

Exploration and Practice of Chinese Education in Southeast Asia

Taking the Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language in Xi'an University as an Example

Ling Qin
Xi'an University
Xi'an, China 710065

Abstract—Southeast Asian countries play a decisive role in the international promotion of Chinese. Over the past ten years, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and other countries have incorporated Chinese education into their national education system. Under this opportunity, we need to seize the opportunity in the training of Chinese talents, further deepen the connotative quality, base on the needs of national and local development, integrate resources and strengths of all parties, conduct practical and effective research and reform, and open the way of Chinese talent training in Southeast Asia in the new era.

Keywords—Southeast Asia; Chinese; Xi'an University; Chinese teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

Language and culture are the bridges of communication between different countries and nations. For a long time, Chinese education has been a link between overseas Chinese in Southeast Asian countries and Chinese. China is a near neighbor, an important trading partner and a tourist destination of Southeast Asian countries. With the increasing exchanges with them, Chinese education has also been widely welcomed by them.

II. THE STATUS QUO AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE EDUCATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Southeast Asian countries have maintained friendly relations with China in politics, economy, culture and other aspects since ancient times due to geography, blood, occupation and culture. Southeast Asia is also home to the largest concentration of Chinese use in the world. After hundreds of years of development, Southeast Asia has formed a relatively complete Chinese education system from kindergarten, primary school, middle school to university.

In retrospect of the Chinese education in Southeast Asia, Indonesian overseas Chinese founded the first Chinese school, Mingcheng Academy, in Southeast Asia in 1690. After several periods of germination, development, prosperity, frustration and revival, different countries have adopted different policies towards the Chinese education over the centuries, which can be roughly divided into the following categories.

A. Malaysia's Education Policy of "One Language and One Source"

The Chinese education in Malaysia has a history of nearly 200 years since the first private school, Wufu Academy, which had been established in Penang in 1819. However, the Malay government has always held a negative attitude towards the teaching of Chinese language in Chinese schools. Early in 1956 Lhasa Report, the concept of "one language and one source" was put forward, stipulating that Malay must be the main classroom language in all schools.

B. Education Policy in Thailand and Philippines Changing from Past "Prohibition" to the Present "Loosing"

Chinese education in Thailand has a history of 300 years. In 1946, there were 450 private schools that teach Chinese in Thailand. Since 1948, the Thai government has taken measures to control the number of Chinese private schools, thus the number of school running declines. From 1948 to 1976, the number of schools has decreased by more than 270, only leaving 119 schools in 1994. Since the 1990s, the Thai government has gradually relaxed its policies on Chinese education and is now taking an encouraging and supportive attitude. The development of Chinese schools in Philippines is smoother than that of Chinese schools in other Southeast Asian countries, which is related to the fact that the Philippine government is influenced by western culture and adopts a more open education policy.

C. Singapore's Education Policy of "Dual Languages and Many Sources"

Chinese education in Singapore had a history that private schools flourished in the middle and late 19th century. Chinese education was established, funded and managed by the Chinese themselves. In recent years, on the basis of Speaking Mandarin Campaign, the Singaporean government has made major adjustments on the Chinese teaching policies to increase the importance of Chinese as the first language.

III. THE CHARACTERISTICS OF CHINESE EDUCATION IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

A. Mode of School Running

Different countries have different modes of school running. For example, Malaysia mainly implements the mother-tongue teaching by means of Chinese schools; Cambodia mainly relies on remedial schools; Thailand and the Philippines focus on the Chinese schools that are incorporated into the national system. In terms of form and operation, the Chinese education in Philippines follows the school model and composition of overseas Chinese education. In a word, due to the different political environment and policies, as well as the different economic strength and status of Chinese ethnic, the forms of Chinese education in Southeast Asian countries are diverse, mainly including formal full-time Chinese schools, amateur continuation schools, study classes, and social education.

B. Teaching Content

At present, considering the concept of “cultivating talents in an all-round way”, the teaching content of most Chinese schools in Southeast Asian countries involves cultural education and skill training, and they attempt to use the teaching platform to discuss various social topics concerned by Chinese society. Although education content seems to be complex, it is closely related to the survival and development of Chinese people and is also consistent with the basic purpose of Chinese education, which clearly embodies the spirit of “serving Chinese people”.

C. Teaching Materials

1) *The teaching materials have different versions:* The teaching materials used in Chinese education are complex and diverse. For example, in Thailand, teaching materials are selected by schools as required by their own needs. Teaching materials recommended by Office of Chinese Language Council International, their self-designed teaching materials, and materials compiled by Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission of Taiwan are all used. In terms of the times of teaching materials, the content is updated slowly. For example, in Philippines, most Chinese schools still use Taiwan’s teaching materials since the 1960s, which is seriously divorced from the reality of the Philippines and hinders the development of Chinese teaching.

2) *“Localization” is not enough:* (1) Teaching materials are too difficult to be suitable for overseas Chinese learners; (2) In content, it deviates from the specific living conditions of the local Chinese, and seldom takes into account the interests and needs of the students; (3) The purpose of propaganda and education is too obvious and causes social sensitive problems.

D. Teaching Language

Chinese becomes the second language in teaching. After World War II, many countries are independent, and they define the national language and lingua franca. Chinese has

become the minority language of the Chinese people in many countries, and the teaching of Chinese has changed from the first language to the second language. As a result, Chinese is no longer the first (and only) language instructed in Chinese schools, no matter for admission or employment.

E. School-running Level

At the end of the 20th century, Chinese education began to infiltrate into higher education in various countries. University of Malaysia has set up the Chinese Department, which is one of the important positions of Chinese higher education in Malaysia. In 1980, Nanyang University in Singapore merged with the University of Singapore, and the Chinese Department of the two universities were merged into one Chinese Department at present. Institutions of higher education in Thailand have successively added Chinese courses, and Thammasat University and other universities have offered Chinese Department. Nanyang Technological University also sets up College of Communications to train Chinese journalists. Since the 1980s, Southeast Asian countries have sent excellent students from Chinese schools to study in Chinese colleges and universities, which has further promoted the development of Chinese higher education in Southeast Asia.

IV. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE TEACHING OF CHINESE AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN XI’AN UNIVERSITY

Along with the changes of international situation and development of Chinese education, a wide range of non-Chinese people have joined in Chinese learning. For example, In Malaysia, both Chinese children and Malayan and Indian children begin to attend to Chinese schools. The increasing number of non-Chinese is almost unprecedented in the history of the development of Chinese education. Many universities have established cooperative relations with mainland universities, and send a large number of students to China for Chinese learning every year.

A. The Status Quo of Chinese Teaching in Thailand

Thailand is one of the countries with more Chinese people in Southeast Asian countries. The Chinese education started in the 18th century, and now it has formed a complete Chinese education system from primary school to university. In recent years, with the rise of China and frequent exchanges between China and Thailand, the Thai government also pays high attention to Chinese education, and successively issues the documents of Strategic Plan for Promoting Chinese Teaching and Enhancing National Competitiveness in 2006-2010 (Five-year Plan) and Five-year Plan for Improving Chinese Teaching in Thai Universities. According to the Office of Chinese Language Council International, at present, there are 15 Confucius Institutes and 20 Confucius Classrooms in Thailand. The cooperation of Chinese teaching between China and Thailand has become a highlight in the friendly exchanges between the two countries.

B. The Construction of the Teaching of Chinese as a Foreign Language in Xi'an University

As a newly-established local university, Xi'an University passed the qualification appraisal of the Ministry of National Education in 2011. Afterwards, it has focused on the "local, applied and open" school-running orientation, explored the path of running a school suitable for its own development, improved education and teaching level and talent training quality, and gradually changed the mode of school-running from simple scale expansion to connotative development, to differentiated development and to characteristic development.

1) The gradual improvement of overseas teaching bases:

The major of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages in our university was approved by the Ministry of National Education to enroll students in January 2008 (ShanJiaoGao[2008]No. 2). The University has been exploring new paths in the talent training mode and practical teaching links, aiming at cultivating Chinese teaching talents who can adapt to the overseas teaching environment. The urgent need for Chinese teachers in Southeast Asian countries as well as opportunities for cooperation between China and ASEAN and major concept of "the Belt and Road Initiative" provides a broad employment prospect for students majoring in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages. The University tries to deepen international exchanges and cooperation to practice and explore a distinctive talent training mode.

In June 2012, Xu Kewei, president of Xi'an University, visited Sripatum University. Presidents of the two universities signed Agreement on the Construction of Thai Practice Base for Chinese Teaching of Xi'an University and Sripatum University. Sripatum University needs to provide a platform for overseas Chinese teaching and practice for students majoring in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages. Besides, the two sides also establish an exchange project for Thai and Chinese teachers. Many practice teaching bases have been built in Thailand and Albania for major of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages, with a total of 21 batches of nearly 300 students assigned to study and work abroad. This effectively ensures the training and development of students' practical ability, improves the interns' ability of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, and also contributes to the popularization of Chinese around the world in a certain sense. According to incomplete statistics, in the past three years, nearly 20 students of the major have signed employment agreements with many schools in Thailand through Hanban volunteers and non-governmental channels after graduation.

2) Developing the cultivation of international students in the whole-class teaching system: As early as before the establishment of the Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages major, the University has been working on Chinese language teaching for international students. Over the past ten years, it has completed the Chinese language training for overseas students from East Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Europe and America. In September 2015, the School of Humanities welcomed the first batch of 29

Thai students majoring in Chinese from Phuket Rajabhat University and Hatyai University, and conducted one-year order-style Chinese teaching and training for them. At present, it has been carried out for 4 consecutive sessions, and the training effect receives good reviews.

V. PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIONS ON OVERSEAS TEACHING

A. Teaching Problems

1) Shortage of talent resources of Chinese teaching: With the continuous rise of Chinese learning, Thai students are becoming more enthusiastic in taking Chinese as an elective course, and the increasing number of universities are eager to offer Chinese major, so the shortage of Chinese teachers is becoming more acute. Although the Office of Chinese Language Council International has sent a large number of Chinese teaching volunteers to Thailand and other southeast Asian countries and they have become a major force in Chinese teaching, it is still unable to solve the lack of Chinese teachers in colleges and universities and primary and middle schools.

2) Unsatisfactory comprehensive quality of Chinese teachers: The level of Chinese teachers in Southeast Asia is generally not high. However, on account of many problems such as concept, salary, and sustainable development of occupation, the proportion of graduates of relevant majors in domestic universities willing to teach abroad is not high, and the shortage of professional teaching staff makes the entry threshold lower. Taking Thailand as an example, more and more people are engaged in Chinese teaching, but their overall quality is not satisfactory, and they lack professional teaching knowledge and ability. Few Chinese teachers have mastered the basic theories and methods of Chinese as a second language.

3) The teaching quality that needs to be improved urgently

a) Teaching materials are researched and developed slowly: A major factor restricting teaching is teaching materials. Despite that the Office of Chinese Language Council International has compiled a series of teaching guide materials, the Chinese teaching materials in the corresponding languages and the textbooks in line with local culture are extremely scarce. In Thailand, due to Chinese learners ranging from primary school to university, and different purposes of learning Chinese, the types of Chinese teaching materials are quite simple.

b) Teaching method and means: Teaching method is an important part of second language teaching. However, currently, there are relatively few high-quality teachers engaged in Chinese teaching. The teaching in reality is still lecture-based, and teacher-centered teaching method is common. In addition, modern education technology is limited by the hardware conditions of local schools and cannot be carried out in many schools. Moreover, the large

mobility of teachers also makes the steady improvement of teaching methods means become an empty talk.

4) *Unbalanced development of Chinese teaching*

The development of Chinese education in Southeast Asia is uneven. There are differences in different regions of the same country. Schools across Thailand communicate and cooperate with China on Chinese teaching through various non-governmental educational institutions, departments or organizations. However, obviously, the education scale and teaching level in cities are generally higher than those of rural areas, and the cities that vigorously develop Chinese teaching are mainly concentrated in the central and northern regions.

B. *Suggestions*

1) *The first is to rely on the state to make international Chinese language education stronger:* In recent years, the Office of Chinese Language Council International has done a lot to alleviate the shortage of Chinese teachers in other countries. As of 2015, it totally has sent 30,000 Chinese volunteer teachers to 118 countries of five continents, which is a respectable number. As a university that offers the major of Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages, we should emphasize the idea of improving vocational skills in school-running orientation, focus on cultivating practical professionals engaged in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language, and increase students' practical skills, to improve students' overseas teaching ability.

2) *The second is to construct teaching staff in the light of local conditions:* It is an urgent problem for us to stabilize high-quality teaching staff in the international promotion of Chinese. We will keep thinking and conduct researches on related topics in an orderly manner. The first is how to send out the students we train; the second is how to assist and train local teachers in other countries; the third is how to invite students who want to learn Chinese in batches and train them by order.

VI. CONCLUSION

Data show that the number of Chinese classes and learners in Southeast Asia is increasing; therefore, the development space for Chinese communication is very broad and significant. In recent years, the Office of Chinese Language Council International has made great efforts to adapt to the new situation of the development of Chinese teaching in the world and alleviate the shortage of Chinese teachers in various countries. China implemented Volunteer Program for International Chinese Teachers in 2004, and promulgated the Overseas Volunteer Program for International Chinese Teachers in 2006. The work points of the Ministry of National Education in 2009 clearly stated that Medium and Long-term Plan for International Promotion of Chinese should be formulated. As far as it goes, Chinese teaching in the world is in a transition period from scale expansion to further improvement of teaching quality. To assist Southeast Asian countries in developing Chinese education is not only a matter for countries and governments. Besides, it also requires the joint action, input and

cooperation of the whole society, enterprises, universities and the people. Only in this way can Chinese education in Southeast Asia develop to a new stage under the new era and new opportunities.

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