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The Teaching and Learning of Chinese in Schools: Developing a Research Agenda to Support Growth

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'We want to ensure that more students study Mandarin... when we study another language, we study another culture, another way of thinking... by studying Mandarin, we can gain an insight into one of the most amazing and inspiring cultures that the globe has ever seen'.¹

The aim of this paper is to provide an overview of the state of the field with respect to the teaching and learning of Chinese in schools in England and to discuss the work of the IOE Confucius Institute for Schools and the issues it has been addressing around teaching materials, teacher supply and assessment for learners of Chinese. A brief overview of provision made for the teaching of Chinese in Scotland and Wales and in the United States will also be given.

There has been little research done on how school students (studying in an English-speaking environment) best learn Chinese as a foreign language. After consideration of the state of the field, the paper will then seek to take the agenda forward by highlighting potential areas of research and practice-based case study necessary to support the development of Chinese teaching and learning in schools, from an English schools' perspective.

¹ M. Gove 'SSAT Annual Chinese Lecture' March 2011

The Context in which the Confucius Institute for Schools Developed

The first Schools Network National Conference on Chinese Teaching in Schools took place in Cambridge, UK in the spring of 2004 with around 65 delegates; it was held in collaboration with the Association for Language Learning and the UK Federation of Chinese (Community) Schools. At this point, only a very small number of schools in England were offering any kind of Chinese provision, but those who were, were keen to share experiences and talk to each other. As an outcome of this first conference, a small e-forum for teachers of Chinese was set up and some webpages to act as a 'virtual' staffroom, so that teachers of Chinese, many of whom felt rather isolated in their schools and localities, would be able to communicate with each other.

The conference marked a turning point in the development of Chinese teaching in schools. Although Chinese has not been widely taught in schools in England, interest has continued to grow dramatically. Political and economic leaders have recognised the rise of Asia as one of the central facts of the 21st century. China, with its economic growth and emergence as a cultural and political leader is integral to this shift of focus. Professor Danny Quah talks about the global economy's shifting centre of gravity and maintains that 'extrapolating to 2050 the global economy's centre of gravity will continue to shift east to lie between India and China.'² Clearly, increasing the number of British students who can speak Chinese proficiently and can demonstrate an understanding of Chinese culture is crucial.

Alongside economic change, came the rise of coverage about China in the media and in TV programming. Chinese films, exhibitions about China, Chinese novels in translation, the Beijing Olympics all added to increased awareness of China in the first decade of the century. Less expensive airfares to China enabled people to go and see the country for themselves. Parents doing business in China began to ask about opportunities for learning Chinese for their children. To meet this demand globally, the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) was developing ways to support the growth of the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language and the first Confucius Institute was opened in 2004 in Seoul.

By the autumn of 2006 when the Confucius Institute for Schools first began, about 7-8% of all maintained secondary schools (around 230 schools) in England offered some form of Chinese provision with about 40% of this being off curriculum. Only 31% of schools had trained teachers teaching Chinese. This increased interest was set against the backdrop of September 2004, when the study of a foreign language became non-compulsory in Key Stage 4 in England (ie for 14-16 year olds).

In July 2006, the Department for Education and Skills signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Office of Chinese Language Council International (Hanban) in Beijing around measures to expand the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese throughout the English education system. At the same time, the Specialist Schools and Academies Trust (SSAT) also signed an agreement with Hanban to set up a schools-based Confucius Institute; the SSAT Confucius Institute for Schools was formally launched in July

² D. Quah 'The Global Economy's Shifting Centre of Gravity', LSE, October 2010
http://econ.lse.ac.uk/~dquah/p/GE_Shifting_CG-DQ.pdf

2007. The SSAT Confucius Institute transferred to the Institute of Education, University of London in June 2012 to become the IOE Confucius Institute for Schools.

The Aims of the IOE Confucius Institute for Schools

In its early days, the Confucius Institute for Schools focussed its attention on working to remove the three barriers to the teaching and learning of Chinese in schools: namely lack of appropriate, localized teaching materials; lack of trained teachers and issues around accreditation. This work went alongside supporting and developing teachers and schools teaching Chinese.

The aims of the project have developed over the years and the core aims of the IOE Confucius Institute for Schools are:

- to work to secure a major expansion in the teaching and learning of Mandarin Chinese throughout the English school system;
- to work to secure a major expansion in teaching and learning about China throughout the English school system;
- to enable Chinese and English schools to have constructive and successful school partnerships and for teachers and learners in the school systems in both countries to learn from each other.

The main focus of its activities is:

- to support the mainstreaming of Chinese teaching across schools in England, acting as a central point for queries and advice, by phone and through its e-forum (see below) and organising an annual conference for teachers of Chinese;
- to develop and promote teaching materials suitable for use in English schools;
- to train local teachers of Chinese;
- to train teachers sent from China to support development work in schools new to Chinese;
- to advance research on the learning of Chinese as a foreign language at school level, providing a secure basis for future thinking and developments in the field;
- to support the development of appropriate accreditation – both with English Examination Boards and using YCT/HSK proficiency tests;
- to encourage IOE Confucius Classrooms to hold a range of appropriate cultural activities;
- to support the development of teaching about China in schools;
- to work with Chinese and English partner schools on bilateral programmes at teacher and student level;
- to organise annual student language learning visits to China to enhance language acquisition.

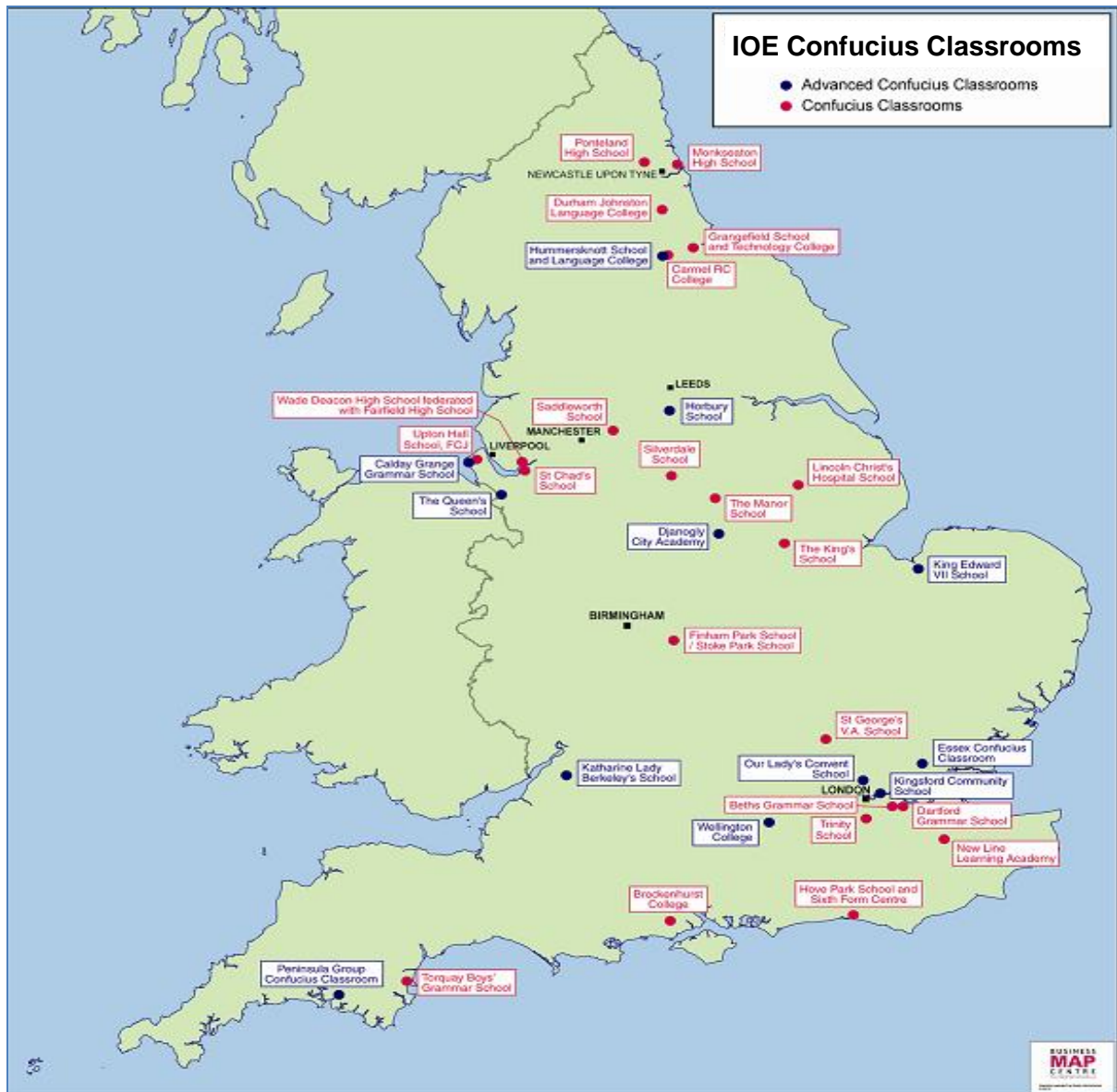
The IOE Confucius Institute for Schools Project

The IOE Confucius Institute for Schools (CI) is a bilateral project with Peking University (PKU) and Peking University High School and supported by Hanban. As well as a small team of specialists in London, the IOE CI has a network of 34 Confucius Classrooms across England, schools which have both Chinese firmly embedded in their own curriculum and which give advice, support and taster classes to other schools in their region looking to start offering Chinese. This outreach development work is made possible through the

support of Peking University High School and a team of over forty Hanban teachers who come to work with the IOE Confucius Classrooms each year.

A bilateral steering group (comprised of members from the IOE and PKU) is responsible for the strategic direction of the IOE Confucius Institute for Schools. There are currently five members of staff working for the IOE CI in London and the CI Chinese Director, who is based at IOE Confucius Classroom at Kingsford Community School in East London and who is from Peking University High School.

IOE Confucius Classrooms



The Confucius Classroom network originally consisted of five leading Confucius Classroom schools or “hubs”, where Mandarin Chinese teaching was already strongly established; each of these “hub” schools reached out to and worked with 5 “spoke” schools delivering Chinese language lessons both on curriculum and at taster level with a view to encouraging these schools to invest in their own Chinese teacher and develop the teaching and learning of Chinese within school. This network was extended by a further 7 Confucius Classrooms in

2008 and a further 22 in 2010. There are now in excess of 200 spoke schools working with the 34 Confucius Classrooms.

The Headteachers of the Confucius Classrooms meet once a term to plan, develop and discuss Confucius Classroom work and how to mainstream Chinese more widely across the school system.

Hanban teachers

Most Confucius Classroom schools only have one (or at most two) Chinese teachers of their own and so cannot be involved in outreach work to spoke schools without this having an adverse impact on the development of the teaching of Chinese in their school. This problem is solved by a dynamic group of teachers, sourced in partnership with Hanban, coming annually from China to support outreach work.

Teaching materials

The Confucius Institute for Schools has worked, in partnership with Pearson and with the support of Peking University and Hanban, on the development of teaching materials for Chinese with 3 student books (进步一、二 for 11-14 year olds and GCSE Chinese for 14-16 year olds) together with 2 work books and 3 teachers' books. This was the first time that textbooks for teaching Chinese were published by a mainstream publisher in England and they have brought Chinese more closely into line with provision for other languages. The books were written by the highly experienced Chinese teachers at the Confucius Institute's first five leading Confucius Classrooms and the Confucius Institute Director, who also acted as the series editor. As one review says, 'A good textbook needs to understand its audience. And this book does exactly that.'³

Teacher training

The growth of Chinese teaching and learning has been quick, but the learning experience for pupils attending Chinese lessons in schools is widely variable. Finding solutions to teacher supply and training is crucial to making the teaching of Chinese sustainable in schools.

Guest teachers from China have a crucial role to play, especially to support initial significant growth in the number of pupils learning Chinese;

Being a guest teacher for one year in a foreign school presents a steep learning curve for the teacher from China, making a two year stay more desirable;

Local teachers of Chinese are much more familiar with the culture and systems of country in which they are living;

Teachers of Chinese working in schools should be both native and non-native speakers;

³ E. Garner GCSE Chinese review <http://www.thechinesestaffroom.com/review/11-09-05/edexcel-gcse-chinese-textbook-independent-review>

Whilst the majority of Chinese teachers in schools are native speakers, second language (L2) users have strengths of their own by giving the students role models of L2 users in action: in short convincing students that they can be successful multicompetent speakers, not failed native speakers;⁴

The Confucius Institute has been actively involved in the development and delivery of the Postgraduate Certificate in Education in Mandarin Chinese at the Institute of Education, University of London; this leads to Qualified Teacher Status for teachers of Chinese. There is a cohort of 10 Mandarin teachers per year.

In November 2010, in the presence of the Secretary of State for Education, Michael Gove, the Confucius Institute signed an agreement with Hanban to train 1000 teachers of Chinese. This is being achieved through:

- intensive short courses in England for existing teachers of Chinese
- courses in China to learn Chinese for existing teachers of other languages; these courses are delivered by Beijing Normal University and East China Normal University.

Both types of course have been very well received. One teacher who went on the course in China and who is a Advanced Skills Teacher in England said

"I cannot praise this course enough. I thought it was amazing - especially since it was the first 'run' so the course can only get better which is very hard to believe!"

Accreditation

There have been issues around learners of Chinese as a foreign language achieving very low grades in GCSE and AS/A2 examinations in Chinese. This is demotivating and the Confucius Institute for Schools has worked hard with examination boards in England to ensure that learners of Chinese as a foreign language can achieve the top grades. Clearly teaching Chinese as a foreign language is relatively new in this country so this work has required a two-pronged approach – both in ensuring that teachers are well equipped to teach the syllabuses and ensuring that examiners really understand what is achievable by learners of Chinese as a foreign language.

There has also been much work undertaken with university departments of Chinese to ensure that they are aware of the level achieved by students doing GCSE and A-level Chinese. This interest from students has resulted in many universities offering non ab-initio as well as ab-initio courses, so as to take account of students' prior learning in schools.

As well as GCSE and A2, there are a number of other pathways with short courses and pre-GCSE accreditation. Asset Languages for Mandarin Chinese has been particularly successful.

The Confucius Institute for Schools is also looking to develop the use of the YCT (a Chinese test for young learners of Chinese) developed in China in some Confucius Classrooms.

⁴ V. Cook, Going Beyond the Native Speaker in Language Teaching TESOL Quarterly, Vol. 33, No. 2 (Summer, 1999), pp. 185-209

National centre for supporting the teaching and learning of Chinese

The Confucius Institute annually hosts a Chinese Conference promoting the teaching and learning of Chinese. This two day event is seen as the leading one of its kind in the UK, with over 300 attendees at the 2012 conference from schools across the UK and abroad.

The Confucius Institute holds an annual student conference on China at the Royal Institute of International Affairs, Chatham House, where students have the opportunity to hear eminent speakers talk about all aspects of contemporary China.

There is also a Chinese teachers' e-forum with 568 subscribers currently: it is used multiple times each day with teachers sharing good practice and ideas. The Confucius Institute acts as a national advice centre with respect to the teaching and learning of Chinese, answering queries and liaising with schools in England and further afield.

Summer camps

For the past six years, the Confucius Institute for Schools has worked with the DfE and Hanban to organise visits to China for students and teachers in England. To date, a total of over 1,500 students and teachers from 72 individual schools across the country have benefited from this opportunity to learn Chinese and visit China. Another 450 students and teachers will be in China in October 2012.

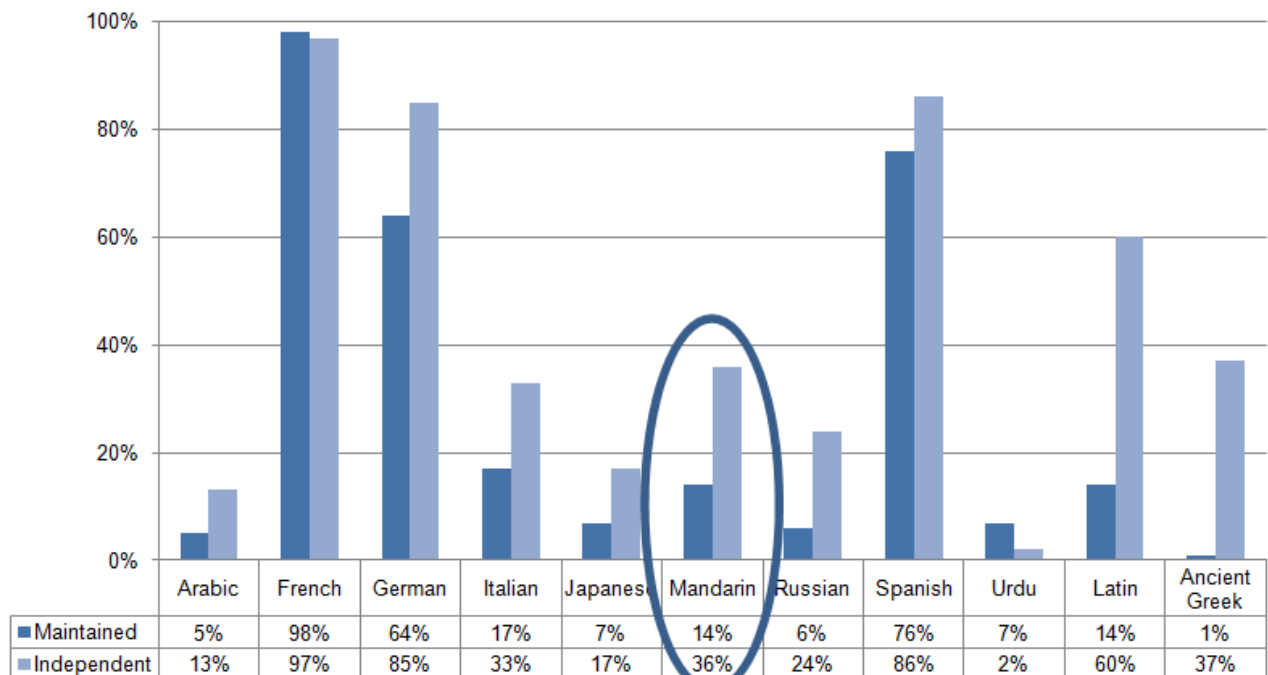
Each camp consists of time in Beijing and then 10 days in a city in one of China's provinces following an intensive Chinese course. As well as providing a very motivating experience, this opportunity provides valuable extra curriculum time for the learners.

The Impact of the Project

There has been a significant increase in the teaching of Chinese; six years ago only 7-8% of maintained secondary schools were offering Chinese. By Autumn 2011, that number had gone up to 14%, which represented about 450 schools, alongside 36% of independent schools⁵; this brought the total to 600 plus secondary schools offering Chinese across England. This number is likely to have increased again in the last year. The growth can be attributed to wider awareness of China, the work of the British Council, other Confucius Institutes and a good number of other organisations, as well as the Confucius Institute for Schools. However, looking at the figures for other languages, there is much work to be done to ensure that the take up of Mandarin reaches anything approaching the level of take up achieved in European languages. Given that Ancient Greek is listed as being offered in 37% of independent schools when take up of Ancient Greek is not known to involve large numbers, then it is likely that reporting for Mandarin may mean that there are only 1-2 native speakers of Chinese learning in some independent schools rather than a more widespread offering across the school.

**Percentage of schools offering languages, maintained and independent sectors
2011/12 (CfBT 2011)**

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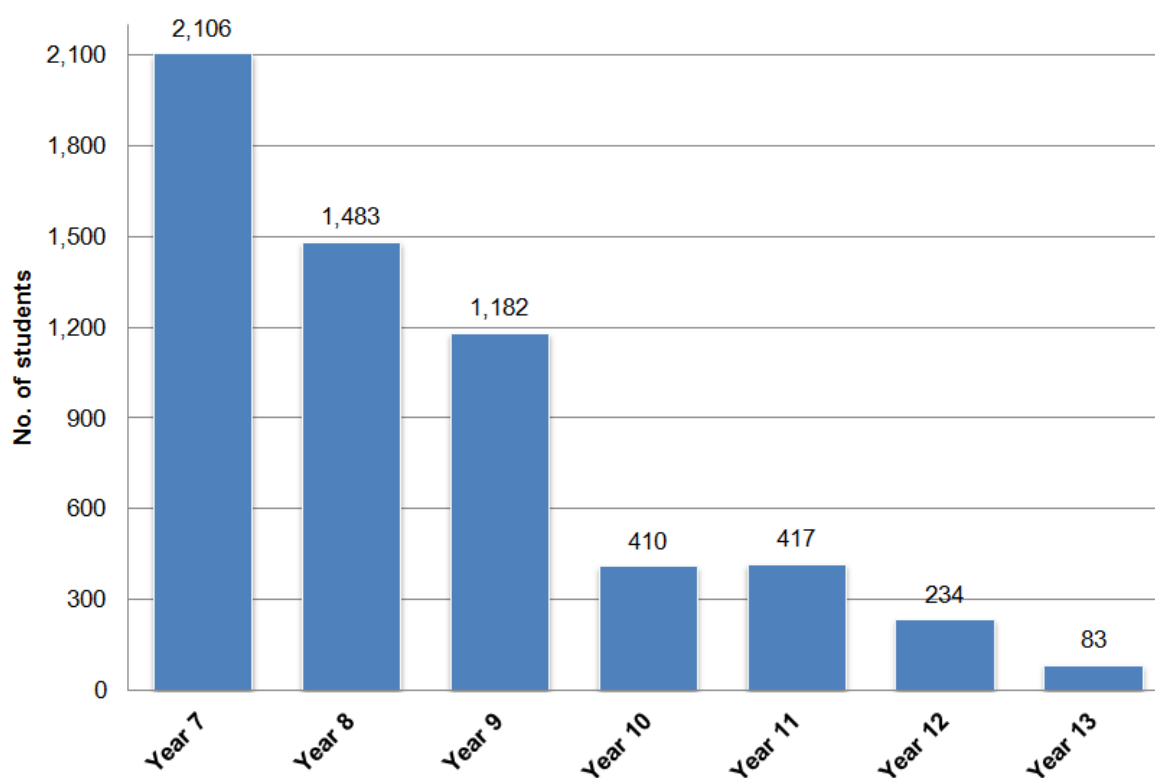
⁵ CfBT 2011 Language Trends Survey
<http://www.cfbt.com/evidenceforeducation/pdf/Language%20Trends%20Report.pdf>

⁶ CfBT 2011 Language Trends Survey

Chinese Learning in Confucius Classrooms

The total number of learners in Confucius Classrooms schools was 5,915 in the Autumn term of 2011. As discussed, Confucius Classrooms operate a 'hub and spoke model' where Chinese language learning now reaches in excess of 18,000 students annually if the spoke schools are included too.

Numbers of students in IOE Confucius Classrooms studying Chinese in 2011 (by year group)



The social impact of the Confucius Classrooms extends well beyond the reach of the pupils' learning, to Chinese being a focus of interest right across the school population and beyond to the parents, friends and families of the young people learning about Chinese language and culture. It is necessary to put in place measures to encourage higher numbers of students to carry on with Chinese, so that a greater proportion of last year's Year 7 cohort is still doing Chinese in Year 11 and beyond.

Each Confucius Classroom is different, depending on its locality, its intake, the number of hours in the curriculum which can be given to Chinese teaching and so on. The tables below show participation and accreditation data for two of the IOE Confucius Classrooms. Calday Grange Grammar School has been a Confucius Classroom for six years and has been teaching Chinese for much longer than that and Finham Park School is a new Confucius Classroom at a much earlier stage in the development of Chinese. Tables like the ones

below can be expanded to show examination results, the number of students going on to take Chinese at university and ultimately, perhaps, the number of graduates training to be teachers of Chinese and coming back into the system.

Advanced Confucius Classroom – Calday Grange Grammar School

2010-2011

Year Group	No. of students studying Chinese	No. of hours per week	No. of weeks per year	Accreditation
Year 7	33	2.08	39	
Year 8	64	2.08	39	
Year 9	26	2.08	39	
Year 10	41	2.08	39	
Year 11	25	2.08	32	GCSE
Year 12	8	4.58	39	AS
Year 13	1	4.16	32	A2 & IB
Total	198 students			

2011-2012

Year Group	No. of students studying Chinese	No. of hours per week	No. of weeks per year	Accreditation
Year 7	57	2.50	39	
Year 8	39	1.60	39	
Year 9	49	1.25	39	
Year 10	21	2.08	39	
Year 11	41	2.08	32	GCSE
Year 12	6	4.58	39	AS
Year 13	9	4.16	32	A2 & IB
Total	222 students			

New Confucius Classroom – Finham Park School

2010-2011

Year Group	No. of students studying Chinese	No. of hours per week	No. of weeks per year	Accreditation
Year 7	0			
Year 8	240 (2 groups at a time)	1 x 2	8	N/A
Year 9	0			
Year 10	0			
Year 11	0			
Year 12	12 (3 groups)	3.5	All year	N/A
Year 13	0			
Total	252 students	5.5 hours		

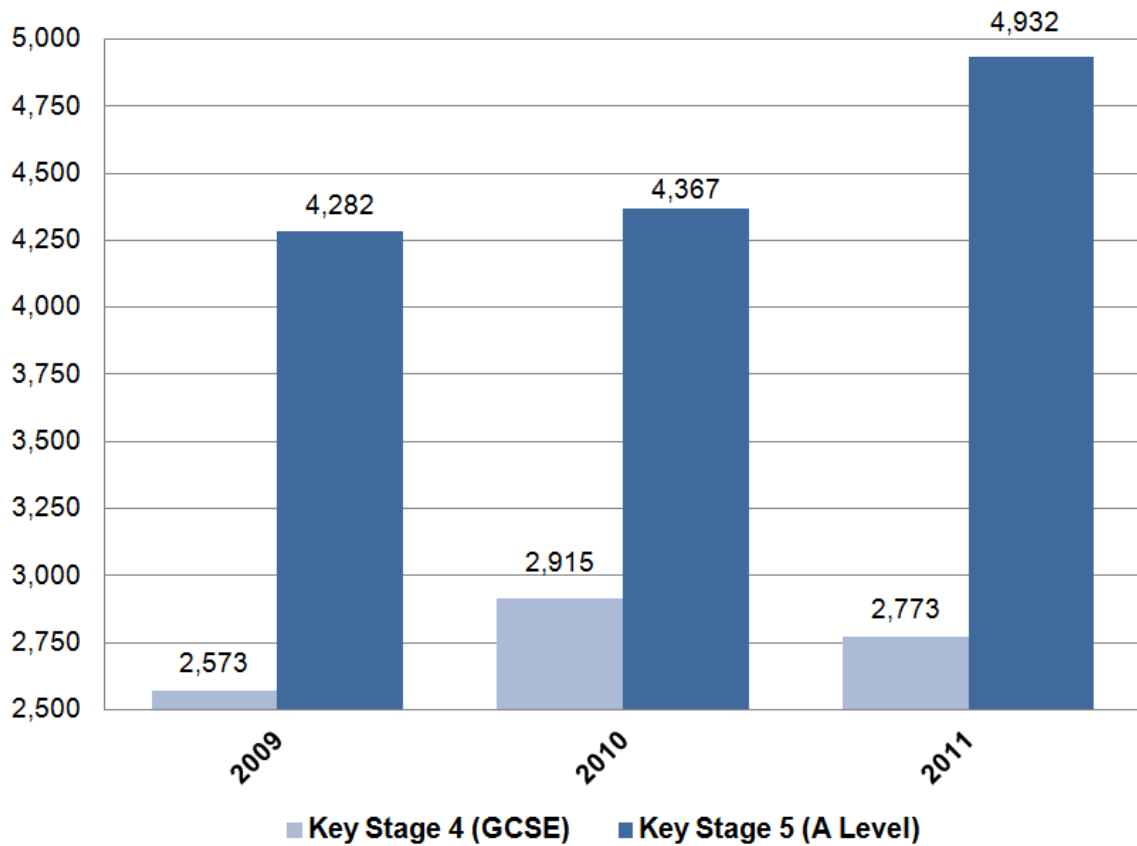
2011-2012

Year Group	No. of students studying Chinese	No. of hours per week	No. of weeks per year	Accreditation
Year 7	0			
Year 8	240 (2 groups at a time)	4	12	
Year 9	20 (2 groups)	2 x 2	All year	
Year 10	0			
Year 11	0			GCSE Chinese
Year 12	13	1.5	All year	
Year 13	0			
Total	273 students	9.5 hours		

The IOE Confucius Classroom at New Line Learning Academy presents a different picture again, as the school has decided that the only foreign language on offer will be Mandarin and so has over 1,000 pupils learning Chinese on curriculum.

As well as quantitative data, the Confucius Classroom has also to decide how to assess impact which is more difficult to measure, as for instance in broadening horizons and student awareness, the impact of the visiting Hanban teachers on the Confucius Classroom (and vice versa), cross-curricular/whole school enthusiasm and engagement etc.

Number of entries for Chinese qualifications (by pupil) 2009-2011

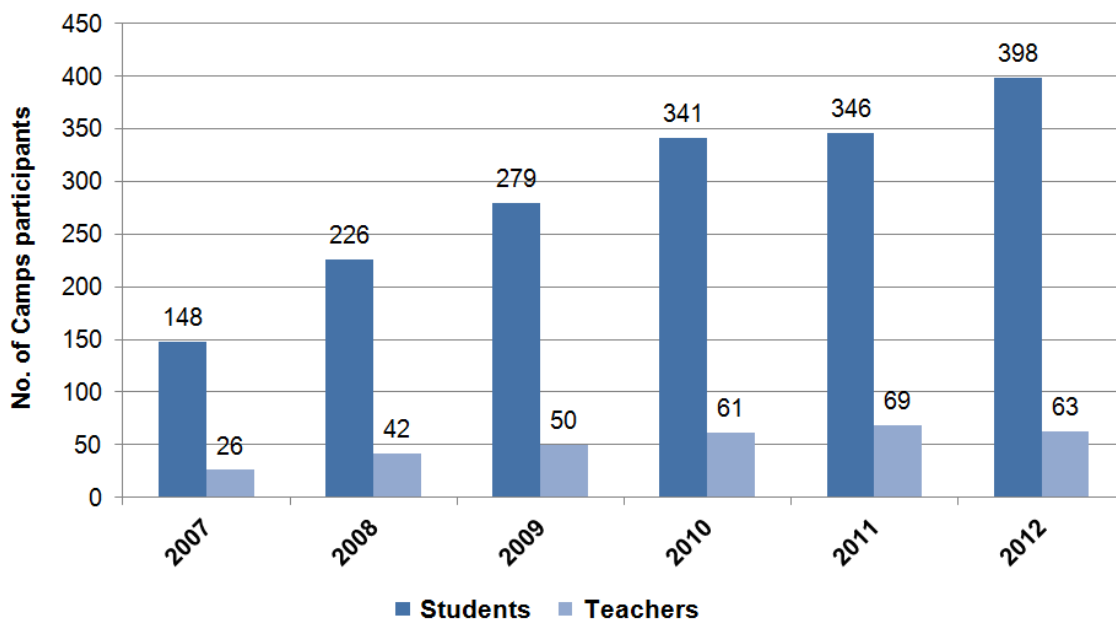


The numbers taking GCSE and A level Chinese have increased. However, the A level figures mask large numbers of native speakers taking the exam and a problem; the problem is that non-native speakers are still finding it hard to access good grades at A level, to the extent that a number of students who want to do Chinese at university do not do the A level in case it does not deliver them a higher enough grade to get into the university of their choice. A number of schools offer IB Chinese and Cambridge Pre-U Chinese as an alternative.

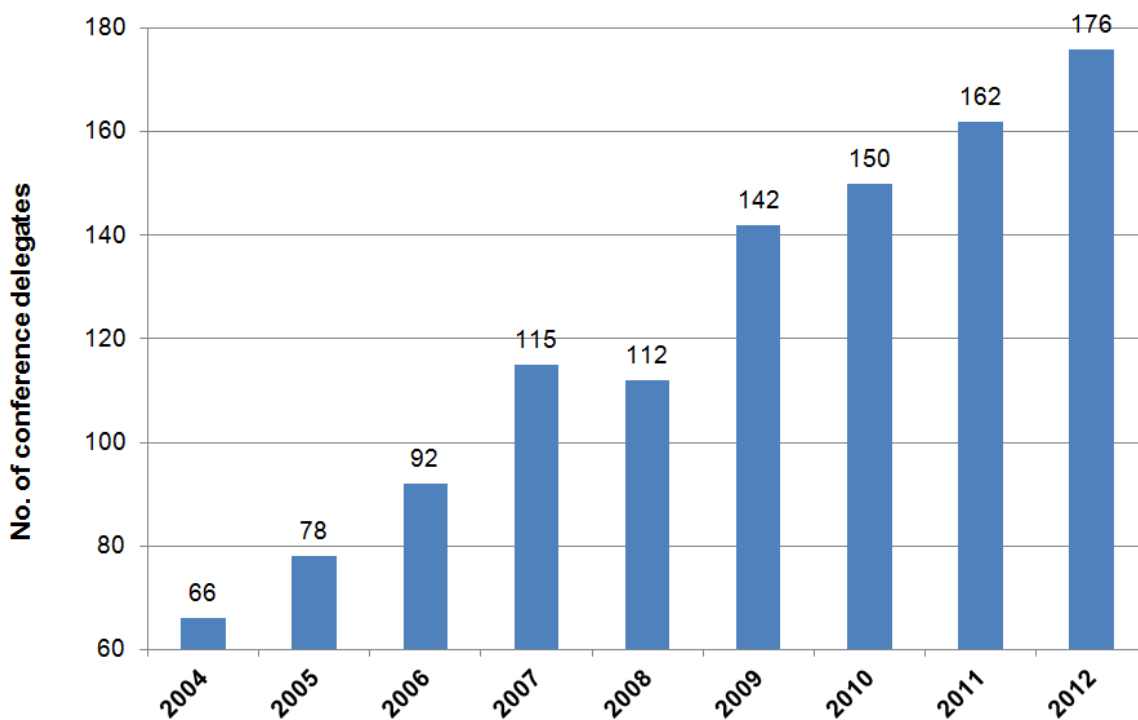
The fall in GCSE entries in 2011 is because many of the heritage learners switched to IGCSE because of problems with setting up controlled assessments at Chinese community schools. The number of non-native candidates for GCSE has continued its steady increase.

The tables on this page show the increase in the number of students going on the summer camps to China to learn Chinese and the substantial increase in delegate numbers for the Chinese conference. This year, the total of delegate numbers, speakers, exhibitors and Hanban teachers took the number at the conference to well over 300.

Numbers of participants in IOE Confucius Institute China Camps, students and teachers (by year), 2007-2012



Number of delegates at IOE Confucius Institute Annual Chinese Conference (by year), 2004 - 2012



The Teaching and Learning of Chinese in Other English- speaking Countries

Wales

In Wales, there are around six schools offering Chinese on curriculum including one primary school; one of these is a Cardiff Confucius Institute Confucius Classroom . There are many more schools which have some kind of Chinese provision, including 10 schools in Cardiff alone.

Scotland

The Confucius Institute for Scotland's Schools based at the University of Strathclyde has 12 Confucius Classrooms, all of which are secondary schools. Each of the Confucius Classrooms work as a hub with varying numbers of schools (up to 20) coming into the hub school for Chinese lessons. Last year's survey showed that over 8,000 students had studied some form of Chinese at the hubs; this included taster lessons. The Confucius Institute has signed agreements with 17 out of the 32 Scottish local authorities with respect to the teaching of Chinese. Whilst the Confucius Institute works mainly with maintained schools, there are also a number of Scottish independent schools with very good Chinese provision.

United States of America

Demand for learning Chinese has also been growing apace. The Asia Society, based in New York, has 100 Confucius Classrooms across the country and the College Board is working with School Districts to set up Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms across the country. K-12 schools offering Chinese have gone up from 250 in 2005 to well over 1,000 in 2012.

Areas for Research

In order to mainstream Chinese and to ensure that it becomes a foreign language on offer widely across schools in England, research is required. Research on Chinese language acquisition by pupils learning Chinese as a foreign language in schools will provide evidence for future thinking and developments.

Much of the research which has been done by academics writing in English and Chinese has concentrated on how university learners of Chinese acquire Chinese; it is, of course, relevant, but a schools-based focus is also necessary.

Chinese is currently being taught in much the same way as European languages in schools in England. Teachers are driven by examinations which are centred around themes and topics and have no time for real consideration of how young non-native learners of Chinese best learn the language; are methods used in teaching European languages in schools always appropriate for Chinese?

There are many areas of research possible, but the following section covers some broad areas in order to provide a basis for discussion and potential future development.

Tracking Cohorts

Tracking KS3 cohorts, some of whom study two foreign languages between the ages of 11 and 14, to compare and contrast their experiences and see how they differ in order to provide insights as to whether different teaching methods are required.

The Teaching and Learning of Characters

Does the teaching of radicals enhance learning? Do learners need to learn characters at all? Should they just learn to input characters via pinyin on a computer? How can the learning of characters be combined with the communicative curriculum?

Should characters/words be grouped into semantic categories rather than alphabetic lists?

Should character learning lists be disassociated from competence levels, topic themes and more centred more round frequency of occurrence in combinations?

Can students learn some characters and some pinyin computer input or is the teaching of characters a 'way of thinking', which needs a more focussed approach?

Are certain types of learner more suited to learning characters (Visual, Auditory, Kinaesthetic)? How do the mental processes involved in the learning of Chinese characters differ from that of learning words in other languages?

What are the most effective ways of teaching characters given current curriculum time and accreditation demands?

Is correct stroke order necessary? Does it aid the learning of characters? What practical measures can teachers of Chinese take to ensure that their pupils adopt consistent stroke order?

The Use of Pinyin

Is pinyin a help or a hindrance? When and how should pinyin be employed in teaching materials?

When to teach it and for how long? How to wean pupils from over-reliance on pinyin?

Tones

How to move on those pupils who are able to pronounce tones for individual words to a more natural sounding sentence intonation?

Grammar

How do pupils develop grammatical competence to represent meanings where the structure in one language is represented very differently in the other – eg using 的 to represent relative clauses. Simple grammatical structures are obviously easily transferable between Chinese and English, with similar word-order pattern in basic sentences, but 的 causes a wide variety of word order mistakes

Research tracking cohorts to analyse common grammar mistakes and the best ways of teaching these difficult areas

IT

Making the best use of tablets in the Mandarin classroom

Using blogs to boost curriculum time

The Use of Target Language

How can the target language be used in class when there are no cognates

Moving from Beginner to Intermediate without children giving up.

KS4-5 transition

Chinese and Dyslexia

Using Chinese to promote global competency?

Immersion Chinese – a potential pathway?

If children follow an immersion pathway at primary school, how can that be maintained during secondary when the immersion pathway cannot be continued.

Concluding Remarks

The teaching of Chinese in schools in England has developed quickly in the last 5-6 years. There is now a much greater general awareness in schools and in the wider community that Chinese is a possible language option, although there is clearly more progress which could be made.

Support from Hanban and Chinese universities has helped the growth in the learning of Chinese across the world.

In schools in England, there is an urgent need to make Chinese language learning more sustainable, for pupils to move from the initial excitement of beginners' taster classes to a longer term endeavour to learn the language. In order to do this, there needs to be a better understanding of how pupils best learn Chinese as a foreign language and how their interest can be sustained, so that they do not opt to give up after a year's study.

Trained teachers, good teaching materials, appropriate examinations are all crucial, but teaching needs to be underpinned by research to inform curriculum content and pedagogy. That research may best be undertaken by groups of academics in China and in England working together and this project report and accompanying research suggestions are intended to start off discussion as to how best to take this agenda forward.