is one great concern at the Center.

³According to Huang (1985:553), Americans have been enthusiastic for Chinese study programs, including the learning of Chinese as a second language. Thus, Mortimer Graves, president of American Council of Learned Society helped establish the "Intensive Language Program" in 1941. Thereafter, more and more American higher learning institutions started Chinese teaching programs. By 1983, there were approximately 250 colleges and universities in the United States offering Chinese programs (Ning 1983).

⁴These scholars included linguists, and language center administrators such as Dr. James Dew, Director of Inter-University Program administered by Stanford University (Taipei), Dr. C. Kubler, Principal of American Institute in Taiwan's Chinese Language & Area Studies School, Taipei. Scholars in other fields were invited, too. Guest lectures have been implemented all year round.

⁵Another international cooperative program being carried on is the one between the Oriental Institute, the University of Oxford and the Mandarin Training Center, National Taiwan Normal University. Oxford sends its students to MTC after they have learned Chinese for a couple of years. Their renewed linguistic and cultural experiences on the native "turf" definitely beef up their proficiency of the Chinese language after three to four months language and culture learning. Professor Raymond S. Dawson of Oxford University and MTC's director have been working closely together to ensure the success of the unique international cooperative program.

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Chen-ching Li

National Taiwan Normal University

ABSTRACT

With the steady increase of teaching programs of Chinese as a second language in the American colleges and universities, a consensus of recruiting quality and well trained native teachers of Chinese to teach on the foreign turf has become a new trend. To meet this vogue, the Mandarin Training Center of National Taiwan Normal University initiated an "In-service Teacher Re-training Program" in corporation with the ROC Ministry of Education and some American colleges and universities. This unprecedented TCSL teacher training project offered theoretical training to the experienced teachers who had been teaching Chinese as a second language in the Mandarin Training Center for years.

The nine-month training project (Mar. 1 - Dec. 22, 1984) has equipped these potential teachers with improved teaching strategies through the courses offered: TCSL theories, Chinese phonetics, Mandarin syntax, sociolinguistics, material adaptation and development, plus a series of guest lectures related to culture learning and cross-cultural communication.

The experimental in-service training program has boosted not only enthusiasm for teaching Chinese as a second language overseas, but also upgraded the quality of the MTC programs in large scale. Moreover, seven of these 35 trainees have already been hired to teach Chinese in American colleges and universities on the cost-sharing basis. Result of this project has motivated the MTC to plan the second stage of TCSL teacher training for teaching on the foreign turf.