Language teaching - mobility enhances professional skills and cultural understanding

A cooperation initiative between China and the EU
The interest in learning Italian has been there for years. The Chinese admire the Italian culture, its design industry and luxury goods. In recent years, Spanish and Portuguese have become more popular, also due to the rise of the economy in Latin-America.

Tutor for the Chinese teachers in Perugia, Italy, working for a Chamber of Commerce in Italy.

EU – China: languages as a vehicle of cooperation

Over the past decade the number of Chinese students in Europe has increased tenfold. Similarly, the number of EU students in China has also increased substantially. Expectations are that by 2020 some 500,000 European students will study in China (see Figure 1).

There is also a growing interest among young Chinese people to study foreign languages, sometimes even two or three. In fact, other European languages besides English are becoming increasingly popular among Chinese students. Spanish, German, French, Italian and Portuguese are among the preferred choices, partly because of their links to either ancient or modern cultures, partly because of their practical applicability in the global economy and business.

Number of Chinese students in the EU and EU students in China (2000-2011)

Teachers and professors of foreign languages at Chinese universities play an important role in preparing Chinese students who want to study in Europe. But of course there are many more students who do not travel abroad and still want to learn a foreign language. For them, ‘internationalisation at home’ is equally important. Language teachers are in the best position to cultivate, improve and disseminate knowledge of European languages and cultures.

As part of continued cooperation between the EU and China, the EU-China High Level People-to-People Dialogue (HPPD) highlighted the importance of intensifying cultural exchange and mobility between China and the EU as a means to strengthening cultural interaction and cooperation. A number of agreements were concluded in the areas of education, culture, researcher mobility and youth.

The European Commission and Chinese authorities agreed to host Chinese university staff in five European universities during the summer of 2013 for an immersion course in the language and culture of the host country. This brochure highlights the experiences of the Chinese and European partners involved.

1http://ec.europa.eu/education/external-relation-programmes/china_en.htm
Better knowledge of languages will facilitate mobility, improve mutual understanding and, over time, benefit EU-China relations. Students and teaching staff travelling between China and Europe will undoubtedly lead to a better knowledge of foreign languages. It is therefore relevant to look to both students and teachers and their roles in the development of professional skills and cultural comprehension.

The EU-China initiative for Chinese teachers of EU languages took place during the summer of 2013. Eighteen Chinese university teachers participated in a one-month intensive language and cultural immersion training programme for Spanish, German, French, Italian and Portuguese. In addition to the linguistic and cultural aspects, the programme addressed the most recent developments in language teaching methods.

"I mastered new trends of language development and learnt about the ways in which foreign teachers organise their classes."
Chinese Teacher of Italian

The micro-teaching sessions with Chinese students that we were able to organise here on campus, were a unique opportunity and a great learning experience for all of us.

University Staff, Perugia
Participating universities in the EU (hosting universities)

For the implementation of the initiative five top-ranked academic language institutes were selected:

- French: Association of Teachers of the region of Lorraine, Nancy
- German: University of Heidelberg
- Italian: University for Foreigners of Perugia
- Portuguese: University of Lisbon
- Spanish: University of Salamanca

Each university developed a specific, fully or partly tailor-made programme consisting of courses on new teaching methods, language learning (reading, writing, listening) and cultural activities.

"We will use this experience to improve our course offer for future participants, especially from China."

University Staff, Lisbon

Participating universities in China (teachers’ home universities)

For every language, a group of three to five teachers was invited by the Chinese authorities. The Chinese teachers were proficient in the language of the ‘receiving’ EU country and had an academic position as a teacher in this language. The Chinese teachers came from the following universities:

- Beijing Foreign Studies University
- Guangdong University of Foreign Studies
- Shanghai International Studies University
- Sichuan International Studies University
- Wuhan University
- Xi’an International Studies University

"The programme was tailor-made, so really tuned to our interests and needs."

Chinese Teacher of French

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University Staff, Lisbon

The programme was tailor-made, so really tuned to our interests and needs.

Chinese Teacher of French
A unique experience for Chinese language teachers...

The initiative provided a unique opportunity for Chinese teachers to participate in a foreign language and culture immersion training in a European country. The course enabled them to refresh and broaden their knowledge on teaching methods and language and cultural understanding.

Language is of course constantly evolving and the programme addressed changes in both spoken and written language. Some teachers had visited Europe before, for others it was the first opportunity to practice and experience the daily use of a European language. Besides, through the course both groups had the opportunity to update their knowledge and skills on teaching methods. The Chinese teachers particularly welcomed the opportunity to discuss changes in grammar rules and newly introduced vocabulary in (spoken and written) European languages.

“I’ve learnt a lot of new things. I’m very interested in teaching methods and I want to write a book about it, so this training was extremely useful for me.”

Chinese Teacher of German

“This type of programme is very important for language teachers in China, since there are very few opportunities for these kinds of courses.”

Chinese Teacher of Portuguese

“This training has renewed my knowledge with regard to new high-tech teaching methods.”

Chinese Teacher of Spanish

The university library in Salamanca

Place Stanislas, Nancy
I got a chance to present China and the level of German teaching in China to people from other countries.

Chinese Teacher of German

"The exchange of experiences was very interesting and useful. Step by step the Chinese participants considered me less a teacher, but more a colleague and this benefited the mutual exchange."

University Staff, Nancy

"The rich extracurricular historical and cultural activities deepened my awareness and understanding of the Portuguese language and its culture; this really promoted the blending of language and culture."

Chinese Teacher of Portuguese

\(\text{....and a unique experience for the universities}\)

Besides offering a high quality training programme for Chinese teachers the initiative also challenged the European institutes to re-evaluate their courses for Chinese students and teachers. Chinese teachers took the opportunity to present China to the European teaching staff and give them feedback on their knowledge and perception of foreign language teaching in China.

The programme triggered adjustments in language teaching for both the Chinese teachers and the university staff in Europe. Chinese teachers were exposed to new teaching strategies, and staff of European universities learned how to apply teaching methods more effectively in the Chinese context.

"The Chinese teachers have taught us what we can do to improve our teaching to Chinese students."

University Staff, Salamanca

Lecture hall, Salamanca

University for Foreigners of Perugia

Farewell Dinner in Nancy

University for Foreigners of Perugia
Cooperation beyond mobility

Internationalisation of higher education brings significant benefits to the European Union, China, and to the education and training institutions, their students and teaching staff.

European universities have their logistics in place for receiving teachers, facilitating future exchanges of teachers.

An exchange of teachers between China and the EU can widen the horizon for internationalisation and encompass many other types of academic cooperation such as joint degrees, support for capacity building, joint research projects and distance learning programmes.

ICT and new media in particular are excellent tools for further collaborative language learning that can have spin-off effects and benefit many more than those who participated in the initiative. Some universities already have ample experience with digital courses for Chinese students. Other universities gained a renewed interest to intensify cooperation in these areas through the initiative.

“Both sides expressed their ambition about setting up a cooperation agreement between our two universities and will invest to proceed further with this plan.”

Chinese Teacher of French

“The programme gave us a possibility of collaboration in the production of teaching manuals and the opening of exam centres for certification of the level of knowledge of Portuguese.”

University Staff, Lisbon
Promising contacts were established for future cooperation and for developing exchange programmes with the European host universities. The programme also laid the foundation for strengthening the relations among the Chinese teachers who participated in the programme, offering interesting possibilities to develop mutual projects in the future.

All Chinese teachers involved in the initiative expressed their ambition to strengthen the networks of language teachers in China and also to develop assessment tools or assessment centres for the foreign languages they teach. The European host institutions offered their help and expertise to this.

"By understanding each other’s teaching and research work, we identified opportunities and channels for future cooperation. This is very meaningful to the work of both sides."

Chinese Teacher of Portuguese
This training provided new thoughts and perspectives for my teaching in the future. It expanded my field of vision on the selection and use of teaching materials, forms of classroom activities and the evaluation of teaching results. As for my professional practice, through this training I deepened my understanding of the French language and culture, which laid the foundation for future studies and research.

Chinese Teacher of French