

CHINESE LANGUAGE

Becoming Popular Worldwide

Chinese as a foreign language has become an elective favored by more students around the globe. Also, the governments of many countries are paying more attention to Chinese language teaching

By REN XIAOFENG

Ten years ago, Chinese people would be very surprised to find a foreigner who could speak even a little Chinese. Today, citizens of Beijing and Shanghai regard it as nothing surprising when they see foreigners bargaining with peddlers in fluent Chinese.

Over the past year, Connie Chen has taken her two children to a Chinese school in New Jersey. During the two and half hours of classes, the children study the Chinese language and culture, involving dance, painting, poetry and martial arts. Chen, a Chinese-American, said, "I want my kids to learn and cherish the culture of my Chinese ancestors. It's very important for them to know their own traditions and origins." There are about 20 such schools in the state and more around the country.

A Caucasian American woman with the Chinese name Liu Xinya, who works in advertising, sat for a Chinese proficiency test in New York last October. She developed her interest in Chinese during a visit to Hong Kong a couple of years ago, and was fascinated by the color and vibrancy of Chinese culture. She studied Chinese for several months at the Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU), and taught herself for another four years. She has a unique understanding of the language, and believes the pictographic characters, so different from the alphabetic letters of English, help cultivate different sections of the brain.

Werner Gelpke, from Germany, made up his mind to study Chinese two weeks after he came to work in Shanghai, stimulated by a frustrating taxi ride. "Just



Egyptian students display their Chinese calligraphy written for the "Chinese Bridge" contest



An Indonesian college student performs a clapper talk in Chinese at a Chinese proficiency competition for foreign students

because of the language barrier between the taxi driver and me, it took over one and half hours longer for me to reach my destination," he said. Later, he became a member of the Chinese Language Communications Club, which was created for foreigners living in China. Now, he can communicate his ideas with local residents in simple Chinese.

"Chinese language teaching is growing worldwide," said Yan Meihua, head of the office of the leading panel of the National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (NOCFL).

In recent years, in both the Chinese mainland and around the world, Chinese language study has heated up. Chinese has become

increasingly popular among foreigners as China has tightened its ties with the international community and enhanced its position in international affairs, following its accession to the WTO and success in hosting the Informal Summit of the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation and the bid for hosting the 2008 Olympic Games and the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai.

More than 2,100 colleges and universities in 85 countries, and numerous high and primary schools and nongovernmental institutions in China's neighboring countries, have opened Chinese language classes with a combined enrollment of nearly 30 million students. China has published Chinese teaching textbooks for learners speaking 18 different languages. Total sales in 2001 reached 200,000 copies, with revenue of more than 5 million yuan or \$600,000.

In the mainland, more than 300 universities and colleges have set up Chinese language teaching institutes and centers for foreigners, with a total faculty of 5,000. Between 1992 and 2001, the mainland enrolled 410,000 foreign students studying the Chinese language. The number hit 60,000 in 2002, up almost 10 percent over the previous year. Majors have expanded from courses such as Chinese and traditional Chinese medicine to science and technology, economics, management, law and other subjects. This has created a trend of foreign students studying other disciplines in addition to Chinese.

Most foreign students studying Chinese used to come from East and Southeast Asia, including Japan, the ROK, Malaysia, Thailand and Viet Nam, as governments of these countries have attached greater importance to Chinese language study. The situation is changing, however, as a number of countries in North America and Europe are also paying more attention to the language.

According to data provided by the *Science and Technology Daily*, over



Governor of Jura Canton, Switzerland, and his daughter. He has decided to resign and take his family to Beijing to study Chinese, his long-cherished dream



These Ukrainian students major in Chinese language, which is gaining popularity there

700 colleges and universities in the United States, or roughly 20 percent of the nation's total, have started Chinese language classes, with more than 100 having set up Chinese departments. More than 20 secondary and primary schools offer Chinese classes, in addition to 800 weekend Chinese schools. Over 100,000 secondary and primary school students in the United States are studying Chinese, and the number of students studying Chinese has increased faster than any other foreign languages.

On July 31, last year, the *Times* newspaper reported that the British Government had requested all primary schools in Britain to offer Chinese classes, and had allocated funds for more than 100 primary schools to support the program. The British Government's decision stemmed from the understanding that the Chinese economy, with an annual growth rate of 7 percent, will greatly enhance its global position in the future. The report said in 2001 there were around 5,600 British secondary school students studying the Chinese lan-

guage, mostly from families of Chinese origin. The British Government is encouraging more students to study Chinese, hoping to double the number of learners in the next three years. It also plans to increase the number of secondary schools teaching Chinese from the present 40 to more than 200 in the next five years. British diplomats stationed in China have been looking for qualified Chinese teachers for the Chinese teaching program in Britain.

To meet worldwide growing demands to learn Chinese, the NOCFL leading panel has adopted various measures to support Chinese teachers abroad. According to the NOCFL, in the coming year, it will edit and publish Chinese teaching materials in such major foreign languages including English, French, German, Russian, Korean, Japanese, Indonesian, Spanish and Arabic. It is planning to set up Chinese teaching centers in countries with available conditions to provide various kinds of resources for learners. It will also apply up-to-date research results in language teaching and testing to the improvement of the

examination models. Meanwhile, it will further develop international cooperation in long-distance education in a bid to promote distance learning and the modernization of Chinese language teaching.

The NOCFL decided to set up 10 Chinese teaching bases in China in the next five years with the aim of promoting Chinese teaching and establishing a batch of prestigious institutions of Chinese learning through the demonstration role played by these bases. Four such institutions—BLCU, Fudan University, Beijing Normal University and Peking University—were approved last year to become the first group of teaching bases in the country.

Last year, the NOCFL teaching panel sponsored the first Chinese Proficiency Competition for Foreign College Students, entitled "Chinese Bridge," attracting students from 21 countries, including the United States, Britain, France, Germany, Russia, Japan, the ROK, Singapore, Australia and Egypt. The winners were awarded the title of Chinese Language Messenger and a scholarship for studying in China. An official of the organization analogized this activity a "Chinese language Olympics."

Last October, the Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China and the Department of Education of the United States signed a memorandum of understanding on an Internet cooperative language teaching project, one of the most substantial cooperative projects undertaken by the two sides since the establishment of Sino-U.S. diplomatic relations. The project will develop a first-rate online English and Chinese teaching and learning system through cooperation between Chinese and American experts, by applying Internet, multimedia, simulation and other advanced technologies. It will provide useful resources for American high school students to learn Chinese and for Chinese middle school students to learn English.

In June 2002, Volume I of the *New Practical Chinese*, jointly edited by China and Canada, was published. Meanwhile, the NOCFL and Canadians involved in Chinese teaching established the All-Canada Chinese Language Teaching Association. In September, three leading universities in Canada, Toronto University, British Columbia University and McGill University, began using this set of teaching materials. In the French-speaking Quebec Province, the French version of the textbook were adopted. The teaching materials are favored by Chinese teachers in Canada, who regard it as an exemplary pattern for the new model of Chinese language teaching. Not long after the publication of the textbook, relevant institutions in Britain, Spain and other countries also entered into cooperation with NOCFL to compile Chinese teaching materials suited to their respective conditions. ■

By the end of 2002, a total of 540,000 people from around the world had participated in the Chinese Proficiency Test

By REN XIAOFENG

On December 24, 2002, some 4,600 people of different nationalities attended the Chinese Proficiency Test, known as *Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi* (HSK) at the Beijing Language and Culture University (BLCU).

The HSK is a state-level standardized test designed to measure the Chinese language proficiency of nonnative speakers, including foreigners, overseas Chinese and students from Chinese ethnic minorities. It is attracting more and more foreign examinees. Spurred on by China's WTO entry, the number of people participating in the HSK worldwide reached an all-time high in 2002.

According to the director of the HSK Center of BLCU, nearly 144,000 people took the HSK in 2002, over 40,000 more than in 2001. People from the Republic of Korea (ROK) formed the largest group of foreign HSK test takers, followed by Japan, the United States, Germany and Italy.

Regularly held each year in China and overseas, the HSK debuted in Beijing in 1988. It began to be held overseas on a trial basis in 1991 and was formally designated as a standardized test at the state level the following year. The HSK has developed into a comprehensive testing system comprising three levels of tests: the HSK Basic, HSK Elementary-Intermediate, and the HSK Advanced. Successful examinees are granted the corresponding HSK certificates.

The first HSK exam, held in 1988, attracted only a few dozen examinees,

A Sought-After Stepping-Stone



These Kazakh college students are practicing Chinese songs

said the director. Even into the early 1990s, the number of examinees merely topped 200 each year. Ten years later, however, the number has increased at an annual rate of about 50 percent, a situation similar to the U.S. Educational Testing Service's TOEFL test in its first 10 years.

The reasons that people participate in the HSK are changing, according to the director. A center survey shows that most early examinees took the HSK to qualify for Chinese universities and colleges. Today, people falling into this group account for only 15 percent of the total HSK examinees. Those who hope to find a job in China make up 35 percent, and the remaining 50 percent just want to know their Chinese proficiency level.

The director noted that China's sustained economic growth is behind the sharp increase in the number of HSK examinees in 2002. In spite of

global economic recession, the Chinese economy has maintained steady growth, which has lured many foreigners to seek development opportunities in China. China's WTO membership provides market access for more foreign businesses, so the Chinese language is becoming increasingly important. As there are now more than 60 million nonnative Chinese learners around the world, the number of HSK takers will continue to increase in the coming two years, the director predicts.

To date, over 400 of the world's top 500 conglomerates have invested in China, and an increasing number of multinationals are considering establishing their regional headquarters in the mainland.

Recognized by the educational institutions of more and more countries and an increasing number of international companies, HSK certification has become an important credential for many foreign jobseekers. It is reported that the ROK Government has made a foreign language certification, such as the HSK, TOEFL and IELTS qualifications, a prerequisite for public servants, and Koreans seeking jobs in ROK companies in China, must acquire a certain level of HSK qualification.

By the end of last year, 540,000 people from over 120 countries had taken the HSK. So far, HSK exam venues have been set up in 27 Chinese cities and regions, including 44 in Hong Kong and Macao, and nearly 60 venues have been opened in 27 other countries, including Japan, the ROK, Singapore, Canada and the United States.

ABOUT THE CHINESE PROFICIENCY TEST (HSK)

1. HSK Levels

● HSK Basic is appropriate for beginners in Chinese, who have attained a basic level in Chinese proficiency, i.e., who have taken 100-500 regular hours of modern Chinese courses.

● HSK Elementary-Intermediate applies to Chinese learners who have attained an elementary or intermediate level in Chinese proficiency, i.e., who have taken 400-2,000 regular hours of modern Chinese courses.

● HSK Advanced is designed for those who are proficient in Chinese, i.e., who have taken 3,000 regular hours or more of modern Chinese courses.

2. HSK Certification

The HSK Certificate serves three purposes:

1) To certify that the holder has obtained the required Chinese proficiency to enter a college or university in China as an undergraduate or graduate student;

2) To certify that the holder can be exempt from taking certain Chinese courses depending on the level of certification; and

3) To serve as a reference for candidates applying for positions that require a certain level of Chinese competency.

3. Supervision and Certificate Issue Authorities

The State Commission for Chinese Proficiency Tests supervises the HSK. The Office of the State Commission for Chinese Proficiency Tests and the HSK Center of BLCU take charge of specific matters in relation to the HSK.

4. Registration

(1) To register, an applicant is required to submit two 30x40mm photos without headwear and a picture ID (passport or residency permit).

(2) The applicant shall pay registration and testing fees. The rate for those taking the HSK in China is as follows: 200 yuan, including a 70 yuan registration fee, for the HSK Basic; 250 yuan, including a 70 yuan registration fee, for the HSK Elementary-Intermediate; and 400 yuan, including a 150 yuan registration and paper grading fee, for the HSK Advanced. Fees for those taking the HSK overseas and for students from Chinese ethnic minorities shall be determined by relevant exam venues. Neither the registration fees, including postage, nor the testing fees will be refunded under any circumstances. In the case that the applicant is unable to attend the test on time due to a difficult situation beyond the applicant's control, the applicant shall submit a statement to the exam venue in advance. The applicant may reserve another chance for the test with his or her statement signed or sealed by the exam venue. At the next test, the applicant is exempt from the testing fee, but must pay the registration fee.

(3) Non-local applicants may register by mail. The applicant should send a copy of the identification paper, a

resume with the applicant's name, gender, nationality, date of birth and address, and two 30x40mm photos without headwear to the exam venue by registered mail at least one week before the registration deadline. Registration and testing fees should also be mailed to the exam venue. No registration may be made by phone. For those who register by mail, admission tickets shall be collected in person at the exam venues.

(4) Exam venues shall issue admission tickets and an HSK Test-Takers' Handbook to those who have registered. Examinees shall report to the testing room according to the time and place written on the admission ticket.

5. Preparation for the HSK

The HSK aims at assessing the examinees' general competency in the Chinese language, so it is not based on any particular textbook or course, and examinees need not refer to any particular textbook in preparing for the test. Examinees are encouraged to read the HSK Guide carefully to know the required Chinese proficiency for each level of the HSK and the method of the test. The HSK Guide, available for purchase at all venues, contains an introduction to the HSK, sample test papers and keys, and a glossary of vocabulary covered in the HSK. Accompanied is a cassette tape recording of a sample listening test.

6. Schedule for HSK Test

In China: The HSK Basic test is held in May, July and December each year, HSK Elementary-Intermediate test in May and July, and HSK Advanced in May.

Overseas: The schedule may be determined in accordance with each country's specific conditions. The following time is recommendable: Saturday of the third week of March, May and September each year, and Saturday of the last week of October.

7. Testing Time

The HSK testing time is arranged as follows: 135 minutes for the HSK Basic and 145 minutes for the HSK Elementary-Intermediate test, both without breaks; and 180 minutes for the HSK Advanced test with a 10-minute break after the written test.

8. Advisory Service

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