

Book Review: Jiening Ruan, Jie Zhang, and Cynthia B. Leung (Eds.). (2015). *Chinese Language Education in the United States*. Springer.

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This co-edited book strives to trace the development of the teaching and learning of Chinese as a foreign language (CFL) in the United States, identify major sociocultural factors at play, and further weave these factors into the larger picture of the evolution of CFL. Since the offering of the first Chinese class in the U.S. in 1871 (Yao & Zhang, 2010, as cited in Ruan et al., 2015, p. ix), the new millennium has witnessed burgeoning growth of CFL programs along with the thriving economic, political, and cultural power of the People's Republic of China. On the one hand, CFL education faces the urgent need to attend to the unprecedented diversity in an expanding population of learners from around the globe. As inclusion becomes increasingly salient in language education, it is thus crucial to explore the future directions of CFL as a developing field to make CFL education more accessible to learners of various linguistic and cultural backgrounds. On the other hand, a lack of scholarship on the historical development of Chinese language education in the global context has been a

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glaring issue that needs immediate attention. This book, focusing on the U.S., succeeds at filling this gap by addressing critical theoretical, pedagogical, and sociocultural issues in the development of CFL from a global perspective, thus constituting a welcome addition to CFL studies.

This interdisciplinary volume consists of 12 chapters, each being an independent study that addresses one particular aspect of Chinese language education in the United States. Chapters 1 to 3 are devoted to the theoretical discussions of language policy making by teasing out influential historical, political, and social factors that have contributed to or hindered the development of CFL in the U.S. Chapters 4 to 12 further tackle a wide range of critical issues in CFL pedagogy and teacher training, including curriculum design for heritage learners, discussions on medium-of-instruction, and pedagogical adjustment in cross-cultural contexts. Overall, Chinese language educators with expertise in multiple disciplines join forces and offer insights into theoretical discussions as well as practical suggestions on the development of CFL education in this increasingly globalized world.

The volume starts with Chapter 1 by Wenxia Wang and Jiening Ruan, which aims to provide an overview of the history of Chinese language education for non-native speakers. The authors traced the development of CFL from its origin in ancient China, the introduction of CFL to the U.S. in 1871, to its rapid expansion in the U.S. since the turn of the 21st century. From an ecological perspective, the authors argued that various forces in the domains of politics, society, and culture interact with each other to form the ecology of Chinese language education in the two countries. The authors point out how religious activities, especially those of Buddhism and Christianity, serve a significant role in motivating the development of CFL in the early days. In addition, the authors also noted the impact of bottom-up forces, as CFL education in both countries was initiated by individuals and groups at the grassroots level to accomplish their practical purposes, such as trade activities and the spreading of religions. Thus, this chapter offers a useful

historical account of both top-down and bottom-up initiatives and factors behind the fluctuations of the development of CFL education in both China and the U.S.

Chapter 2 by Shuai Li and Jianqin Wang seeks to investigate the language education initiatives implemented by the Chinese government to promote the globalization of the Chinese language over the past few decades, which substantially contribute to the development of Chinese language education in the U.S. This chapter starts with an analysis of a major shift in the policy-making of the Chinese government from catering to the foreign students that study abroad in China to facilitating the international popularization of Chinese. The authors introduced a series of current policies issued by government institutions, such as building the Confucius Institute network, sponsoring the development of educational resources, as well as promoting teacher training programs. While acknowledging the positive influence of these governmental efforts, the authors have also observed continuing “shortages of qualified teachers, appropriate teaching methods, and suitable teaching materials” (p. 29). From the perspective of the economics of language, the authors pointed out that the monopolistic role of the Chinese government policies excludes the potential contributions from other parties, such as non-profit organizations and private sectors, and thus limits the efficacy of these policies and initiatives. The authors concluded the chapter by calling for the collaboration of different stakeholders for future popularization of the Chinese language.

Following Chapter 2, the third chapter by Jin'ai Sun and Roger Shouse investigates CFL-related policies and initiatives in the K-12 and post-secondary sectors in the United States. The authors summarized three major motivations for CFL education, including national competitiveness, individual academic development, as well as a general appreciation for the Chinese language and culture. The authors argue that compared to the other foreign languages, the development of CFL in the United States is especially constrained by the government's cautious political position towards China and the negative

perceptions of China reinforced by institutions and media. In the third decade of the 21st century, as China-U.S. relations continue to be strained since the inception of the trade war in 2018, the issues discussed in this chapter seem particularly relevant. In order to overcome the political obstacles facing CFL in the U.S., as the authors suggested, the role of educational institutions in fostering cultural understanding and exchange seems particularly important.

Chapter 4 by Jie Zhang, adopting a perspective of second language acquisition (SLA), reviews major theories of CFL with a focus on the following three issues. First, the author examined the SLA literature that describes and measures the theoretical construct of “learner language”, with particular reference to proficiency. The author also noted a recent trend in expanding the scope of the definition of learner language, which includes not only linguistic features but also pragmatics and sociocultural knowledge. The second key theoretical notion explored in this chapter is “second language learning”, where the author introduced two major approaches to the acquisition of L2. The cognitive-interactionist camp looks into how the cognition of L2 learners processes the language input in the environment, while the social-oriented studies approach SLA by situating language learning in the context of social interactions. Lastly, the author introduced the scholarship on L2 learners, which aims at determining how differences in age, aptitude, motivation, and affect among individual learners influence the acquisition of L2. In addition to the theoretical discussions, this chapter also sheds light on how we can apply the theories and findings of SLA research to language pedagogy. The author suggested that CFL teachers should set up realistic expectations and create a student-centered learning environment.

Chapter 5 by Danping Wang analyzes the policies and practices related to the medium-of-instruction (MoI) in CSL education in China. The author traced the historical development of MoI policies and observed a transfer from a monolingual model with the Chinese-only policy to an eclectic paradigm, which allows appropriate use of the L1 to facilitate communication with students, especially

those with relatively low proficiency levels. The choice of the MoI in the eclectic approach, however, is also in dispute. According to the author, while English serves as the most frequently adopted MoI in CSL teaching in China, some instructors are reluctant to use English due to concerns about the threat of English to the purity of Chinese. Although this chapter is mainly focused on MoI policies in China, the discussions offered here have valuable implications for CFL in the U.S. as well. As the author pinpointed the phenomenon of improper use of English and linguistic terms in Chinese language classrooms overseas, she highlighted the necessity of more substantial theoretical and pedagogical discussions on MoI practices in the U.S.

In Chapter 6, the author, Yongan Wu, surveyed the application of computer-assisted language learning (CALL) technologies in CFL education and described the development of classroom technology. Since CALL was first introduced into CFL by Chinese language teachers in the U.S. and since cutting-edge technologies in the U.S. have been naturally integrated into Chinese language classrooms, this chapter draws attention to an increasingly important area of CFL worldwide. In examining the advantages of advanced technologies, the author especially pointed out possible technology-related challenges faced by CFL teachers and learners. According to the author, the development of CALL has gone through three phases, Behavioristic CALL, Communicative CALL, and Integrative CALL, the development of which aligns with the evolution of language pedagogy theories. In CFL classrooms, CALL has been applied to the study of Chinese orthography, vocabulary learning, creating online learning communities, and so forth. The author also emphasized the increasing prominence of the Internet and mobile devices in CALL. Here, although the author introduced distance education with the help of CALL only as an alternative to in-person language classes, the COVID-19 pandemic no doubt demonstrates the essential role of technology in language education when virtual classrooms often become the only viable option. Nonetheless, as the chapter indicates, the development of CALL is also subject to

various constraints, such as the accessibility of technology, which is a critical issue in the building of a more inclusive learning environment.

Chapter 7 by Ke Peng presents a review of the achievements and challenges of CFL programs in K-12 schools in the U.S. The chapter first reports the increasing demand for CFL programs in elementary and middle schools in recent years. Such growth of CFL study in K-12 education can to a large extent be attributed to government initiatives and institutional support. In addition, the active efforts by Chinese language teachers to integrate established national and state standards into their teaching also help improve the existing CFL curriculum at the K-12 level. A variety of innovative language teaching models, such as exploratory (Foreign Language Experience of Exploratory), language focus (Foreign Language in the Elementary School), and immersion programs, have also brought positive changes to the development of CFL. However, the author also highlighted the barriers that CFL education must overcome, including a shortage of qualified teachers and a lack of systematic coordination of CFL programs. This chapter thus concludes with the hope of more articulated Chinese programs delivered in more innovative ways to accommodate the different needs of students from diverse backgrounds.

The authors of Chapter 8, Yu Li and Zheng-sheng Zhang, offered a critical investigation of the CFL education for non-heritage learners at the post-secondary level in the U.S. Despite the accomplishments in CFL teaching, the authors underscored a number of critical issues that impede further development of CFL curricular planning and instruction. First of all, in contrast to the significance of content and proficiency standards in language curriculum, a large number of CFL programs are still textbook-based. In addition, this chapter also pinpoints the limitations of the scope and sequence of existing CFL programs, taking the lack of interdisciplinary curricula as a typical example. At this level of instruction, the authors also argue that discrepancies between theory and practice still remain, especially due to a shortage of qualified CFL teachers. This chapter thus calls

for further standardization of content and proficiency measurement in the CFL curriculum and tighter integration of cultural perspectives and interdisciplinary perspectives into CFL instruction at the college level.

Chapter 9 by Xuehua Xiang examines the field of teaching Chinese as a heritage language (TCHL) at the college level in the context of the United States. The objective of this chapter is two-fold. Theoretically, this chapter draws on frameworks from second language acquisition and sociolinguistics to discuss the CFL education for heritage language learners (HLL). The author first advocated for an elastic definition of HLL to include a diversified group of students with individual differences. The author also stressed the different focuses of post-secondary CFL education from community-based Chinese schools for children in immigrant families and points out the possible social stigma associated with dialects in Chinese classrooms, both of which may have negative impacts on the motivations of HLLs. Furthermore, this chapter also reviews research on the dynamic nature and complexity of the bilingual identity of HLLs. The second aim of this chapter is a pedagogical one. The author provided practical suggestions in the aspects of proficiency assessment, learning goals, teaching approaches, incorporation of discourse-oriented grammar, and so forth. The chapter also indicates future directions of research of TCHL as a developing field.

Chapter 10 by Li Jin draws our attention to Chinese language learning in the study abroad programs organized by American universities. The author first analyzed major models of study abroad programs in mainland China and summarized common features among different programs, such as a prerequisite for language proficiency in summer programs. Second, the author offered a critical review of literature on language learning in the context of study abroad environments and identified a gap in research on the development of pragmatics and identity-related variables. The chapter concludes with pedagogical implications for the design and instruction of Chinese study abroad programs. The author suggested a three-pronged pedagogical approach for US-originated study abroad

programs in China, which covers pre-program preparation, during-program induction, and post-program reflection.

In response to the need for qualified language educators in the U.S., the last two chapters of the book focus on the preparation and training of CFL teachers. Chapter 11 by Wenyang Zhou and Guofang Li reviews the difficulties in pedagogical adjustment and classroom management that newly arriving CFL teachers have encountered after coming to the U.S. The authors found that different teaching ideologies, educational systems, cultural values, and instruction strategies in cross-cultural contexts can all lead to challenges for CFL teachers with no prior experience with American culture. Therefore, as argued in the last section of this chapter, both CFL teachers and teacher training programs should raise awareness of differences in both instruction styles and pedagogical approaches between China and the U.S. to better prepare for cross-cultural teaching. Following Chapter 11, Chapter 12 by Michael E. Everson investigates the challenges in the development of CFL teacher training programs by situating CFL within the context of the U.S. educational system. Furthermore, Chapter 12 provides a series of suggestions on reforming the current CFL teacher preparation systems, such as identifying a core body of skills for teachers to master, standardizing teaching certification requirements, and promoting preservice field practicum.

In summary, this book not only offers rich theoretical discussions on the evolution of Chinese language education in the U.S. from a cross-disciplinary perspective, but also suggests a number of future directions of CFL in terms of adapting to a globalized learning community and meeting the needs of learners from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The authors offer pedagogical insights into how to tailor instructional approaches according to the variation in age, identity, and aptitude of students to make CFL classrooms more inclusive. In addition, by closely examining the accomplishments and challenges of CFL in the U.S., this book situates CFL in the larger sociocultural context and reveals that popularization of the Chinese language relies critically on mutual efforts

of governments, academic institutions, and educators. Thus, this book also has valuable implications for policy making in CFL beyond the classroom. The insights offered by this book may be particularly beneficial to current Chinese language teachers, scholars in second language acquisition and language pedagogy, language policymakers, as well as CFL curriculum designers.

Apart from the significant contributions, this book could have achieved more if it had shed more light on how to improve the inclusiveness of CFL classrooms in light of the theme of this special issue. While the authors identified the increasing diversity in CFL learners and programs, this book does not seem to particularly address the variations in the ethnic and linguistic backgrounds among the CFL learners in the U.S. For instance, despite the extremely multilingual and multicultural context of the United States, this book seems to have paid limited attention to the large population of CFL learners in the U.S. who natively speak other languages rather than American English. In addition, the definition of Chinese here is rather ambivalent with a lack of discussions on the linguistic varieties under the broader term “Chinese language”. For instance, this book does not look into the design of Chinese curriculums in the U.S. that often involves decision-making and considerations regarding different varieties of Chinese in both speech and writing, such as simplified vs. traditional characters as well as Mainland Mandarin vs. Taiwanese Mandarin. Furthermore, although Chapter 2 briefly discusses the shortage of qualified teachers and course materials, the book would be even more helpful for policymakers and program leaders if it had presented more research on the allocation of CFL educational resources and offer more discussions on how to improve the accessibility of CFL to learners from underrepresented groups given the rising awareness of inclusive education in the U.S. and elsewhere.

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