

Study on the Relationship Between Affective Strategies in Chinese Character Learning and Chinese Proficiency for International Students in China

Yanping Ying^{1,2,*}

¹College of Literature and Journalism, Sichuan University, Chengdu, Sichuan 610064, China

²Hainan Tropical Ocean University, Sanya, Hainan 572022, China

*Corresponding author. Email: tammy2233@163.com

ABSTRACT

Through case study, interview and questionnaire survey, it is found that the use of affective strategies affects the learning effect of Chinese characters of international students, and ultimately affects the learning effect of Chinese language. The use of affective strategies in Chinese character learning is related to learning motivation. Through the investigation, the learners with instrumental learning motivation are found significantly better than the learners with integrative learning motivation in the use of affective strategies for Chinese character learning, and the learners who love Chinese culture have the highest use rate of affective strategies for Chinese character learning, which are called affective learners, and they will spontaneously use various affective strategies to reduce anxiety. Generally speaking, classroom learning stage can be divided into pre-learning, in-learning and post-learning. No matter which stage the successful Chinese learners are in, they can use affective strategies to reduce anxiety, and make self-encouragement and relaxation in Chinese character learning. The progress in Chinese character learning can also stimulate the motivation of international students to learn Chinese, so that international students can continue to use affective strategies in Chinese character learning to reduce anxiety, encourage themselves, and continue to learn. Thus, a spiral circulation system is formed. The losers of Chinese character learning either give up Chinese character learning without affective strategy at the beginning of learning, or give up Chinese character learning without affective strategy at the stage of learning process, or give up Chinese character learning after classroom learning. The level of Chinese character learning determines the level of Chinese language.

Keywords: *affective strategies, Chinese character learning, international students*

I. INTRODUCTION

Chinese characters have always been a difficult problem for international students to learn Chinese. According to survey results, international students in non-Chinese cultural circle generally think that Chinese characters are difficult, and international students in Chinese cultural circle also think that Chinese characters are difficult. After a follow-up survey of these students, it believes that the use of affective strategies in the process of Chinese character learning affects the learning effect of Chinese character, even the whole Chinese language learning effect. Affective strategies belong to affective factors. As early as the mid-1980s, Krashen, an American language educator, put forward the input hypothesis model with the input hypothesis as the center. Specifically, it consists of five interrelated core hypotheses: the acquisition learning hypothesis, the natural order hypothesis, the monitor

hypothesis, the language input hypothesis, and the affective filter hypothesis. Among them, the Affective Filter hypothesis refers to that learners' input of language materials is not fully absorbed, and various psychological factors such as learners' motivation, attitude, self-confidence and anxiety level have certain screening on language input, that is to say, only through affective filter can all language input achieve language acquisition mechanism and be absorbed by the brain. The application of affective strategy in Chinese character learning directly affects the learning effect of learners.

II. THE CURRENT SITUATION OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS USING AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN CHINESE CHARACTER LEARNING

As early as 1990, Oxford classified the learning strategies of learners. Among them, as one of the

important parts of learners' learning strategies, affective strategies, which together constitute indirect strategies with metacognitive strategies and social strategies, play a significant role. The so-called "emotion" in "affective strategy" refers to emotion, attitude, motivation and values. Affective strategies mainly include the following three contents: reducing anxiety, self-encouragement and controlling emotions. The effective use of affective strategies is not only helpful to reflect the main position of learners in the teaching process and play their initiative and creativity, but also an important way to promote learners' language learning. In order to make the data accurate, this paper adopts

three methods, namely, case study, interview and questionnaire, to investigate the use of affective strategies in Chinese character learning of international students.

A. Case study of using affective strategy

In the initial stage of Chinese language learning, students show strong interest in Chinese language, but their attitudes towards Chinese characters vary from person to person. The details are shown in the "Table I":

TABLE I. USE OF AFFECTIVE STRATEGIES IN THE EARLY STAGE OF CHINESE LANGUAGE LEARNING

	American Male A	American Female B	Russian Male C	Russian Female D	Cape Verde Male E
Age (person/years old)	40	22	23	21	21
Chinese Proficiency	starting from zero	starting from zero	starting from zero	starting from zero	starting from zero
Learning motivation	Long life in China	Short-term life in China	1 year of Chinese language learning and then studying other majors	1 year of Chinese language learning and then studying other majors	1 year of Chinese language learning and then studying other majors
Chinese character learning willingness	unwilling	unwilling	willing	willing	willing
Affective Strategy	no use	use	use	use	use

The learners in "Table I" are all language students, and they have Chinese courses for five days a week, including Chinese comprehensive, Chinese listening and speaking, Chinese reading and writing, Chinese culture and other related courses. The five learners showed different anxieties when they contacted with Chinese language. A, Chinese learner starting from zero, believes that as long as he learns Pinyin, he could not learn Chinese characters, which are too difficult. He refuses to learn Chinese characters. His main motivation for learning Chinese is to live in China. A doesn't need to take the HSK exam. B has lived in China for 3-5 years. As a zero-based learner, she doesn't know Chinese. She thinks Chinese characters are too difficult. With the encouragement of the teacher, she begins to use affective strategies to reduce anxiety, encourage herself and practice Chinese characters every day. The purpose of C learning Chinese is to study in China one year later. Although it is difficult, he is willing to use affective strategies to reduce anxiety and learn Chinese characters. D, Chinese learner starting from zero, is willing to learn Chinese characters. The learning goal is to learn Chinese in China, and he has adopted the affective strategy of learning Chinese characters. Cape Verde male E, Chinese learner starting from zero, is willing to learn Chinese characters, with the goal of learning other majors in China.

Through the above description, the influence of age on Chinese character learning is not obvious, and the

influence of learning motivation on Chinese character learning is relatively large. A and B starting from zero have integrative learning motivations, while C, D, and E have instrumental motivations. Instrumental motivation learners are willing to learn Chinese characters. Integrative motivation learners are reluctant to learn Chinese characters. In the use of affective strategies in Chinese character learning, instrumental motivation learners use affective strategies to reduce anxiety and self-encourage learning of Chinese characters, while learners with integrative learning motivation show gender differences in the use of affective strategies. A firmly rejects the use of affective strategies for Chinese characters learning, while B, encouraged by the teacher, tries to use affective strategies to reduce anxiety and learn Chinese characters. In case investigation, the author did not find the influence of country differences on the learning effect of Chinese characters.

After one year of study, students' attitudes towards Chinese character learning will change, and the use of affective strategies will vary, as will their specific performances:

In A's opinion, as long as he learns Pinyin, he doesn't need to learn Chinese characters. Chinese characters are too difficult, so he gave up learning Chinese characters from the beginning. His motivation for learning Chinese is to live in China. American male

A does not take the HSK test. His Chinese listening and speaking skills can handle ordinary daily communication. He has rejected Chinese character learning from the beginning. Although he has lived in China for many years, he can reach the new HSK level 5 in spoken Chinese and HSK level 4 in spoken Chinese. He cannot read Chinese characters. He believes that Chinese characters should follow the path of alphabetization.

Living in China for 3-5 years, B is learner starting from zero. She does not know Chinese language. After studying Chinese characters for two months, she thinks that Chinese characters are difficult. She cannot overcome the anxiety of Chinese character learning, and automatically gives up Chinese character learning. Spoken Chinese can only be communicated daily.

Starting from zero, C learns to write Chinese characters one by one, and persists in writing every day. Dictating Chinese characters in class can maintain more than 95% accuracy. It is very difficult to learn Chinese characters at the beginning, and C even has the idea of giving up. However, under the circumstances of using affective strategies, reducing anxiety, self-encouragement and controlling emotions, C persists in learning Chinese characters. The correct rate of Chinese character recognition and reading can be guaranteed about 99% every day, and the correct rate of dictation can be guaranteed about 95%. After one year's study, C successfully passed the HSK4 test and entered the professional study.

D is also afraid of learning Chinese characters. But she overcame the fear of learning. She began to learn to write Chinese characters one by one from the beginning, and insisted on writing every day. The

dictation in class can maintain more than 85% accuracy, and the recognition and reading accuracy rate is more than 95%. After one year's study, she passed HSK4.

E studies very hard and insists on learning Chinese characters every day. Dictation in class can keep the accuracy of about 98%, and the accuracy of recognition and reading is about 99%. After one year of Chinese study, E passed HSK4 and successfully entered the major study.

From the performance of the above students, they have three attitudes towards Chinese character learning: refusing to learn Chinese characters, trying to learn Chinese characters, and willing to learn Chinese characters. These three affective attitudes affect students' learning.

After A and B learning for half a year, the language learning plateau phenomenon appeared, which lasted for about one month. The Chinese they learned was more "Chinese on the road". Although C, D, and E also have a "plateau phenomenon", the duration of the "plateau phenomenon" of C, D, and E is about one week to half a month. With the increase of Chinese characters learning, Chinese proficiency of C, D and E has been significantly improved. An obvious fact is that A and B do not learn Chinese characters, have strong listening and speaking skills, and strong oral expression skills, but cannot learn written languages that rely on Chinese characters.

For the learning situation of Chinese characters, C, D and E are obviously better than that of A and B who do not learn Chinese characters. The specific situation of Chinese character learning is as follows:

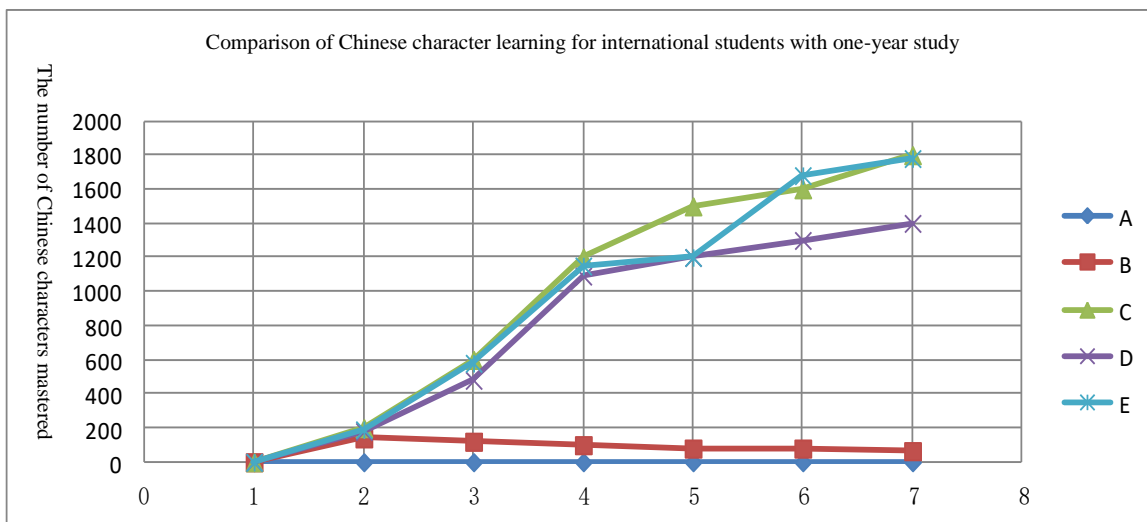


Fig. 1. Comparison of Chinese character learning for international students with one-year study. ¹

¹ The case investigation period is from September 2012 to September 2017.

A didn't learn Chinese characters all the time, and the level of Chinese characters didn't change. B gave up two months later, and the level of Chinese characters dropped. Persisting in learning Chinese characters, the level of C, D and E has improved significantly. After studying Chinese for a year, A married a Chinese wife, and there was no barrier in daily communication. A can't write Chinese characters, and insists that Chinese characters should be Pinyin. After one year of Chinese learning, B has been living with American counterparts in China. Listening and speaking can carry out daily communication. After the end of Chinese learning, there will be degradation. C entered the professional study after passing HSK4 in one-year study. In the process of learning Chinese, he did not overcome his anxiety, gave up learning Chinese characters, and finally gave up the professional study. At present, as a

tour guide in a tourism company, he has strong listening and speaking ability, and tends to "road Chinese" more and more. D continues to learn Chinese characters after passing HSK3. At present, he has passed HSK4 and successfully entered the professional study. After one year of Chinese learning, E has successfully entered into professional learning after passing HSK4. In the first year of professional learning of Chinese teaching, he always insists on learning Chinese characters, often asks for advice from teachers, and carefully reviews all the Chinese characters and vocabulary he has learned every day. After a year of professional study and passing the HSK5, she plans to apply for a postgraduate course in China. The changes of their Chinese learning after one year can be summarized as follows ("Table II"):

TABLE II. SPECIFIC SITUATION OF THE RESEARCH OBJECT AFTER ONE-YEAR CHINESE LEARNING

	American Male A	American Female B	Russian Male C	Russian Female D	Cape Verde Male E
Whether to learn Chinese characters	No	No	Gave up two months later	Yes	Yes
HSK Test	No examination	No examination	HSK4	HSK3	HSK5
Learning motivation	Long life in China	Short-term life in China	Give up the study of major	Have the study of major	Have the study of major
Chinese character learning willingness	Unwilling	Unwilling	Unwilling	Willing	Willing
Affective Strategy	No use	No use	A little	Use	Use

American male A has been studying for one year. Although he has listening and speaking practice every day, he refuses to learn Chinese characters. He does not have the ability to read and write. His Chinese listening can reach the level of HSK3, and his oral expression is at the level of HSK2. With one-year study, Chinese listening and speaking level of American female B is at HSK2 level, without reading and writing ability. After passing HSK4, Russian male C gave up the study of Chinese characters, failed to keep up with the progress after entering the major, and finally gave up the professional study. Russian female D passed the HSK3 test and continued to learn Chinese characters. Her goal is to pass HSK6 and study in China. After one year of study, Cape Verde E has passed the HSK5 level, and continues to use affective strategies after entering the major. From the above research, it finds that the successful learners of Chinese characters will go through five stages, while the unsuccessful learners of Chinese characters will go through two different stages.

Russian female D and Cape Verde male E are successful in learning Chinese characters. Their learning process has gone through five stages. In the first stage, there is the learning anxiety of Chinese characters starting from a zero; in the second stage, they use affective strategies to overcome learning anxiety of Chinese characters; in the third stage, they learn

Chinese characters to obtain a sense of achievement; in the fourth stage, they have obtained progress in Chinese learning; in the fifth stage, they use affective strategies to continue learning Chinese characters. For the losers, there are two situations of Chinese character learning. In the first situation, Chinese character learning of Russian male C has gone through five stages: the first stage refers to Chinese character learning anxiety starting from zero; the second stage is to use affective strategies to overcome Chinese character learning anxiety; in the third stage, Chinese learning has achieved phased results, passing through HSK4; in the fourth stage, after entering the major, there is no use of Chinese character affective strategy, giving up learning Chinese characters; in the fifth stage, it learns oral English and listening or gives up learning Chinese completely. There is also a case where learners such as American male A and American female B give up learning Chinese characters from the beginning, they will also go through two stages. In stage 1, they give up learning Chinese characters from a zero starting point. In Phase 2, they only learn spoken Chinese and listening. Chinese has a plateau phenomenon and loses motivation to learn.

B. Analysis on the interview of using affective strategies

This paper interviewed four students from Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Comoros, and Kazakhstan. The content of the discussion was to understand the students' time of

learning Chinese, whether to learn Chinese characters and whether to use affective strategies. Based on interviews, this paper finds that the learning of Chinese characters affects the effectiveness of Chinese learning. The results are shown in "Table III".

TABLE III. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHINESE CHARACTERS LEARNING OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS AND THE EFFECT OF CHINESE LEARNING

	Ukrainian female F	Ukrainian female G	Uzbekistan H	Comorian Male I	Kazakhstan female J
Age (person/years old)	35	22	19	20	18
Time for Learning Chinese	1 year	half a year	half a year	half a year	half a year
Whether to learn Chinese characters	No	Study for two months and then give up	Yes	Yes	Yes
HSK Test	No examination	No examination	No examination	No examination	No examination
Learning motivation	Long life in China	Short-term life in China	1 year of Chinese language learning and then studying other majors	Learning Chinese in China	subject or field of study
Chinese character learning willingness	unwilling	unwilling	willing	willing	willing
Affective Strategy	No use	A little	use	use	use

Ukrainian female F and G didn't learn Chinese characters when they were learning Chinese in China. They learned Chinese listening and speaking for half a year in Ukraine before they began to learn Chinese characters seriously. The Chinese language teaching in Ukraine belongs to a teaching mode of "listening and speaking first, reading and writing later", which is what we call "speaking first, then writing". They don't advocate mechanical copying. F and G think that learning Chinese characters should start from the simplest and most basic Chinese characters, and then learn a Chinese character according to morpheme method. They like morpheme method to learn Chinese characters very much. Mechanical practice is meaningless to them. Using Chinese characters of HSK4 to test them, F can understand 85%, and G can understand 60%. F only knows about 60% of Chinese characters, while G only knows 40%. Obviously, their listening and speaking ability is ahead of their reading and writing ability, while there is a disjunction between sound, meaning and form in Chinese character learning.

Uzbekistan male H only knows Uzbekistan language. As a student starting from zero, his teacher asked him to write Chinese characters in class, which is very difficult for him to learn. Because of different languages, there is no inter-language, Chinese characters are more difficult to learn, and it is not easy to understand the meaning of Chinese characters. Later, he found an Uzbekistan learning partner to tell him the meaning of those Chinese characters, and told him to write and remember the pronunciation, meaning and writing method every day. After about a month, he began to copy a large number of Chinese characters, and asked the partner for the meaning of Chinese characters. After the Uzbekistan language was marked

on the teaching materials, his Chinese progress was very obvious. The strategy of Chinese character learning was from mechanical learning to morpheme understanding. He thinks that copying Chinese characters every day can help him remember the writing and meaning of Chinese characters and dictation in the classroom can also help him remember more Chinese characters.

Comorian male I also finds Chinese characters difficult. In order to learn Chinese characters, he has been working hard to learn Chinese characters, but he has not insisted on the end. Therefore, his oral and listening skills are good, and his ability to recognize and read Chinese characters is poor. He thinks there are some Chinese characters that he thinks are very simple, but other international students think it is very difficult. And some Chinese characters that other international students find very easy are difficult for him. He believes that there are cognitive differences in the study of Chinese characters among international students, and there are individual differences in students' understanding of the difficulty of Chinese characters. Sometimes he can read the Chinese character, but he doesn't understand the meaning. Sometimes he knows the sound and meaning, but he doesn't know how to write.

At first, Kazakh female J felt that Chinese characters were not difficult. She used the method of copying many Chinese characters every day to achieve the purpose of remembering Chinese characters. After a period of study, she no longer copied Chinese characters, and the recognition, reading and listening of Chinese characters have declined.

From interviews with students and the results of Chinese character tests on students, it can be seen that international students have anxiety in learning Chinese characters at the beginning, and the successful learners of Chinese character are those who can successfully use affective strategies to overcome anxiety. It is believed that "speaking and writing synchronization" is more conducive to learning Chinese, because "speaking and writing separation" is the product of not overcoming the anxiety of learning Chinese characters. From the interview, the author also finds that the use of affective strategies does not only exist in a certain stage of Chinese character learning, but throughout the whole process of Chinese character learning. Learners who adhere to the use of affective strategies in the whole process of Chinese character learning, Chinese learning has made rapid progress.

According to the interview results, the successful learners of Chinese characters, such as Uzbekistan male H, Comoros male I and Kazakhstan female J, have gone through five stages in the process of Chinese character learning. In the first stage, it refers to Chinese character learning anxiety starting from zero; in the second stage, they use affective strategies to overcome Chinese character learning anxiety; in the third stage, Chinese learning performance is good; in the fourth stage, they learn Chinese successfully; in the fifth stage, they use affective strategies to learn Chinese characters. There are also three types of learning process for losers. For the first case, in the first stage, there is an anxiety in learning Chinese characters from the beginning; in the second stage, using affective strategies cannot overcome the anxiety of Chinese character learning; in the third stage, they give up Chinese character learning; in the fourth stage, they learn speaking and listening or give up Chinese learning completely. For the second situation, in the first stage, they give up learning Chinese characters from the beginning; in the second stage, they only learn oral Chinese and listening (plateau phenomenon in Chinese learning). For the third situation, in the first stage, it refers to Chinese character learning anxiety starting from zero; in the second stage, using affective strategy can overcome Chinese character learning anxiety; in the third stage, Chinese learning performance is good; in the fourth stage, they can learn Chinese successfully; in the fifth stage, they give up affective strategy to continue learning Chinese characters; in the sixth stage, Chinese character learning fails.

C. Questionnaire survey of using affective strategy

The author distributed 53 questionnaires, recovered 51 questionnaires, and received 50 valid questionnaires. Among the 50 questionnaires, 5 people thought it was too difficult to learn Chinese characters at the initial stage. They gave up learning Chinese characters, and only learned Chinese listening and speaking,

accounting for 10% of the survey population. 24 people gave up learning Chinese characters in the middle stage, accounting for 48% of the survey population. 21 people kept learning Chinese characters, accounting for 42% of the total population. In survey, none of the students who didn't learn Chinese characters at all took the HSK test. Five of the 24 students who gave up learning for a period of time didn't take the HSK test, and 19 students took and passed the HSK3. Among the students who have been persisting in learning Chinese characters, eight students are preparing for the HSK4 test, 10 students passed the HSK4 test, and three students passed the HSK5 test. The details are as follows:

TABLE IV. LEARNING EFFECT OF CHINESE CHARACTERS AND HSK PASS RATE OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

	Don't learn Chinese characters	Learning for a while, then giving up	Always learning Chinese characters
Number of students	5	24	21
percentage occupied	10%	48%	42%
HSK3	0	19	8
HSK4	0	0	10
HSK5	0	0	3

According to "Table IV", there are 5 people who do not learn Chinese characters at all, accounting for 10%. They do not learn Chinese characters and do not take HSK exam. They have certain listening and speaking ability, but no reading and writing ability. There are 24 people who give up learning a Chinese character in the middle stage, accounting for 48%. Among them, 19 people have passed the HSK3 test, and 2 people have always insisted on learning Chinese characters, accounting for 42%. Among them, 8 people have passed the HSK3 test, 10 people have passed the HSK4 test, and 3 people have passed the HSK5 test. It can be seen that the learning of Chinese characters really affects the learning effect of learners.

In the process of investigation, it also found that students' learning order of Chinese characters and Chinese learning reflected different trends according to different language learning environments.

TABLE V. LEARNING MODE OF CHINESE CHARACTERS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

	Separation of speaking and writing, speaking first and writing later	Speaking and writing advance together
	9	41
Learning style	Learning Chinese as a foreign language	Acquisition of Chinese as a second language

International students have their own views on the teaching mode of speaking and writing separation and speaking and writing integration. In the survey (see "Table V", 9 students came to China after studying in their own country for one year. Their way of learning Chinese characters is to separate the speaking and writing. They learn speaking first, and then the writing. The students prefer this way. The other 41 people's Chinese is enlightening in China and pay more attention to the development of Chinese skills, namely, listening, speaking, reading and writing. 9 people's Chinese listening and speaking ability is significantly higher than Chinese reading and writing ability, and there is a phenomenon of mismatch between pronunciation and form in the aspect of word recognition.

This paper has investigated whether these 50 Chinese learners used affective strategies in the learning of Chinese characters, and preliminarily concluded that the use of affective strategies affects the learning effect of Chinese characters, while the learning of Chinese characters affects the overall level of Chinese development of international students. For example, the average value of affective strategies of international students who do not learn Chinese characters at all < the average value of affective strategies of international students who give up learning Chinese characters in the middle stage < the average value of affective strategies of international students who insist on learning Chinese characters. The learning of successful Chinese characters learners is a circular process, while the losers do not use affective strategies to reduce anxiety or make self-encouragement, thus breaking the spiral process of Chinese learning.

III. CONCLUSION

The teaching of Chinese characters is a long-standing problem. Besides the differences between the cultural circle of Chinese characters and the cultural circle of non-Chinese characters, there is also a big reason for the difficulty, which is the affective and psychological factor of learners. It believes that the use of affective strategies affects the learning effect of Chinese characters for international students. Successful Chinese learners can use affective strategies to reduce anxiety and improve Chinese character learning, so as to continue to use affective strategies in Chinese character learning. In this way, a spiral

circulation system is formed. The losers of Chinese character learning either give up Chinese character learning without affective strategy at the beginning, or stop using affective strategy in the middle of learning or give up Chinese character learning in the middle. The level of Chinese learning determines the level of Chinese. The affective factors have a great influence on international students learning Chinese characters. Among them, the instrumental motivation can stimulate the initiative of international students' Chinese characters learning and mobilize the use of affective strategies. The use of affective strategies affects international students' Chinese characters learning. Psychologically, all international students have Chinese characters learning anxiety, but the learners of instrumental motivation are good at using affective strategy to learn Chinese characters. The use of affective strategies affects the learning effect of Chinese characters, while Chinese character learning affects the learning effect of Chinese. As a teacher of Chinese as a foreign language, what should do is to help international students use affective strategies, overcome anxiety, encourage them, build self-confidence, and cultivate their internal motivation for learning Chinese characters.

References

- [1] Ma Mingyan. Case Study of Chinese Character Learning Strategies for International Students of Non-Chinese Character Circle in Elementary Stage, *Chinese Teaching in the World*, 2007, Issue 1. (in Chinese)
- [2] Jiang Xin. The Relationship between Knowing Pronunciation and Knowing Meaning of Chinese Characters among CSL Learners, *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, No.6, 2003. (in Chinese)
- [3] Jiang Xin, Liu Yanmei. A study of character writing errors by foreign learner using alphabetic writing, *Chinese Teaching in the World*, No. 6, 2004. (in Chinese)
- [4] Jiang Xin, Zhao Guo. Investigation and Study of Chinese Character Learning Strategies for International Students at the Primary Stage, *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, No.4, 2001. (in Chinese)
- [5] Qian Yulian. Classification of the Second Language Learning Strategies and Other Related Questions, *Chinese Language Learning*, No.6, 2015. (in Chinese)
- [6] Qian Yulian. Current Status of Research on Second Language Learning Strategies and Its Prospects. Renmin University copied newspaper materials "Linguistics". 2005. (in Chinese)
- [7] Sun Ni. Empirical Study on Learning Strategies of Second Language for Adult Learners, *Journal of Xi'an Foreign Languages University*, Vol.15, No.3. (in Chinese)