

# Chinese Language and Culture for Foreign Students-Courses Design Framework in the University of Hong Kong as a Model

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**Abstract:** There is a remarkable increase in the number of foreign students coming to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong to study Mandarin in recent years. As Chinese Language is one of the hottest subjects for them to choose, in 2017, there are about 950 foreign students (undergraduates or exchange students) studying Chinese as a Foreign Language courses in the University of Hong Kong. Compared with teaching Mandarin in Beijing or Shanghai, Mandarin teachers and foreign learners have to take much more challenges inside as well as outside the classroom because 97% of the population in Hong Kong speaks Cantonese. In this paper, we demonstrate our curriculum design of Chinese as a Foreign Language courses from Level One to Level Eight and a Chinese history and culture course titled as “Exploration of Major Cultural Themes across Chinese History” at the University of Hong Kong. The medium of instruction of these courses is bilingual. We would systematically explore the detailed structure and design of courses based on our teaching team over these years of solid practice, with the aim to show a model in this area for the international educational academia to refer to.

**Keywords:** Chinese Language Course, Chinese Culture, Foreign Student, Model, HKU

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## 1. Introduction

As the economy of China is booming and for the next 20 years, China can still enjoy a high GDP growth rate, there is a rapid increase in the number of foreign students coming to Beijing, Shanghai and Hong Kong to study Mandarin. As Chinese Language is one of the hottest subjects for them to choose, in 2017, there are about 950 foreign students (undergraduates or exchange students) studying Chinese as a Foreign Language courses. Compared with teaching Mandarin in Beijing or Shanghai, Mandarin teachers and foreign learners have to take much more challenges inside as well as outside the classroom because 97% of the population in Hong Kong speaks Cantonese.

Chinese is the mother tongue for Hong Kong students and still served as the most important learning language [1]. In this paper, we want to demonstrate our curriculum design of Chinese as a Foreign Language courses from Level One to

Level Eight and a Chinese history and culture course titled as “Exploration of Major Cultural Themes across Chinese History” at the University of Hong Kong. In addition, The Chinese history and culture course familiarizes students with China and it also introduces international students to Chinese history, schools of thoughts, cultural themes and achievements in Chinese civilization; The course will highlight differences and similarities between Chinese and other cultures; stimulates students’ interest in deeper understanding of China, its people, its history and its culture in the global context [2]. The medium of instruction of this course is English and we would also like to introduce course outline of Exploration of Major Cultural Themes across Chinese History course in this paper.

Chinese as a Foreign Language Level One to Level Eight general course description [3] are shown as follows:

- 1) Level one (basic: zero beginners)
- 2) Level two (basic)

- 3) Level three (basic)
- 4) Level four (Intermediate)
- 5) Level five (Intermediate)
- 6) Level six (Higher-Intermediate)
- 7) Level seven (Advanced)
- 8) Level eight (Advanced)

The medium of instruction of this course is English and we would also like to introduce course outline of Exploration of Major Cultural Themes across Chinese History course in this paper.

## 2. Level One

### 2.1. Objectives

This course is for foreign students who do not have previous knowledge of Chinese. It will give students with no previous knowledge of Chinese a foundation. It covers 4 main areas: speaking, listening, reading and writing which will require pinyin-word processing and actual writing of Chinese characters.

### 2.2. Course Description

This course will use *The Rudiments of Mandarin* (chapter 1 to 5) as the textbook. It allows students to know about 150 Chinese Characters and some useful sentences in daily life and around 65 important grammar points.

### 2.3. Assessment

Quiz, dictations, home assignments, written test and oral test will be used to assess the students' reading, writing, listening and speaking ability.

### 2.4. Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students should be able to demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively in basic Chinese using correct pronunciation and tones. Students should be able to identify and write 150 frequently used Chinese characters and 200 common words. Students should be able to communicate in speech and writing by using the basic grammar structures of modern Chinese.

## 3. Level Two

### 3.1. Objectives

This intensive course is intended for student whose native language is not Chinese. After completing the beginner's Chinese course, he or she has demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively in basic Chinese using correct pronunciation and simple sentence patters of modern Chinese in speaking and writing.

This course helps the students enhance their engagement and motivation in Chinese language learning, develop their knowledge in Chinese culture and establish a more solid foundation of Mandarin in a non-target language environment.

### 3.2. Course Description

The course will use a textbook (chapter 6 to chapter 10 of *The Rudiments of Mandarin*) to continue what the students has learnt in Level One. Level Two allows students to know about another 150 Chinese Characters and some useful sentences in daily life and another 65 important grammar points.

In Level Two, students have opportunities to have the role plays, creative writing based on the words and expressions they have learned in class and presentations. The course provides an interactive learning environment for students to increase the opportunities in studying the target language in non-target language environment and mastering more practical phrases and expressions from the in-class activities.

### 3.3. Assessment

According to the students' evaluation and their assessment results, the course not only enhanced students' Mandarin language proficiency but also facilitate in-depth study of particular aspects of Chinese language, such as sentence patterns, usage of expressions as well as of Chinese culture, such as request in a polite way, different ways to address people and etc.

### 3.4. Learning Outcomes

After completing the Level One and Level Two course, the students will finish the textbook, *The Rudiments of Mandarin*. At that moment, students should master 130 important grammatical points, 400 common vocabulary words and 300 Chinese characters. They can also conduct a 250-character speech as well as a role play script on a given topic. The course provides an interactive learning environment for students to increase the opportunities in studying the target.

## 4. Level Three

### 4.1. Objectives

This course is for foreign students who have an equivalent competency Level Two or New HSK Level 2. It aims to further develop students' audio-lingual proficiency as well as raise their reading and writing ability to a higher level. Students use information obtained from their course to converse with Chinese people, and present speeches based on the assigned topics. Emphasis will be placed on everyday topics and common patterns, so that students experience communication in Chinese.

### 4.2. Course Description

This course will cover *New Practical Chinese Reader Book II* (lesson 15 to lesson 20), including vocabulary, notes, grammatical explanation, characters and drills.

#### 4.2.1. Accuracy and Fluency of Pronunciation

- a. Review Pinyin System.

- b. Pronunciation Clinic: tones will be the focus.
- c. Sentence:

#### **4.2.2. Six Chinese Communication Skills Are Emphasized**

- a. Confirming;
- b. Commenting;
- c. Enquiring;
- d. Comparing;
- e. Describing;
- f. Disagreeing.

#### **4.2.3. Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing Skills will Be Enhanced**

#### **4.3. Assessment**

Quizzes, dictations, workbooks, worksheets, in-class activities, mid-term test, final test will be used to assess the students' reading, writing, listening and speaking ability.

#### **4.4. Learning Outcomes**

On successful completion of the course, students should be able to communicate effectively with complex Chinese sentences using correct pronunciation. Students should also demonstrate the ability to communicate in speech and in written form using the more complex grammar structures of modern Chinese.

Students should also master 150 of the most frequently used Chinese characters in addition to the 300 basic Chinese characters learned in Level One & Level Two.

## **5. Level Four**

### **5.1. Objectives**

This course is intended for foreign learners who have completed Level Three and prepare to take New HSK Level 3 test. It aims to develop the student's overall language skills through reading and discussion of contemporary affairs. Students will not only distinguish the difference between written language and spoken language, but will also gain the ability to understand, and speak Chinese in a variety of situations. At the end of the course, students should be able to learn to read and write at a higher level than Level Three.

### **5.2. Course Description**

This course will cover New Practical Chinese Reader Book II (lesson 21 to lesson 26) which including the following aspects:

#### **5.2.1. Understand Intermediate-Level Conversation by Native Speakers**

- a. More listening exercises in everyday conversations;
- b. Some lectures in Chinese culture and language.

#### **5.2.2. Communicate in Intermediate-Level Using Accurate and Clear Sentences**

- a. Talking about Sports Matches;

- b. Discussion on Beijing Opera and a past experience;
- c. Making an appointment or a date with someone;
- d. Talking about the Plan and Making Suggestions.
- e. Talking about the Changing Circumstances and Living conditions;
- f. Talking about an Incident; Making complaints.
- g. Talking about language studies.

#### **5.2.3. Reading and Writing**

- a. Reading short articles (around 500 Chinese characters) on different topics;
- b. Mastery of the 150 most frequently used Chinese characters and review of the 450 characters learned in Beginning Chinese courses; the focus will be on simplified characters.
- c. Write short essays starting off at about 250 characters and gradually increasing to 400 characters.

#### **5.3. Assessment**

Quizzes, dictations, workbooks, worksheets, mid-term test, final test, oral presentation and listening exercises will be used to assess the students' reading, writing, listening and speaking ability.

In the final test which include a reading comprehension with 500 Chinese characters and essay writing with at least 300 Chinese characters. Normally 80% of Level Four students perform good in reading comprehension and 70% of the students perform good in essay writing.

#### **5.4. Learning Outcomes**

On successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

- 1) Read short articles (around 500 Chinese characters) on different topics
- 2) Write short essays of up to 400 characters.
- 3) Demonstrate the ability to communicate in intermediate-level Chinese using accurate, clear and fluent sentences;
- 4) Demonstrate the ability to understand intermediate-level conversation by native speakers.
- 5) Demonstrate mastery of 150 of the most frequently used Chinese characters in addition to the 650 characters which have already been learned and recognized in Level One to Level Three.

## **6. Level Five**

### **6.1. Objectives**

This intensive course is intended for foreign learners who have completed CHIN9504 (Chinese as a Foreign Language Level IV) or have attained equivalent competence to Chinese Proficiency Test (New HSK) Level III. It aims to increase students' communicative and linguistic competence in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating. It also provides in-depth study of Chinese culture and society.

## 6.2. Course Description

This course will cover New Practical Chinese Reader Book III (lesson 27 to lesson 32). It familiarizes students with 150 core sentences, 450 new words, and 200 most frequently used Chinese characters in addition to the Chinese characters acquired from previous levels.

## 6.3. Assessment

Quizzes, presentations, essays, home assignments, written tests and oral tests will be used to assess the students' reading, writing, listening and speaking ability.

*Table 1. Level V Assessment Methodology and Weighting (%).*

Assessment methods	Weighting (%)
1. Dictations	5
2. Workbook	15
3. Quiz	10
4. In-class Presentation	10
5. Essay	20
6. Midterm	20
7. Final	20

## 6.4. Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

- 1) Speak accurate, clear and fluent sentences. Students are encouraged to engage more in complex dialogues on special topics according to lessons in the textbook.
- 2) Enhance students' listening ability. Guided listening comprehension will be used to train students' listening skills systematically. By the end of the course, students will be able to understand more conversations at normal speed carried out by native speakers.
- 3) Read short articles (around 500 Chinese characters) on different topics for training in reading comprehension.
- 4) Write short essays gradually increasing to 400 to 450 characters.

### *Class Demo*

For language learning, technology provides venues and makes it easy for learners to regulate their language learning. New technologies offer the potential for autonomous language learning, especially in the context of "globalized online spaces". And technology is changing the face of organizations and having impact on the nature of informal learning. So in order to achieve the learning outcomes, many e-learning strategies are used in the language learning class. For example:

- 1) Movie reviews. In lesson 28, the topic is Chinese culture of gift-giving. In order to enhance students listening ability and help students understand more conversations at normal speed carried out by native speakers, students watched a section about gift-giving of Chinese movie "Personal Tailor", then students were encouraged and invited to express their different opinions.
- 2) Movie dubbing. In lesson 29, students learn "Disciples are not necessarily inferior to their teachers. Teachers

are not necessarily wiser than their disciples". In order to encourage students to engage more in complex dialogues on this topic, and give students more chance to make comments, a movie section of "Three Idiots" were chose and students were encouraged to dub the movie section into Chinese and then make comments.

- 3) Write stories based on illustrations. In order to foster students' interest in writing in Chinese and improve their writing skills, students were encouraged to write stories based on a series illustrations and then gave a presentation about their stories.

## 7. Level Six

### 7.1. Objectives

This intensive course is intended for foreign learners who have completed CHIN9505 (Chinese as a Foreign Language Level V) or have attained an equivalent level of competency. It aims to increase students' communicative and linguistic competence in listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translating. It also provides in-depth study of Chinese culture and society.

### 7.2. Course Description

This course will cover New Practical Chinese Reader Book III (lesson 33 to lesson 38). It familiarizes students with another 600 new words, 200 most frequently used Chinese characters, in addition to 1600 Chinese characters and 150 core sentences learnt. The course will be conducted mainly in Chinese.

### 7.3. Assessment

Quizzes, presentations, essays, home assignments, written tests and oral tests will be used to assess the students' reading, writing, listening and speaking ability.

*Table 2. Level VI Assessment Methodology and Weighting (%).*

Assessment methods	Weighting (%)
1. In-class dictations & quizzes	18
2. Two compositions	20
3. Home works	12
4. Oral presentation	10
5. Mid-term & Final tests	40

### 7.4. Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students should be able to:

- 1) Demonstrate an ability to communicate effectively in sophisticated Chinese using correct pronunciation.
- 2) Demonstrate mastery of newly acquired most frequently used Chinese characters in addition to Chinese characters, words/phrases, and core sentences already been acquired in CHIN9501, CHIN9502, CHIN9503, CHIN9504 and CHIN9505.
- 3) Demonstrate an ability to communicate in speech and writing short essays of around 500 to 650 characters by

using standard modern Chinese to discuss various topics.

## 8. Level Seven

### 8.1. Objectives

This intensive course is for foreign learners who have completed intermediate Chinese, that is, has demonstrated an ability to communicate in speech and writing short essays of around 500 characters by using standard modern Chinese to discuss various topics. It aims to enhance students' communicative competence, specifically targeting at speaking, reading and writing. Students will be exposed to Chinese society and culture through a greater variety of topical presentations and discussions. They will write short essays starting off at about 600 characters and gradually increasing to 800 characters by using varying sentence styles and structures.

### 8.2. Course Description

Developing Chinese Advanced Speaking Course II (chapter 1 to 8) will be used as textbook. There is an increase in student demands for advanced Chinese language course. Most of the students want to explore more in Chinese society and political issues, such as concept of marriage, Only-Child Policy and etc. They have a strong motivation to express their opinions in the current political affairs and cultural topics. Some topics of the textbook (New Practical Chinese Reader IV), such as concept of marriage, woman issue and Only-Child Policy are selected. The students need to study the grammar and vocabulary of the selected chapters and enhance their ability to distinguish the spoken language and written language.

### 8.3. Assessment

In addition to the regular quizzes and home assignment, the students are required to enhance their ability in writing and presentation on a given topic. After delivering the speech, the other student audiences will ask some questions according to the content and the speaker need to answer the questions. The course provides an interactive learning environment for students to improve their understanding and language skills used in the writing and presentation of an essay in Chinese. It's the student's opportunity to demonstrate their ability to communicate accurately, fluently, and coherently; to effectively deliver and express more complex ideas in a short speech; to master more frequently used Chinese characters, new vocabulary and complex sentence pattern/structures, phrases and core sentences already acquired in previous courses; and to demonstrate the ability to communicate, in writing, short essays using standard modern Chinese grammar and sentence structures to effectively present data, concepts, and ideas.

*Table 3. Level VII Assessment Methodology and Weighting (%).*

Assessment Methods	Weighting (%)
1. Dictations	10
2. Home Assignments	20
3. Individual Presentation	15
4. Online Quiz	10
4. Movie Review	10
5. Group presentation	20
6. Final Composition	15

### 8.4. Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students should be able to demonstrate improvement in an overall ability to communicate accurately, fluently and coherently in sophisticated Chinese using correct and appropriate diction. Demonstrate an ability to effectively deliver and express more complex ideas in short speeches.

Students should also master more Chinese new words, complex grammar patterns/structures, set phrases and core sentences already acquired in previous courses.

Students should also be able to write short essays and compositions by using standard modern Chinese grammar and sentence structures to discuss various social topics.

The curriculum provides learning experiences that enable students to successfully achieve the course learning outcomes and well prepared for the higher-level Chinese studying, ie. Chinese as a Foreign Language VIII (CHIN9508).

Students taking CHIN9508 will continue the textbook Developing Chinese Advanced Speaking Course II, chapter 9 to 15. They will expose to Chinese society and culture through a variety of selected reading materials from well-known Chinese modern writers' works, newspapers and magazines, short stories and novels. In addition, students will write summaries of some of their reading assignments to enhance comprehension and strengthen writing ability. Students will also be asked to accurately and fluently expressing ideas in different topics in class. This course will also prepare for sentence structure analysis, punctuation usage, and fundamentals of rhetorical methods and classical Chinese.

## 9. Exploration of Major Cultural Themes Across Chinese History

### 9.1. Objectives

- 1) Enable student to recognize a clear timeline of China, its culture, its language and its complexity.
- 2) Instead of knowing "who is who", guide student to investigate China's long history through interesting legends, stories and historical events.
- 3) Through introduction of the most notable people and events in Chinese history, let students gain a general picture of China in the past.
- 4) Enhanced student with a broader perspective to compare different cultural models. This will be placed in the global context of contemporary world culture.

## 9.2. Course Description

A history and culture course that familiarizes students with China and its past, approached from non-traditional perspectives. The course introduces international students to Chinese history, schools of thoughts, cultural themes and achievements in Chinese civilization; highlights differences and similarities between Chinese and other cultures [4]; stimulates students' interest in deeper understanding of China, its people, its history and its culture in the global context. Students are required to make presentations on assigned topics.

## 9.3. Course Outline and Schedule

A broader perspective/background picture of Chinese Heritage will be presented [5]. Core topics include:

1. Chinese History: a Macro Perspective [6]
2. Core Element: Character / Calligraphy
3. Literature and Arts: Unity of Paintings [7]
4. Literature and Arts: Chinese Opera
5. Literature and Culture: Poetry [8]
6. Literature and Culture: Ci lyric [9, 10]
7. Literature and Sociology: Great Novels [11, 12]
8. Thought and Enlightenment: Confucianism [13]
9. Thought and Enlightenment: New Cultural Movement [4]
10. Chinese Heritage and the World [14, 15]

## 9.4. Assessment

Quizzes, presentations and essays will be used to assess the students' knowledge.

*Table 4. Assessment Methodology and Weighting (%).*

Assessment methods	Weighting (%)
1. In-class quizzes	30
2. Essay	40
3. Group discussion and presentation	30

## 9.5. Learning Outcomes

On successful completion of the course, students should be able to demonstrate a basic knowledge of Chinese history timeline, historical events and people that had great impact on Chinese history. They should also be able to incorporate background information provided by selected reading materials, to articulate one's opinion and understanding of certain historical figure, philosophical theory and cultural theme of the time, social events and their significance in changing the society. In addition, they should be able to produce critique of established thoughts/definition of historic figures, theories, social events and demonstration of critical thinking and ability to analyze events, people, cultural theme, and to use cross reference of other parts of the world and learn lessons from history.

## 10. Conclusion

We are striving to make our curriculum better and more effective for students who want to study Chinese as a foreign

language within a limit period of time. In order to enhance the outcome of Chinese learning, we always encourage students to study Chinese outside the classrooms, such as find a language exchange partner at HKU or go to mainland China during holidays. Thus they can totally immerse themselves in the target language context and acquire Chinese naturally. Studying Chinese at HKU and acquiring Chinese outside classroom will work hand in hand and guide the students towards the goal.

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