

## China's New Challenge: Quenching the Global Thirst for Chinese Language Study

By Joshua Zhong

“Foreign Teacher” (*waijiao*) was a prestigious name that Chinese college students bestowed on those Westerners who went to China to teach English at a few important colleges in the early 80's, when China's higher education institutions were re-opened after ten disastrous years of the Cultural Revolution. I never imagined that one day, many Chinese would be granted such a title and would teach the Chinese language around the world.

Today, an estimated 50 million people in more than 100 countries and 2,500 universities are studying Chinese as their second or third language, many of them under the instruction of Chinese *waijiao*. In China, nearly 400 universities offer Chinese language training and many other academic majors to approximately 160,000 foreign students (*liuxuesheng*), according to the latest report by China Central Television (CCTV).

China's amazing rise in the past thirty years has not only strengthened China's international status and improved China's image, but has also elevated the importance of its language and created a global interest, economically, politically, culturally, and militarily, in studying its language. To meet the quickly-growing need and to “teach the Chinese language and build understanding of the Chinese culture around the world,” the Chinese government established the Office of Chinese Language Council International (OCLCI) in 2004.

As part of the Chinese Ministry of Education, OCLCI is sponsored and funded by such powerful agencies as the General Office of the State Council, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the State Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Culture, the State Administration of Radio Film and Television (China Radio International), and the State Press and Publications Administration. Such high-level governmental backing is unprecedented. The ultimate vision of OCLCI is to turn Chinese into an international language, second only to English, and to prepare for the further rise of China in the decades to come.

To accomplish its lofty goals, the OCLCI employs two key strategies. First, it is recruiting and training volunteer Chinese teachers and sending them overseas to schools of various levels that have made their need known to the OCLCI. Since 2004, more than 5,000 volunteer Chinese teachers have served in twenty-some countries for a period of one to two years. An additional 30,000 Chinese have signed up to offer their volunteer services.

Second, it created a franchiseable “Confucius Institute” by joining hands with universities around the world to “increase the understanding of the Chinese language and culture among all nations, to build friendship between China and other countries, to stimulate multicultural development, and to contribute to world peace,” in the words of its by-laws. The first Confucius Institute opened to the public in Seoul, South Korea, on November 21, 2004. Today, 170 Confucius Institutes have been successfully established on five continents, 20 of them in the USA, according to the OCLCI website.

In France the universities have seen a 38% annual increase of Chinese language students in recent years, compared with only 2-4% increase for students learning English, Japanese, or Spanish. Five major language schools in Japan have seen their Chinese language students increased from around

1,000 in 2000 to over 5,000 in 2005. The OCLCI projected that by 2010 more than 100 million people in the world will be studying Chinese. China is quickly becoming an “education exporting” country along with its massive economic exports. This newly-found “soft power” is gaining its strength in influencing the world.

China’s well-orchestrated and effective efforts have finally caught Washington’s attention. On January 5, 2006, President Bush signed the National Security Language Initiative and allocated 114 million dollars in its 2007 annual budget “to dramatically increase the number of Americans learning critical-need foreign languages such as... Chinese.”

In response, hundreds of middle schools, high schools, and colleges around the country applied for the unprecedented federal funding and started to offer Chinese classes. In Colorado, more and more high schools, as well as some middle schools, offer such classes. As a result, many schools are experiencing a “crisis” of Chinese teacher shortage.

We are very proud that our very own Joyous Chinese Cultural Center (JCCC) is playing an important and unique role in providing Chinese language education and cultural support to hundreds of our adopted children and their families. The focus of JCCC, aside from providing emotional support and cultural appreciation, is not to raise fluent Chinese language speakers through weekly classes, but to lay a solid linguistic foundation so our children will blossom and have a head start over their peers when they start Chinese classes in their middle school, high schools, and colleges. Ultimately, we hope our kids will be better-prepared for the incredible cultural, economic, and scientific opportunities these two great nations, the United States and China, will provide in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The world is changing; the rise of China will continue. I challenge every adoptive parent of a Chinese child: Find resources, create opportunities, and take the initiative on behalf of your child to positively expose him or her to the Chinese language and culture early and often. We can and should help nurture their hearts and minds so they will grow up strong and well-prepared for the challenges of life and opportunities of the world.

*JCCC offers long-distance learning curriculum and resources. JCCC can be reached at [school2@chinesechildren.org](mailto:school2@chinesechildren.org)*