

An Overview of Chinese International Education

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Abstract—In the past decade, Chinese international education has experienced rapid growth. The boom motivates the author of this paper to have done a holistic study on this issue. The study finds that Chinese international education programs have so far been operated basically in two directions: teaching Chinese to international students here in China and teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages in their own home country. The two types of Chinese programs share some common features as in core contents, teaching approaches and technology prospects. They also show striking differences in terms of students age, students composition and learning-aid activities. These differences pose varying challenge to course teachers and instructors. However, digital technology has changed education landscape, making great impact on Chinese international teaching. Teachers need to keep pace with technical progress, update their instructional techniques and pedagogical concepts. More video clips about Chinese and Chinese culture are expected to be developed and integrated into current classrooms.

Keywords—*Chinese international education; home programs; offshore programs*

I. INTRODUCTION

Practice of "Chinese International Education (汉语国际教育)" begins with the Chinese language program established for eastern European exchange students at Tsinghua University in 1950. Over several decades, the term now has several equivalents in China with subtle differences in each variation. The terms "Chinese international education", "international Chinese education", "global Chinese education", "teaching Chinese in the world" and "teaching Chinese as a second language" are all used to mean the concept of teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages, home and abroad. Obviously, scholars in this field equate Chinese international education programs with Chinese international teaching programs. [1] This paper would like to adopt the definition "Chinese international education is to teach Chinese as a second language to foreigners whose mother tongue is not Chinese".

Teaching Chinese as a second language has so far been operated basically in two lines: teaching Chinese to

international students here in China and teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages in their own home country. The first line can be referred to as domestic teaching or home teaching programs while the second line as offshore teaching or overseas teaching programs. In the past decade, the Chinese language programs both inside and outside China are on the rise. The number of international students coming to China has been increasing year on year. According to statistics, [2] there are 492,185 foreign students studying in China in 2018. Chinese education programs outside China also keep expanding either in width or in depth. The boom of course derives from the impact of China's rapid economic growth and its ever-increasing influence around the world. This situation also motivates us to have a close look at the two types of international Chinese education programs.

A holistic investigation conducted by the author of this paper finds that the two lines of Chinese international education programs, first of all, share some common features as in the core contents, teaching approaches and technology prospects.

II. SIMILARITIES SHARED BY THE TWO TYPES OF PROGRAMS

A. Core Content Is Basically the Same

In terms of the similarities lie between the two types of Chinese education programs, the most important one is the core contents established for both. No matter it is teaching Chinese at home to international students or teaching Chinese to the local learners in a foreign country, the goal of teaching is generally the same. Both aim to cultivate learners' Chinese language competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing. Naturally teachers or the class instructors have to focus on Chinese phonetics, lexicology and grammar, etc. Classroom activities often are designed to know and to learn Chinese characters, words, pronunciation and sentences. When learners have acquired the basic Chinese competence, they are guided to move further to acquire Chinese writing and cultural competence. Teachers or educators also have to study the applicable assessment tools and identify the needs for stratified learning experience. They usually identify

learners' Chinese language proficiency through evaluation before the commencement of training, observation during training and re-evaluation after training.

Generally, Chinese international education programs cover two areas: Chinese language and Chinese culture. The primary goal of the program is to help speakers of other languages to acquire Chinese language skill. And it is hoped that learners will also acquire Chinese cultural knowledge in the same period of language learning. For these reasons, some key courses are developed including language courses at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels. These language courses are often taught in small classes. Integrated Chinese books are developed to train learners listening, speaking, reading and writing abilities. In addition, cultural courses such as paper cutting, Chinese knots, Chinese martial arts, Chinese painting and calligraphy appreciation are established to enhance learners' perception into Chinese culture. On the basis of classroom tasks, series of language practice activities are commonly designed and organized, such as Chinese speech contest, Chinese characters contest, Chinese writing contest, or even calligraphy contest.

B. Teaching Approach Is Basically the Same

In terms of teaching approach, many teachers and educators agree that teaching Chinese as a second language (CSL) follows the general laws of worldwide second language education and meanwhile, should also be based on an in-depth research on the characteristics of the Chinese language and the special laws pertinent to Chinese teaching and learning. [3] Accordingly Chinese teachers or instructors proactively study the pedagogical development in second language education and try to integrate these pedagogical philosophies into Chinese teaching.

The Structuralist school and the Functionalist school are the most influential two schools over the history of second language education. The Structuralist school focuses on learners' acquisition of language features such as the sound (pinyin), the tone, the form and the structure of a Chinese character, words, sentences, etc. They emphasize that the output, no matter it is spoken or written, should be descent Chinese without deviation or discrepancy in terms of sound, tone and grammar. [4] This pedagogical philosophy is demonstrated typically by the traditional grammar-translation approach and audio-lingual approach. While the Functionalist school emphasizes acquisition to the meaning and the function of Chinese language of learners, they can realize the successful communication with native speakers. Therefore the teaching of this school focuses on fluency rather than accuracy and the notion is demonstrated typically by the task-based and content-based teaching approaches.

Based on research and practice, Chinese teachers and instructors develop a unique approach to avoid the drawbacks of the above two schools and try to find balance between accuracy and fluency in terms of learners' output. Some scholars call this approach "three-in-one", [5] that is, integrating language structure, function and cultural awareness into one session of teaching. Nowadays, no matter it is domestic teaching or offshore teaching Chinese to non-

native speakers, classroom teachers or instructors basically follow this procedure: ① defining the teaching objective→② warming up to arouse interest→③ introducing learning materials→④ explaining language points→⑤ (students) practicing in pairs or small drill groups→⑥ (students) performing designated communicative task or topic-based task→⑦ briefly reviewing the language points for the given session of learning activity.

It should be noted that step① is often skipped and the instructor directly begins class with step② warm-up activities if the program is targeted at kids. It also have to be noted that throughout the procedure, most time and energy are spent on the steps④⑤⑥, especially step ⑤ and⑥, which are students-centered, teacher-guided activities. Among these steps, ④⑤ and ⑦ demonstrate the idea of Structuralists school, while step⑥ demonstrates the idea of Functionalists school, and cultural elements may be observed throughout most of the steps. In terms of application, the teacher or instructor will assess students' current Chinese language level and accordingly decide how much time will be spent on step④⑤⑥ respectively. So the teaching process seems more or less the same, but when it comes to each specific step, the time allocated varies from program to program, based on students' language proficiency. Of course, classroom instructions are bilingual given in Chinese and English.

Having reviewed the similarities shared by the two fields of Chinese international education, we'd like to look into the differences exhibited by both.

III. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO TYPES OF PROGRAMS

Although there exist similarities in teaching Chinese as a second language home and abroad, the most striking feature of these two types of programs lie in their differences.

A. Different Age Group

Chinese education abroad generally is targeted at all levels of learners including adults. Overseas programs cover a wide range of learners from kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, throughout colleges and universities, with most learners beginning their Chinese learning at a lower grade, especially in developed countries and those has established friendly relationship with China. So, Chinese teaching programs abroad recruit both kids and adult learners. While home education basically is designed exclusively at college level and targeted to exchange students who come to China, with small portion of learners who come here to work learning Chinese to facilitate communication with their local Chinese partners. Those who come to China to learn Chinese are generally adult learners.

When a Confucius institute get established on a foreign land, the teaching staff need to be highly proactive to design their courses based on the needs of targeted local learners and then promote its program in college/university, communities, or even elementary and secondary schools to attract potential learners. The reports or WeChat accounts of

many Confucius institutes also show that their students include kids apart from adult learners and compared with adult learners, kids appear more often in their promotion pictures. As it is known to all, the learning mechanism of kids is somewhat different from that of adult learners. The learning of kids is not a rational action but intuitive acquisition. Teachers or instructors have to pay much effort to create a learning environment which brings about happy learning experience of this group of learners. Generally, course ingredients such as picture, animated graphics, game, competition, task and group learning, etc. are frequently integrated into classroom activities to make learning fun and interesting. To summarize, offshore Chinese teaching is multi-level operated with both kids and adult students. And compared with domestic Chinese programs targeted at exchange students from other countries, the offshore Chinese education has more segmented markets.

Unlike offshore Chinese teaching programs, the vast majority learners of domestic programs are adults at college/university level. Unlike kids, adult learners don't have advantages in memory or imitation. However, they exhibit good logic and analytical ability in learning things. Although games and small competitions are used in and out of classrooms to motivate or stimulate exchange students' interest in Chinese language or Chinese culture, these activities are not the major tools in the program for adult students. Instructors focus more on language features rather than classroom activities, introducing learning materials, elaborating key language points usually by comparison or contrast with the students home culture or language, guiding students to understand new materials by means of deduction or induction, and then encouraging them to do much drills or practice in well-designed classroom activities. Of course, games or designed performance add stimuli to students during this process. The combined lectures, language drills, games and performances are proved to be quite effective in teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages here in China in the past 3 decades.

Since some students who come to China to learn Chinese has acquired certain Chinese proficiency, the domestic programs established in some schools provide both compulsory courses and optional courses for students above intermediate level. [6] This is also something different from the practice with most programs in other countries.

B. Different Students Composition

Participants in overseas Chinese education programs are basically mono-culture background, coming from the same host country. While in China, students receive education almost with a multi-culture background, and coming from different countries or nations. This difference in students' composition creates varying challenge to teachers and class instructors because a successful teaching activity must be based on the accurate assessment of its learners.

1) Varying interests in learning Chinese: Overseas students learn Chinese out of different purposes and accordingly with varying level of commitment. Most students choose to learn Chinese out of curiosity. They are

curious about China and want to know about Chinese people, Chinese civilization and today's China. For this part of learners, they usually exhibit strong motivation in studying Chinese and show great commitment in the course learning. However, it can't be denied that there are actually a small number of people whose immediate purpose to learn Chinese is simply to be able to associate or interact with the local overseas Chinese. So acquiring some conversational Chinese skills will be enough for them since they have no intention to work in or travel to China in the future. Obviously, overseas Chinese teaching programs have to take into account the varying purposes in designing multi-level courses for the potential local learners.

While for the participants in the Chinese programs, they generally show strong motivation in Chinese learning. They come here with a clearly-defined purpose: to be specialized in a certain field or to be experts in China issues. Now that they are in China, of course they desire to acquire authentic Chinese. Therefore, the emphasis on how to produce natural and beautiful Chinese sounds, how to choose right words, how to produce grammatically correct Chinese sentences and ultimately complete successful communication with local Chinese people become the focus of this group of learners. Teachers or instructors in these programs are less challenged compared with those engaged in overseas programs.

2) Mono-culture vs. multi-culture background: As has described above, participants in overseas Chinese programs are basically mono-culture background because they come from the same host country of the program. Even in the country like the U.S.A., where people come from different ethnic groups, students still share some common values such as independence, weekends being for families while working hours for work, adult children leaving parents' home and finding their own shelter, etc. And they also share more or less similar learning style. When the class instructors guide students to perform the designed tasks in the session of discussion, it is relatively easier for them to operate. While as international students coming to China with a multi-culture background, they come from different countries or nations. It is more challenging for teachers or instructors to organize learning activities since students from different cultures prefer different learning styles. In some cultures, teachers talk or lecture a great deal of time, whereas in others students do most of the talking. Silence and minimal vocal participation characterize some classrooms, whereas others tend to be noisy and active. [7] The authority vested in the teacher also varies from culture to culture. Teachers have to make adjustment based on the course contents. Cultural pluralism is generally recognized as the organizing principle of classes and teaching diversity is encouraged and practiced at all levels of programs. For example, students learn not only Chinese Mid-autumn Festival, but also other harvest holidays around the world. They are encouraged to offer multi perspectives on social problems and significant historical events. Teachers' awareness of cultural variations has to be maintained in the multicultural classrooms.

3) *Different learning environment*: As is known, education ecosystem consists of teachers, students, the management and the learning environment. In the case of Chinese international education, when the venue of learning shifts, the teachers and students have to change and adapt themselves to the new environment. For cross-border education programs, the students stay on their native land. The learning environment doesn't change much and they can enjoy a relatively easy life. But they can't have immediate and convenient access to Chinese speaking communities. Consequently, they may need more language support services [8] from the teaching staff who actually experience much more challenge and must adapt themselves to the diverse requirements of the offshore working contexts. [9] They have to modify their instructional techniques including speaking at a slower rate, defining key terms and concepts more often with pictures, charts, gestures, facial expressions, para-linguistic clues, or even with pantomimes. While for domestic programs here in China, It is the international students who adapt themselves to the new environment which in turn creates favorable learning opportunities for them. They are immersed in Chinese language and cultural environment and that is to their advantage to speed their Chinese acquisition.

C. Varying Learning-aid Activities

For offshore Chinese programs, the activities organized in foreign countries to facilitate local learners to learn Chinese are quite limited, due to the lack of physical learning environment and necessary resources. The most common activities designed and conducted in overseas Chinese classrooms include singing Chinese songs, paper cutting, practicing simple Taichi movements and Chinese folk dance, small scale Chinese culture-related competitions or folk arts performance. Teaching aid activities organized by home educational institutes, on the other hand, are more inclusive and extensive, covering various cultural trips to enhance an in-depth insight into Chinese, apart from those routine activities organized on foreign land. Learners can gain more direct experience of Chinese culture and Chinese people. For example, the Chinese Speech Contest is usually held almost every year in every institution that has established the program. Contestants are required to deliver a speech talking about their experience in China and their perception of present-day China. Learners can truly experience the joyous and festival atmosphere of Chinese holidays, the social convenience brought about by the powerful WeChat and the daily convenience by mobile payment. Some even have acquired the performance skill of "Changing Face" in local Sichuan drama, the bamboo clipboard performance skill and Chinese crosstalk skill. [10] These direct experiences may overturn the previous stereotypes or prejudices they maintain against China, if any. The in-class and the out-of-class activities join together and build up a positive learning continuum, greatly enhancing student acquisition of Chinese and Chinese culture.

IV. PROSPECTS: TECHNOLOGY AS A BRIDGE TO CHINESE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

As is known, teacher competencies are one way to bridge culture and learning in the classroom. And teacher's competency can be enhanced by advancing technology and its application to learning activities. Nowadays, computers or computer-aided devices have already found their way into most classrooms around the world. Almost everyone is using a smart phone. And 5G network is going to be established in the near future.

Meanwhile, more and more mobile apps are developed for users to conveniently install in their smart phones. Teaching related software programs are designed and launched to markets. A wide variety of MOOC (massive open online courses), + SPOC (Small Private Online Courses), have been developed and put on line for students to learn. As teaching-aiding programs become more refined and economically available, a blended learning mode, integration of online courses and traditional classroom activities, begin to take shape. Diverse learning styles existed in current linguistically diverse classroom can be accommodated by these advances in education technology because wealth of online teaching videos provides customizable learning experience to students.

Students in this era of "Internet +", by making use of their smart phones and other digital reading devices, can easily get access to online courses and information almost anywhere anytime. Digital devices allow them to learn on-the-go! The Internet now is not just a conveyor of knowledge but also function as learning community. Language-related intelligent products activate learning resources and students as well. The online forums provide students with platform to interact with others. Some students are actively engaged in the interaction with teachers or learners from other cultures. The shared perspectives would enhance their Chinese learning and facilitate mutual understanding.

As for the teachers, it can be seen that modern digital technology allows teachers to conveniently select a picture from a comprehensive catalog of images, a video clip or a narrated animation from countless sources. Today it only takes minutes to pull together a visual show. While in the past, it may require hours of work to organize. As children and young people are increasingly being labeled the "game and video generation", educational technology that is entertaining and interactive is becoming a popular way to instruct. Take a teacher delivering a lecture as an example. As she lectures, she has images or a short video appear at appropriate time on the white board, making a list of links available to her students for them to review from varying perspective after class. Educational technology is making classroom teaching more interesting and interactive, getting speakers of other languages closer to Chinese and Chinese culture.

V. CONCLUSION

Teaching Chinese to international students here in China and teaching Chinese to speakers of other languages in their own homeland are the two areas of Chinese international

education. The home teaching programs are generally established and operated under government guidelines and have been run for several decades. Whereas the offshore teaching programs are relatively young, basically starting from the first overseas Confucius institutes built in 2004. So far, the offshore programs have developed into a dominant factor in Chinese international education and Confucius institutes have become the pillar organization for offshore programs. Meanwhile, domestic Chinese education programs for international students, with universities/colleges as the main body, continue to expand, especially in the past decade. An ever-increasing number of international students come to China to learn Chinese and Chinese culture. Chinese education outside China also keeps expanding both in width and depth.

Digital technology has changed the education landscape of how people acquire and spread knowledge, making great impact on Chinese international teaching and learning. Teachers engaged in Chinese international education programs have to keep pace with technical progress, update their instructional techniques and pedagogical concepts. In view of the fact that traditional classrooms are still the main sites of Chinese international education, teachers are hoped to develop more micro video clips suitable to be watched through MOOC platform network. A combined approach of both online and offline resources will be to the advantage of a diverse Chinese learning.

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