

## How Chinese Stands as a Cultural Course?

### - *An Attempt to Establish the Role of Chinese as a Cultural Study in TUES*

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和文要旨：これまでの大学のカリキュラムでは英語以外の第二外国語科目の役割、重要性について十分な研究が行われてこなかった。本論文は、鳥取環境大学における二年半の間の教育実践の経験にもとづき、第二外国語としての中国語教育の目的、ならびに教育方法をまとめたものである。著者のクラスでは、中国語教育を「言語」と「文化」の二つに分けて行っている。このような授業の仕方によって、限られている時間数内に、学習者のために最大限の言語知識を教授し、そして様々な文化分野に触れ合うチャンスを与えることを目指している。

【キーワード】 中国語、第二外国語、言語、文化、能力試験

**Abstract** : This article is intended to illustrate the author's understanding of the general goals of Chinese, an elective subject in the curriculum of TUES, and what, in consequence, should be conducted to realize those goals. As there is not so much research on the role and importance of the second foreign language courses (other than English) in the university curriculum, this is a tentative attempt to exemplify the importance of Chinese as a second language course as well as to show how to take advantage of this subject to sensitize students to the existence of China and equip themselves with the maximum possible ability in both oral and written communication.

【Keywords】 Chinese, second foreign language, language, culture, proficiency test

#### 1. Introduction

Cultural studies set in the curriculum of a university cover a wide range of disciplines, ranging from philosophical studies, basic mathematics, social studies and even to orchestra appreciation. However, there is a common purpose underlying all those subjects, i.e., to equip university students with preliminary skills to deal with their life after graduation as a member of society. Among many, language courses are often seen as a window to peep into other cultures, and to establish oneself in a global context and even as a practical skill to widen

their employment prospects. This article is, then, a tentative attempt to establish the general roles and stance of the language course, Chinese, set as one of the cultural studies in TUES.

#### 2. Pedagogical purpose

In China, Chinese language teaching has experienced a gradual change in terms of ultimate purposes of language learning. In the early stages, foreign students from other developing countries came to study Chinese in order to participate in Chinese university courses so that they could

master necessary technical or administrative skills to serve for the developments of their own countries. However, with more and more students from other developed countries coming to China, a change in the purposes of Chinese teaching is necessitated, because most of the foreign students study Chinese either out of pure interests in China itself or to achieve success in their career developments in China. In view of this, teaching of Chinese has shifted the focus from the earlier **academic purposes** to **communicative purposes**, so that students could function successfully in economical or cultural activities in China.

With the growing exchanges in different aspects of social life, China has come to a stronger bond with Japan as well as with the rest of the world<sup>1)</sup>. The recent establishment (June 28<sup>th</sup>, 2005) of *Confucius Institute*<sup>2)</sup> in Retsumeikan University has shown that Chinese language has gradually come under the scrutiny in Japan. However, as an elective subject in the curriculum of TUES, Chinese has only been offered 30 periods (about 45 hours) throughout the whole academic year, which is even inclusive of two examination periods. Compared with English, the compulsory language subject that covers a total of 108 hours per year, time allocated for Chinese accounts for less than half of those of English. Still, with reference to *HSK*<sup>3)</sup>, the basic certificate would even require a minimum of 100 hours of intensive study of Chinese. In view of this, the time given is far from being enough for students to even attempt to sit the *HSK* exam. Consequently, what shall be set as the course target and in what ways Chinese courses shall be conducted so as to realize this target have aroused my attention.

#### A. To equip learners with survival communicative skills

As is with all the other language courses, Chinese course also aims at enabling learners to function in a target language. Though short in the total length of class time, Chinese course has aimed at covering the basic linguistic knowledge of Chinese in terms of its phonological system - *Pinyin*, its orthographical system - Chinese characters and some fundamental syntactical patterns and survival vocabulary. While being able to take the advantage of the shared use of many characters in both China and Japan, particular attention should be paid to the simplified set of characters used in present Chinese society. (See appendix I)

On top of those, dictionary skill is another must. Dictionary skills are indispensable skills for learners to further their study in Chinese on their own. Compared with speaking Chinese in a local environment, the chances are much greater for them to run into materials or manuals written in Chinese. In this sense, being able to use dictionary by themselves to do independent research has become a prospectively critical skill.

#### B. To promote intercultural understanding and enrich students' view of value

Language is said to be the embodiment of its culture, and ultimate purpose of students' language learning could be seen as to function successfully in the target culture (Moran, 2001). In other words, language is no more than a tool to help learners to cope with the culture it represents, although language learning could mean more of research values to linguistic researchers. A brief browsing of most of the syllabus of culture studies in the universities in Japan reveals that many have put "deepening cross-cultural understanding" as one of the top priorities (syllabus of cultural studies in Kinki University, 2004; Okinawa Prefectural Art University, 2005, etc.). Although a few high schools in Japan have started Chinese as a second foreign language, most high schools have English as the main foreign language option (Chinese Education Committee of Japanese National High Schools, 1999). This means that university could well be the first academic situation where students encounter Chinese. In view of this, it stands to reason to claim more importance to the introduction of target culture.

Many students select Chinese out of mere curiosity, such as its unique way of pronunciation and intonation, the similarity in the use of characters, Chinese cuisine and even their favorite Chinese actor or actress could trigger such choices. However, taking advantage of students' initial interests in the target language and its culture, course designer may well lead students to appreciate the role of underlying culture, thus coming to a more complete view of the target country.

#### C. To provide learners with another chance of starting a brand new language for the purpose of expanding employment prospects

For some learners however, selecting Chinese as a second language could be a way to compensate their unsuccessful

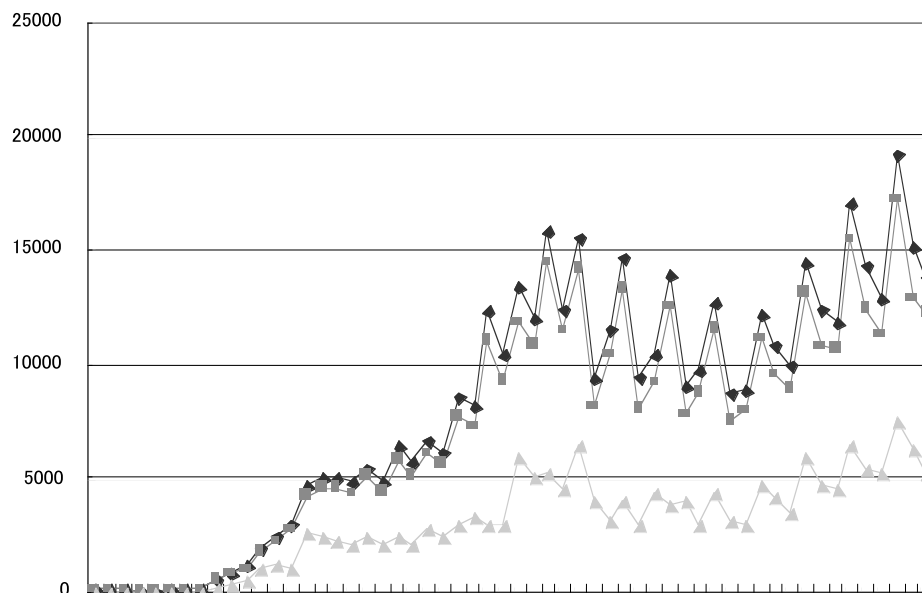
learning experience in the first foreign language, such as English. From my experience, some students have come to a standoff in the learning of English and they were earnest to start up another language to regain their confidence in language acquisition. At the same time, to have a certificate, even an introductory certificate in a foreign language, may well enhance their job-hunting potentials. With the ever increasing culture and trading exchange between Japan and China, more and more Japanese enterprises have set up their head office and plants in China. And the demand for those who could function in Chinese is remarkably on the increase. In view of this, it could be well argued that, elective cultural subject as it is, Chinese may as well receive enough attention to function as a subject that may help to contribute to the students' employment prospects in the near future.

To have certificates of different levels in Chinese language proficiency test is one of the proofs of one's language proficiency in job-hunting. There are mainly three nation-wide Chinese proficiency tests in Japan, respectively, *HSK*<sup>4)</sup>, *Chinese Examination* (日本中国語検定, or 中検), and *Chinese Japanese Business Communication Test* (中日通検 or *BCT*). *HSK* is a Chinese Proficiency Test (*Han Yu Shui Ping Kao Shi*), which is directly authorized by the Educational Committee of Chinese government. It offers two kinds of certificates, required either in applying for studying in the university or working in China. It is a worldwide test and anyone who has Chinese as their second or foreign language could sit *HSK*. *Chinese Examination* is a test organized by Japanese government to evaluate Chinese language proficiency of learners inside of Japan. *BCT* is hosted by Japanese Interpretation Association (日本通訳協会), aiming at evaluating learners' communication ability under business context.

In the case of *HSK*, the overall number of examinee is seen to be on a steady increase from the year *HSK* was first conducted. Up to 2003, there have been more than 140,000 examinees who have sit *HSK* worldwide. And in Japan, the accumulative number shows more than 34,000 candidates have sit *HSK* in Japan since it was first administered in Japan in 1984.

Another look at the total number of *Chinese Examination* (see Table I) also elucidates that Chinese is enjoying a vicissitudinous increase of popularity within Japanese learners. As the exam is carried out twice a year, the number of exams

shows how the general number of applicants changes over 28 years. As is shown in the graph, there are less than 5,000 applicants in the 15<sup>th</sup> administration of *Chinese Examination* whereas an increase of 10,000 is observed at around 31<sup>st</sup> examination. With some ups and downs, though, the graph has revealed a steady growth in the number of applicants as with the progress of the number of examinations.



As a relatively new comer of the proficiency test, *BCT* is now gaining popularity as its English counterpart *TOEIC*. The number of applicants for the year 2005 (the first implementation of *BCT* in Chinese-Japanese) is 365. (Japanese Interpretation Association has started similar exams in English-Japanese for over 32 years since year 1973; however, the implementation of *BCT* in Chinese-Japanese was started in spring, 2005) The introduction of Business dimension in Chinese has foregrounded the importance of Chinese as a means of business transaction.

The brief listing of statistics has insinuated that Chinese is receiving more and more attention as a media to participate in Chinese cultural and economical life. And this world wave could have exerted its powerful influence over Japan, and it is particularly true in view of much geographical and cultural affinity between these two countries. Therefore, we have every reason to believe that being able to function successfully in Chinese will help students in TUES to bring in new perspectives in their lives as well as to expand their prospective employment possibilities.

### 3. How to set the syllabus

#### A. Language skill part

In this part of the course, learners are to be taught some basic linguistic facts about Chinese and some communicative skills. In detail, the following items are to be covered:

##### a. Chinese phonological system

*Pinyin* ( 音), is a set of written alphabetic system that represents the phonetic features of Chinese. This may also be the most difficult starting-up stage for most of beginners in Chinese. It has taken me more than five periods of class time to cover all *Pinyin* sections. As a result of repetitive imitation and gradual hardening of their mouth muscles, most of the learners got quite exhausted when *Pinyin* section came to the end, and some students even became so frustrated as to have given up at this stage.

However, I choose not to skip this *Pinyin* section, because if so, the *Katakana* style of interpreting the real Chinese pronunciation could result in irrevocably devastating results. To show how different real Chinese pronunciation and Japanese *Katakana* interpretation could be, I have

chosen one Chinese song, with one *Katakana* style of its lyrics. After having students to listen to the Chinese original CD recording, they are then asked to listen to the reading of *Katakana* version, using special audio software. By doing so, my students could easily feel the differences between real Chinese pronunciation and *Katakana* interpretation, realizing that by trying to rely on *Katakana* is by no means an effective method to get them across. (The version of this song lyric is attached as appendix II.)

b. The comparison and contrast of characters

Most of my students wrongly believe that Chinese is easy to acquire because Chinese and Japanese share most usages of characters. However, this opinion is only partially true. In 1956, Chinese educational committee released a set of simplified characters in the interest of enhancing the general efficiency of writing in Chinese. On the one hand, Chinese seems a lot familiar to Japanese learners to start up with; however, vocabularies used in daily life situation are very different from those applied in other social and natural scientific disciplines. In other words, in the initial stages, learners may not encounter as many characters of precisely the same usage as they expect. Rather, they may meet up with very many simplified characters, which would only puzzle Japanese learners as being somehow familiar but not exactly what they know about. In this way, it seems rather practical to give my students a list of characters, compared and contrasted within both Chinese and Japanese contexts, so that they could get used to the simplified characters as used in the road boards. (Also see appendix I)

c. Dictionary skills

As an indispensable skill to assist students in their independent research work, dictionary skills are taught right after the instruction of *Pinyin* and the introduction of simplified set of characters.

There are usually two ways of using a dictionary: *Pinyin* approach and *Radical* approach. By *Pinyin* approach, students need to interpret the audio input into correct *Pinyin* and then locate this *Pinyin* in the dictionary. This is usually the harder part, since various mistakes could be

expected in the interpretation process. Besides, even the same *Pinyin* could result in a number of candidates and students will need to locate the correct candidate by fitting it into the interlocutory context. However, more often, students will make use of *Radical* approach, which is similar to that of *Kanwa*<sup>4)</sup> dictionary. As long as students could recognize simplified radicals, they could then, locate the character easily in the dictionary.

Some exercises to practise dictionary skills could be found in appendix III, with 1) characters with the same looking having interestingly different meaning in both Japanese and Chinese, and vice versa; 2) some Chinese-specific usages.

d. Basic syntactic rules and vocabulary

For Chinese course, I have chosen *24 Tools of Conversation* (会話ツール24) as the standard text in class. One reason is that this text book has its equivalent electronic version so that student could study on their own outside class time. The basic syntactic rules that are covered are attached as Appendix IV.

In addition, there are also some essential vocabularies to be introduced so that students could rise up to the everyday situation. According to the minimum requirement of *HSK*, a minimum of 400 words is necessary for the issue of an introductory certificate. Therefore, a total number of more than 1,000 words are introduced in the set textbook.

B. Culture part

Culture, is an enormously huge concept, with a rich variety of definitions. Teaching of culture may sound too arrogant or just ignorant. Yet, language and culture is obviously interdependent and language is the embodiment of its culture whereas culture is inevitably reflected in language itself. It then makes every sense to sensitize learners to the culture that gives birth to its language.

Within a total of less than 45 hours allotted to Chinese subject, how to weave the introduction of culture into language classrooms in order that students may be able to see where they

stand in relation to the target culture? Moran (2001) has given out five culture dimensions, namely, *products*, *perspectives*, *persons*, *practices and communities*. It may be easier to explain the definition of five cultural dimensions by setting the scene with, for instance, an automobile. *Product* refers to automobile itself as a tangible cultural product; *practice* could refer to how *automobile* functions as a means of transportation in the target culture (such as rules governing which side of the road automobiles run in the target country); *persons* could be those who manufacture *automobiles* with their own identities and their life experiences (such as those introduced in Project X<sup>6)</sup>); and *communities* relates to any social institutes that have rules of their own governing the operation of *automobile*, (such as police who carry out traffic laws); and *perspective* could mean general belief or attitude of persons within the target culture taken towards *automobile* (whether they view automobile as a daily necessity or just an item of luxury). Oversimplified, though, the above could be understood as applications of five cultural dimensions in the case of an *automobile*. Among those, *product*, *person* and *practice* may be more readily included in the introduction of Chinese culture. Because *product* refers to any visible or invisible items that are particular to the target culture. *Practice* refers to any customary actions or operations within a culture. *Person* refers to individuals whose ID typifies that culture. If classroom materials are selected to reflect the above three aspects, students could have a base to come up with their own understanding of the target language culture, thus coming to understand, eventually, how they stand in relation to it.

As a complimentary part to language-skills part, cultural introduction only takes up 30 minutes of class-time, which is apparently far from enough to, ideally, cover all five culture dimensions. In view of this, Chinese syllabus in TUES has included, for the main part, cultural *products* (such as Chinese food, idioms, songs, ancient poems, famous tourist spots, historic relics, etc) and some common *practices* (such as the major national festivals and wedding ceremonies, etc.) as well as some *community* scenes (such as one-day of a Shanghai family). The author has attached more importance on the introduction of the above three dimensions due to time limit as well as out of assumed efficacy of material selection and application. So is the cultural part of syllabus set, this part of the course will try to spread in front of learners as much of Chinese daily life and its underlying morals (*perspectives*) as

possible so that they could construct an image of China out of their own understanding.

An illustration of one of the cultural topics - loan words - is described as below. Given the similarities in the usage of characters, it could arouse more interest, for example, to compare and contrast the use of loan words in both China and Japan. Japanese loan words usually have close pronunciation as the original word while Chinese loan words are often characterized by both approximating pronunciation and imaginable implication. By explaining loan words, students could be more prepared to approach Chinese loan words and enjoy their imagery association. An example of this is attached as Appendix V. Also, the year-out syllabus for Chinese is attached as Appendix VI for references.

#### 4. Conclusion

This paper has presented how the author understands the purposes of Chinese as an elective cultural study on the basis of the interrelationship between language and culture it represents. Moreover, it has also depicted how to set Chinese syllabus to best realize its pedagogical purposes as the author believes. An elective second language course as it is, Chinese course should not only be dismissed as nothing more than second foreign language course; rather, it had better be viewed with reasonable expectations and treated with more importance.

#### Notes

- 1) So far, there are about more than 300 Chinese teaching organizations in the world. (对外汉语网, 2005)
- 2) Confucius Institute is an organization sponsored by Chinese government for the purpose of promoting Chinese language teaching overseas.
- 3) HSK is the standard examination sponsored by Chinese government to measure the language proficiency of learners of other languages. HSK issues the only officially recognized certificate that certifies learners' language ability in terms of admission to study in any of the tertiary level schools in China.
- 4) Project X is a Japanese national TV program introducing pains-taking struggles of people involved in major projects across a variety of industries during the beginning of the economical development in Japan.

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Appendix I: (1) Simplified characters: radicals

### 日本漢字と中国漢字（簡体字）対照表

日本の漢字	中国語の漢字	日本の漢字	中国語の漢字
[Redacted content]			

## (2) Simplified characters

中国語の漢字	日本語の漢字	中国語の漢字	日本語の漢字
农业	農業	云	雲
鸟	鳥	头	頭
自行车	自転車	干事	幹事
丰田	豊田	出发	出発
图书	図書	马	馬
毛笔	筆	儿童	児童
对应	対応	土产	土産
手术	手術	看护	看護
兴奋	興奮	宣传	宣伝

## Appendix II: Song lyrics

The original Chinese lyrics:

跑马溜溜的山上

一朵溜溜的云。

端端溜溜的照在

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Katakana interpretation of the above Chinese lyrics:

パオマー リウリウディ シャンシャン,  
 イートウオ リウリウディ ユンヨー.  
 トゥアントゥアン リウリウディ チャオツァイ,  
 カンティン リウリウディ チュンヨー.  
 ユエリアン, ワン- ワン-,  
 カンティン リウリウディ チュンヨー.

Appendix III

Same characters with different meanings in Chinese and Japanese

Use dictionaries to check out the meaning in Chinese of the following Japanese characters

日本語語彙	同じ漢字の中国語の中の意味	日本語語彙	同じ漢字の中国語の中の意味

Some Chinese-specific usages

Use dictionaries to check out the meaning of the Chinese phrases

中国語語彙	日本語の意味	中国語語彙	日本語の意味

## Appendix IV: Syntactical structures covered in 24 Tools of Conversation

1. Affirmative sentence with the verb “是”； particle “吗”，“的”；
2. Adjective predicative, particle “吧”，“呢” and repetitive question;
3. Verbal predicative, sentence order with adverbial phrases, verb “有”， selective questions;
4. Particle “了”，“到 --- 去 / 来”， preposition “在” and auxiliary verb “想”；
5. Quantity, successive sentences, particle “过” preposition “离”，“从” and “到”；
6. Adverb “在”，“正在” and “快要…了” and quantitative complement;
7. Comparison, auxiliary verb “能”，“可以” and conjunction “要是”



## Appendix V: Chinese loanwords

Unlike Japanese, there is no Katakana in Chinese to indicate loanwords as they are phonologically are. Chinese loanwords are also expressed with characters. There are generally two types of loanwords in Chinese, i.e.

## 1. Transliteration type :

チョコレート	巧克力 qiao ke li	マラソン	馬拉松 ma la song
サンドイッチ	三明治 san ming zhi	クローン	克隆 ke long
オーストラリア	澳大利亚 ao da li ya	ベートーベン	贝多芬 bei duo fen

## 2. Transliteration with imageable indication :

Still, there are the direct importation from Japan, such as: 新登場 出前一丁 吉野屋 人気 資生堂 豊田

コカコーラ	可口可乐 ke kou ke le	ベンツ	奔驰 ben chi
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Appendix VI: Syllabus for the first term:

	言語部	文化部
第一週	漢語ピンイン 1	中国概況
第二週	漢語ピンイン 2	漢字鑑