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Heritage is Not Enough: The Changing Demographics of the Chinese Language Field in the United States

Scott McGinnis

Introduction

In a series of articles beginning in 1994, Richard Brecht and the late A. Ronald Walton first identified four sectors in the United States as sources for providing national capacity in the Less Commonly Taught Languages (LCTLs).

1. **Federal:** "[G]overnment language-training programs designed for employees of government agencies" (Brecht & Walton, 194)
2. **Private sector:** Composed of at least three components, (a) proprietary schools, "aimed at professionals…for business, travel, and tourism" (194); (b) corporate programs aimed at employees within an organization; and, (c) language services, including both private language instruction, and translation and interpretation services, as well as foreign visitor escort services.
3. **Academic:** The traditional K-16 (and now more commonly dubbed pre-K-16+) classroom-based language education system, supplemented by various "auxiliary systems" such as summer programs and study abroad.
4. **Domestic ethnic language preservation/enhancement:** In the intervening years since first proposed, this has come to be known more succinctly as the "heritage sector," composed of immigrant populations and their descendants, many of whom have established semi-formal instructional programs for their mother-tongue language and cultural preservation. Brecht and Walton make the point that this fourth heritage sector is "unique in that it possesses the potential to supply language capacity without instruction" (195-196).

In two previous works, I have analyzed the development of Chinese as a heritage language (CHL) education within the United States. Two major points characterize the evolution of the CHL sector.

1. While initially maintaining a pedagogical philosophy that could best be described as derivative, modeling itself after first the language

educational system of the home country of Chinese immigrants (i.e., mainland China or Taiwan) and then later the American K-12 system, CHL educational organizations and institutions have become increasingly innovative in serving a number of societal roles not served by the traditional academic sector-based Chinese language programs; e.g., providing Chinese language and cultural education for both Chinese adoptees and their American adoptive parents through the Families with Children from China (FCC or FWCC) programs (McGinnis 2007).

2. However well-intentioned and purportedly pragmatic an attempt to tap in to this potential pipeline of Chinese language expertise for any one of a range of American needs with regard to greater China—economic, security or otherwise—seeing the CHL population as a "silver bullet" is at once insufficient and ill-motivated. "To the contrary, Chinese heritage language learners are but one sector of our collective national student body, and it is imperative that we work to develop a more extended pipeline that will enable non-heritage learners to reach equally high levels of proficiency" (McGinnis 2005, 594).

Put more succinctly, over the course of the last nearly two decades, the heritage sector has become in some aspects every bit as well-developed any of the other sectors. But as a means of addressing all of the critical national language needs delineated by Walton (1996) for Chinese in particular, it is still just a single sector, and only in combination with the other three sectors can all of those national needs be met.

In this paper, I want to build from what remains a tremendously insightful and innovative analysis by Brecht and Walton to portray the continually evolving Chinese language instructional field in the United States. In the 21st century, it is clear that not only is a single sector—heritage—not enough, but a four-sector analysis of the field is not enough. One cannot understand the means for meeting Chinese language capacity needs in America without adding at least two new sectors to Brecht and Walton's original framework—domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and foreign governmental agencies. In the former category, most prominent (but not the only ones) are the Asia Society and The College Board; in the latter, it is China's National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language, more commonly known by the Chinese term *Hanban*, taken from the first syllable of two words in the Chinese name of the organization, *Hanyu bangongshi* (literally "Chinese language office"). While each one shall be examined separately, it will quickly become very clear that the

interrelationships among the three of them are considerable and essential to the rapidity with which they have emerged as arguably the major shapers of the Chinese language instructional field in America.

The Asia Society

Founded in 1956 by John D. Rockefeller III, the Society describes itself as "the leading global and pan-Asian organization working to strengthen relationships and promote understanding among the people, leaders, and institutions of the United States and Asia" (Asia Society 2010c). While the Society does pursue various projects related to areas such as business and economics, as well as operating a museum in its New York City world headquarters, the overarching mission of the Society is professed to be an "educational mandate."

Late in the year 2001, two major events took place in the life of the Asia Society. The first was the publishing of a report entitled "Asia in the Schools." Produced by the National Commission on Asia in the Schools, within its "call to action," it posed the intriguing challenge of increasing "the number of K-12 students studying Asian languages from the current level of less than two percent studying a foreign language to five percent by 2005, and to ten percent by 2010" (Steinemann, Fiske and Sackett, 8). However, arguably the more significant event in the life of the Society at that time was the appointment of Vivien Stewart, who served as Vice President for Education until 2009. She currently serves as Senior Advisor for Education to the Society, with specific responsibilities as Chair of the Society's Confucius Classrooms Initiative, to be discussed below.

As reflected in the quote above, the initial thrust of the 2001 monograph seemed to encompass the promotion of all Asian languages. Indeed, as stated on the Society's website under the Frequently Asked Questions, "[t]he Asia Society's definition of Asia includes the more than 30 countries broadly defined as the Asia-Pacific region—the area from Japan to Iran, and from Central Asia to New Zealand, Australia, and the Pacific Islands" (Asia Society 2011b). However, it very soon became apparent that Stewart's primary focus of responsibility was to be on all things Chinese. The Society's first major Chinese language-specific project was the convening of a meeting in April 2005 that ultimately produced a report entitled "Expanding Chinese Language Capacity." Over two dozen leaders in both language education in general and the Chinese language teaching profession in particular met to discuss a draft and contribute to the final version of that report. It is interesting to note that whereas the 2001 report targeted enrollments in Asian languages of 5 percent by 2010 and 10 percent by 2015, the

2005 report framed the question as such: "What would it take to have five percent of American high school students learning Chinese by 2015?"—an admittedly more modest and realistic goal, particularly given the growth in interest in Chinese language education in the intervening four years.

In the years since then, the following additional reports were produced and published by the Society.

- "Creating a Chinese Language Program in Your School: An Introductory Guide" (2006).
- (with The College Board) "Chinese in 2008: An Expanding Field"—an overview of the current state of the Chinese language field in general.
- "Learning Chinese in American Schools" (2009)—a DVD distributed at no charge other than shipping, with funding being provided by *Hanban*.
- "Meeting the Challenge: Preparing Chinese Language Teachers for American Schools" (2010).

Besides Stewart, a critical contributor to all of the above reports and products was Dr. Shuhan Wang, who served as Executive Director for Chinese Language Initiatives at the Asia Society between 2006 and 2009.

But while all of the above projects have in their own way had an important impact on the continuing development of the Chinese language educational field, a relatively new one, undertaken jointly with the *Hanban*, may provide an even more comprehensive developmental mechanism for K-12 Chinese language teaching in the United States.

"Asia Society's Confucius Classrooms will be a national network of 100 exemplary Chinese language programs over the next three years…Asia Society will identify, through a competitive process, schools that have the potential to grow into exemplary Chinese language programs…Each Confucius Classroom will be linked with a partner school in China to enhance opportunities for language learning…Asia Society's Confucius Classrooms provides the infrastructure for the development of effective and sustainable Chinese language programs for American students…This Network is also the beginning of an ongoing **field-building process** (emphasis mine) with the goal of establishing high-quality, sustainable Chinese language programs in all regions of the United States" (Asia Society 2011a).

What is striking is the explicitness with which Asia Society conceives of this project as one that can build the Chinese language field *in toto*, arguably supplanting the role of the traditional field developmental leaders that come

from the academic sector; namely, professional membership organizations such as the Chinese Language Teachers Association (CLTA) and the Chinese Language Association of Secondary-Elementary Schools (CLASS). And the Confucius Classroom Network represents just one point of collaboration between the American NGO Asia Society and the mainland Chinese government *Hanban*, as will be discussed shortly.

But as was noted in the introduction to this paper, the Asia Society is not the only NGO involved in Chinese language field development. Indeed, the Society has been assuming its leadership role most frequently in concert with another domestic NGO.

The College Board

To all those that work within the academic sector, it would hardly be surprising that The College Board would seek to exert influence on the development of Chinese language education in the United States. In purely quantitative terms, the Board's influence on secondary and tertiary levels of education is vast: it currently "is made up of more than 5,900 of the world's leading educational institutions…Each year, the College Board helps more than seven million students prepare for a successful transition to college through programs and services…including the SAT® and the Advanced Placement Program®" (College Board, 2011a). Far older than the Asia Society (the College Board was founded in 1900), it has been involved in Chinese language education for several decades, beginning with the creation of the SAT II Chinese with Listening subject test in the early 1990s. But in the view of many of those involved with the SAT II Chinese (including the author, who served on the SAT II Chinese Test Development Committee for eight years from 1995 until 2003, including three years as Chair), the SAT II never really moved beyond providing primary service to the Chinese heritage language learner (HLL) community—in principle, the very audience that was not meant to be served by such a testing metric, given the stated focus of the SAT II language tests for assessing achievement by second or foreign language learners of the tested language. What was seen to be needed by many people in the Chinese language educational field was a means to more broadly develop K-12 Chinese language **programs** throughout the United States in a range of demographic settings, both non-heritage and heritage, and to provide both curricular and assessment resources for that process. Certainly one of the best possible and broadly supported means for doing so would be through an Advanced Placement (AP) Course and Exam.

What has been somewhat obscured by the passage of time is that the original impetus for the establishment of the AP came not from within the College Board, but from a number of national organizations and NGOs, including:

- Chinese Language Association of Secondary-Elementary Schools (CLASS).
- Chinese School Association in the United States (CSAUS), the organization of Chinese community schools with primary connections to immigrant populations from mainland China.
- National Council of Associations of Chinese Language Schools (NCACLS), an "organization of organizations," all regionally based and with primary connections to Taiwan immigrant populations.
- National Council of Organizations of Less Commonly Taught Languages (NCOLCTL), hosted by the National Foreign Language Center (NFLC) until 2003, and which served as the organizational home for a three-year (2001-2004) project funded by the Henry Luce Foundation entitled the Chinese Language Field Initiative (CLFI). All three of the aforementioned Chinese language associations (CLASS, CSAUS and NCACLS) as well as CLTA were represented on the National Chinese Language Commission (NCLC), which provided the advisory oversight to CLFI.

In June of 2003, the Board of Trustees for the College Board approved a plan to implement four new AP courses and examinations: Chinese, Italian, Japanese, and Russian. As part of the initial planning process for the establishment of the AP Chinese, the College Board and Asia Society put together their first joint venture, in the form of an invitational meeting to present and discuss the preliminary plans for the Chinese AP. Prior to that meeting at the Asia Society on September 16, 2003, at the annual meeting of the NCLC in August 2003, a position paper was drafted, revised, and ultimately presented to the invited participants prior to their arrival at the September meeting. In that position paper, the NCLC stated their view that "no issue is of greater importance at this time to all Chinese language teachers and students in the United States than the establishment of an AP for Chinese" (McGinnis et al, 2003). Four primary conditions or rationales supporting its establishment were presented.

- **Potential market.** Based on data gathered by the two national HLL Chinese associations and the Secondary School Chinese Language Center (SSCLC) at Princeton University, a pipeline of potential

participants in a Chinese AP Course and Exam was estimated to be well over 150,000 students.

- **No single existing curricular model.** Given the multiplicity of state and local regulations governing curricula in the public school, the only arguable means of being able to articulate both horizontally (across K-12 instructional settings, including Chinese community schools) and vertically (that is, into higher educational programs) would be a commonly agreed-upon "capstone" sort of course such as the AP.
- **No single existing assessment tool.** Even while a number of domestically- and foreign-produced assessment metrics were in existence already at that time, they were not tied to a particular curriculum, measuring instead more general, global proficiency. The then relatively recent (1999) development of the Chinese National Standards by CLASS provided a framework that could help shape the content of the proposed AP Course as well as the attendant Exam.
- **Lack of broad-based professional development, both pre-service and in-service.** As has been stated for many years by a number of experts in a number of settings, the greatest impediment to the development of any LCTL field is the lack of well-qualified teachers; Chinese most definitely included.

In examining the initiatives undertaken by the College Board since the announcement of the plans to develop an AP for Chinese Language and Culture, it is interesting to examine how the Board, albeit certainly not in direct emulation of the points presented in the NCLC position paper, nonetheless mirrored and responded to the challenges implicit in those stated conditions and rationales.

- **Potential market.** The College Board conducted its own survey in 2004, in the process determining that nearly 2,400 high schools expressed an interest in offering the AP Chinese course in 2006-07 (College Board, 2011c).
- **No single existing curricular model.** Various resources in support of the AP Chinese Language and Culture Course are now available online, either free or for purchase, including course descriptions with audio files, a teacher's guide, and sample syllabi.
- **No single existing assessment tool.** In addition to the actual AP Chinese Exam that is revised on an annual basis, online resources are available for support of teachers and students for the AP Chinese Exam, including a complete released exam.

- **Lack of broad-based professional development, both pre-service and in-service.** It is probably in this regard that the College Board, in collaboration with the *Hanban*, has made the greatest efforts towards providing support of all sorts in response to the lack of highly qualified teachers of Chinese in the United States. In a lengthy press release dated April 19, 2006, it was reported (in part):
  "A five-year plan to collaborate on a new Chinese Language and Culture Initiative was announced today by China's National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language (Hanban) and the College Board.… The initiative will address the critical shortage of teachers of Chinese in the United States…expand professional development for teachers…. In an AP survey conducted in 2004, nearly 2,400 high schools expressed an interest in offering the AP Chinese course in 2006-07, but for many of these schools, this goal may go unrealized. They either are understaffed or have no teacher of Chinese, and many see no prospect of finding the teachers necessary to build their programs…the plan announced today will temporarily place 150 guest teachers from China in American classrooms over the next three years…the plan will also enable the College Board to support nearly 300 American teacher candidates in their efforts to attain state certification to teach Chinese….These programs will expand to include greater numbers of teachers…in the coming years. In all, nearly 600 American teachers of Chinese will have access to these programs over the next five years" (College Board 2011d).

What was immediately apparent and continues to this day is the multi-prong approach taken by the College Board and *Hanban* to address the teacher shortage problem via both tactical and strategic means. Clearly the "guest teacher" concept only fills immediate needs; long-term plans have to include professional development for both pre-service and in-service Chinese language teachers, including teacher certification pathways and opportunities for language immersion experience. One can see the continuation of the original 2006 "model" in an examination of current professional development opportunities from the AP Central Chinese website.

> **"About the College Board's Chinese Language and Culture Initiatives**
> **Chinese Bridge Delegation to China.** Join school and district leaders for a one-week educational tour to China…

> **Chinese Guest Teacher Program.** Host a qualified teacher from China for up to three years; start or expand Chinese programs efficiently and affordably…
> **Summer Institutes in China.** Apply for a scholarship to attend intensive AP and Pre-AP® Summer Institutes in China." (College Board 2011c).

The addition of the "Chinese Bridge" program is comparable to the "soft diplomacy" approach by the mainland Chinese government reflected in the rapidly proliferating Confucius Institutes continuing to expand throughout the world—as of early December 2010, numbering a total of 322 individual Confucius Institutes in 96 countries and regions (China Post 2010).

China-based government agency: *Hanban*

As is clearly evident from the above discussion, the *Hanban* is working with both the Asia Society and the College Board in two unique, complementary ways, in the process neither competing for resources nor duplicating effort. With the creation of the Confucius Classrooms program, the focus in their collaboration with Asia Society seems to be more on the material (as in classrooms, curricula and technology) infrastructure development. With the College Board, however, beyond the continuing development of the AP Chinese Course and Exam, the emphasis appears to be more on human resource support and expansion, both for the short- and long-term.

It should be noted that collaborations between a foreign governmental office, either exclusively funded by the foreign government or one with partial governmental support, and an American organization or entity, is not unprecedented. For well over two decades now, the Japan Foundation (primarily through its office in Los Angeles) has provided funding for a range of projects, such as the Standards for Japanese Language Learning, and JOINT (Japanese On-line Instruction Network for Teachers, a professional development support system). The Japan Foundation and its offices throughout the world are supported through a number of funding streams, including Japanese government endowment and annual government subsidies. But grants by the Japan Foundation in the United States have been primarily made to the several professional Japanese language teacher organizations—the Association of Teachers of Japanese (ATJ; comparable to CLTA, with most members teachers of Japanese at colleges and universities), the National Council of Japanese Language Teachers (NCJLT; like CLASS, composed primarily of elementary and secondary school Japanese language teachers), and the Alliance of Associations

of Teachers of Japanese (AATJ; the umbrella administrative office supporting both ATJ and NCJLT). In contrast, the various projects discussed above and funded by the *Hanban*, while ultimately indirectly supporting the goals of both CLTA and CLASS, do not directly financially support the work either Chinese language teachers association.

To its credit, *Hanban* has been an extremely influential force in bringing together a wide range of stakeholders in the development of the Chinese language field in the United States. No place is this more evident than the annual National Chinese Language Conference (NCLC), which will be held for the fourth time in April 2011 in San Francisco. It is once again being jointly organized by Asia Society and the College Board. In only four years, it has grown to drawing nearly 1,000 participants from an ever-increasing range of 19 collaborating organizations and agencies, as represented below, including national membership associations of language supervisors, principals and administrators, a range of NGOs, and the United States Department of Education (Asia Society 2011d).

The 2011 Conference also represents a watershed between the three previous years and this year. In each of the past three years, a separate national "Chinese Education Conference" was hosted by the Chinese American International School (CAIS) in San Francisco. Consistent with the seemingly continuing emphasis on rationalizing economic and other resources, CAIS, through a new NGO of its own dubbed the Mandarin Institute, has joined Asia Society and the College Board to serve as a "collaborator" along with the other 18 entities listed above for the 2011 conference.

The future of sector roles in Chinese language field development

The first decade of the 21st century has seen the beginning of an arguable sea change in the role of the various national capacity sectors in the development of Chinese language education in the United States.

For the federal and private sectors, which are (particularly in the greater Washington, D.C. area) integrally and inextricably linked for many of the critical LCTLs, the role they can and may come to play in the overall Chinese language field development will most likely remain highly circumscribed and comparatively limited in overall field impact.

There is no question that the academic sector and its representative professional language teacher organizations (i.e., CLASS and CLTA) retain a role in the overall progress of field. But economics are a harsh reality, and in the case of CLASS in particular, which does not have sufficient funding to provide a

salary of any sort for its executive director, it is the "kindness of friends" (cf. strangers) such as the Asia Society, College Board and *Hanban* that are integral to their success, or even survival.

As for the heritage sector, the jury remains out at this point. Even while they have come to assume some unique and genuinely important educational roles, such as the aforementioned FWCC programs, the hope that many of us held with the announcement of the AP Chinese—that is, that the AP Chinese Course and Exam would serve as a means of facilitating greater horizontal articulation between the compulsory K-12 educational system and community schools—has only been realized to a very limited degree.

The extremely influential roles, both qualitatively and quantitatively, that the two new sectors of domestic NGOs and foreign governmental entities have already assumed have proven to be both a blessing and a challenge for the Chinese language educational field. On the positive side, that the College Board and Asia Society have seen fit to prioritize Chinese language and culture education reflects well on what will hopefully be a continuing long-term commitment to the health and growth of the field. But the political repercussions that comes with the perception of accepting foreign government support for American public schools from a nation that is and will most likely remain the number one challenge to the continuation of United States leadership in the world—economically, militarily and otherwise—are not inconsiderable.

It is also interesting to note that in addition to the roles being played by the Asia Society and the College Board, there is a third NGO that has begun to emerge, or more accurately, re-emerge. The National Foreign Language Center (NFLC), housed at the University of Maryland, played a series of important roles in the multi-sector development of the field of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. In addition to the previously mentioned Chinese Language Field Initiative, projects from the first two decades in the life of NFLC included:

- Providing advisory and consultative support for the creation of the CLASS in 1987 and NCACLS in 1994.
- Publication of the first major edited volume on Chinese heritage schools in the United States, *A View from Within* (1996).
- Funding of a major project that produced the *NFLC Guide for Basic Chinese Language Programs*, first published in 1997, with a 2nd edition released in 2006.

While the first few years of the 21st century saw a fundamental transformation in the mission and infrastructure of NFLC, what is particularly notable is that since approximately 2005, there has been a significant revival of attention to Chinese language field development initiatives in a number of forms, including:

- *Read Chinese!*, with funding by the United States Department of Education, focusing on online e-learning reading lessons for beginning and intermediate students of Chinese at the secondary school level.
- STARTALK, with funding by the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, supporting summer programs for both students and teachers of a number of LCTLs, Chinese most prominently included, as well as a website with access to online resources including curriculum development programs, classroom video collections, bibliographic lists of language-specific materials, and lesson plan templates.
- The hiring in 2010 of Dr. Shuhan Wang, formerly Executive Director for Chinese Language Initiatives at the Asia Society, as NFLC Deputy Director—the first hiring of a Chinese language specialist as a full-time staff member at NFLC in nearly a decade.

It would not be at all inappropriate for NFLC, where Brecht and Walton first developed their sector analytical model, to rejoin the ranks of the NGOs truly leading the Chinese language field.

Conclusion

The last half of the 20th century was marked with a remarkable degree of regularity in the appearance and development of two LCTL fields—Russian in the late 1950s and throughout the 1960s, and Japanese in the 1980s. In large part, what has enabled teachers of these two languages to sustain their fields in the face of major world changes, either political (the breakup of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European Communist Bloc) or economic (the significant economic downturn for Japan in the 1990s), has been in the ways that they have taken control of their field's enhancement—or sometimes even survival. In the case of Russian, it was made possible by the creation of an entirely new organization, the American Council of Teachers of Russian, separate from the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL), in some ways similar to the genesis of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, which was constituted out of a subset of members of the Modern Language Association. For Japanese, the very different teaching

environments and professional demands prompted first the formation of a completely separate organization for K-12 teachers, the National Council of Japanese Language Teachers (NCJLT), which then later joined with the older, primarily higher education-focused Association of Teachers of Japanese (ATJ) to establish the Alliance of Associations of Teachers of Japanese (AATJ)—an initially tactical, but over time strategic approach to rationalize relatively meager resources.

As a veteran (or survivor) of over two decades of seeing Chinese emerge as the Russian or Japanese of the first quarter of the 21st century, I can say with considerable confidence that neither such model—that is, an ACTR for the Chinese language field, or an AATJ-type alliance of the existing Chinese language teacher organizations and teacher-supporting agencies (e.g., the National East Asian Language Resource Center at Ohio State University)—is possible in the near (and very likely far) distant future. The challenge that therefore remains is that lacking the organizational glue to truly help shape the Chinese language pedagogical field *in toto*, what can the existing professional organizations do to provide some sort of coherence to the field's development? Otherwise, we as teachers and students of Chinese will be beholden to those with the most resources at their disposal; namely, the Asia Society, College Board, *Hanban*, and increasingly, NFLC. However good their intentions, Chinese language education is only part of their agenda. As Chinese language educators, it *is* our agenda.

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