

Discussion on the First Lesson in Chinese Characters Teaching to the Foreign Students*

Leixin Su

International College of Northwest A&F University, YangLing, ShaanXi 712100, China

Zhu Zeng

International College of Northwest A&F University, YangLing, ShaanXi 712100, China

Abstract—Beginning with the teaching design of the first Chinese characters lesson to foreign students, from the excitement of foreign students' interest in Chinese characters learning, relieving their psychological fear of it, the meaning of Chinese characters learning, and establishing a correct concept of Chinese characters, step by step, the aim of this article is to help foreign students understand Chinese characters, lead the students to learn Chinese characters easily and happily, and reach the ideal teaching effect finally.

Index Terms—foreign students, the first lesson, Chinese characters teaching

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, teaching Chinese as a second language has made a considerable development in China, and also made remarkable achievements. Then no need for reticence, that "Chinese characters is difficult to learn" is an issue we have to face, seems to become a universally accepted theory, a lot of foreign students have accepted it before they come to China. This existing pessimistic attitude not only brings a negative effect on Chinese Learners, but also plays a great negative role for international Chinese dissemination. That "Chinese characters is difficult to learn" is lack of convincing reason, and it is a false proposition (Li Quan 2010). The Chinese characters have a the deficiencies of nature that we can see the shape of it ,but can't know its pronunciation, which is also reflected in teaching practice, especially in the initial stage of learning Chinese characters, and it is different from the language of Phonics, like English. Certainly, according to that we can't make the final conclusion that "Chinese characters is difficult to learn", but we can't also underestimate that this existing pessimistic attitude bring a negative effect on Chinese Learners and play a great negative role for international Chinese dissemination.

It is not easy to learn Chinese characters, especially for the learners whose mother tongue is a phonetic writing. However, it can't be avoided in the conventional Chinese learning. Cui Yonghua (2008) pointed out, the ability of Chinese characters is the basic condition of Chinese learning; the ability of Chinese characters is the key of Chinese words accumulation, that if we solve the problem of Chinese character teaching well will be very important to improve the efficiency of Chinese teaching. The Chinese teaching practice proves that Chinese character is the key factor to affect the confidence, process, efficiency and Chinese level of Chinese learners, the success or failure of Chinese learning depends largely on the success or failure of Chinese characters. The breakthrough of Chinese character teaching is the breakthrough of Chinese language teaching.

Previous research about teaching of Chinese characters has achieved fruitful results (Chen Fu 1998, Lv Bisong 1999, Wan Yexin 2004, Sun Dejin 2006, Zhou Jian 2007, Zhao Jinming 2008, etc.) These studies Mainly concentrated in the Chinese character teaching principle, teaching method research, structure characteristic analysis of Chinese characters, Chinese character acquisition error analysis, etc. To some extent, the first lesson is very important for the foreigners in the Chinese characters learning. According to the author's teaching experience, this paper try to start from first Chinese characters lesson to foreign students, to stimulate foreign students' interests in learning Chinese characters, to help them overcome the blind fear of Chinese characters, and to establish a correct concept which is "Chinese characters can be learned and deserve to be learned".

II. TO STIMULATE FOREIGN STUDENTS' INTERESTS IN LEARNING CHINESE CHARACTERS

A. *Let Foreign Students Understand Chinese Characters Is a Kind of Interesting Character*

As a ideogram, Chinese characters have a lot of interests, so it can be explained full of wit and humor by teachers in the class.

In the first class, teacher can show the evolution of Chinese characters by image and text. It helps foreign students understand Chinese characters and cultivate their interest in Chinese characters. Because it is the first Chinese

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characters lesson, students know nothing about it, so we should choose simple and easy to understand materials for them. Such as pictograph, we can use the ancient Chinese characters to let the students combine the characters and pictures. For example "车" (car), teacher can show all script forms of "车" and the pictures of the ancient Chinese car on PPT, and encourage students to write it, let the students experience the evolution of Chinese characters directly. Another example is "明" (bright), it's a associative compounds. First, we can show the pictures and ancient script forms of "日" (sun) and "月" (moon), because "日" and "月" are pictograph, from ancient time to now the change is not big, and the outline is clear. Students can roughly guess the meaning of them, and the combination of "日" and "月" is "明".

B. *Let Foreign Students Feel the Beauty of Chinese Characters*

Although Chinese Characters only have 5 basic strokes, which are“丶 一 | 丿 ㇇”, but they become the most beautiful words in the world, because of their unique Line beauty and Structural beauty. They have an external form of beauty which phonographic alphabet haven't. By allowing foreign students feel the beauty of Chinese characters, to stimulate their interest in learning Chinese characters.

As mentioned above, foreign students have initially felt the Chinese characters similar to the picture when teacher show the evolution of Chinese characters by image and text. Teacher can also tell the students that the process of the evolution of Chinese characters is actually a beautification process. From ancient times to now, Chinese characters changed from picture writing to square writing, the strokes are very standard simple and smooth. Chinese characters formed a unique style of art in the long history of evolution, because of many reasons and conditions, but the most important reason is Chinese characters contain aesthetic features by themselves. (Dong Kun, 1996) In the first Chinese characters lesson teacher is necessary to show the famous calligraphy works to the students, it is need to pay attention to both the soft pen calligraphy and hard pen calligraphy. At the same time, pay attention to the evolution of Shang and Zhou ancient text, seal character, official script, regular script and other Chinese characters form. Such as teachers can take the character "马" (horse) as an example, Show "马" in different fonts, let students talk about the feelings of different fonts, and improve their understanding and interest of Chinese Calligraphy.

Teacher can also show the Chinese characters written by foreign students before, Of course, these works are good and bad. Although it is not really start learning Chinese characters, but in the process of comparison, they can distinguish between beauty or ugliness, good or bad. Let the students participate in the evaluation, and talk about their feelings. In the right time, teacher should encourage students to write good Chinese characters, to write standard and beautiful Chinese characters.

C. *Let Foreign Students Feel the Chinese Culture Contained in Chinese Characters*

Chinese character is the root of Chinese culture, In the first lesson, teacher can also inspire foreign students to learn Chinese characters by Chinese culture contained in Chinese characters.

Each Chinese character is a picture of Chinese history and culture, and the Chinese character can be regarded as the carrier of cultural information by itself. In the class, teacher should tell the students that there are a lot of historical and cultural information in the ancient Chinese vocabulary, especially the shape of Chinese characters, It records the cultural meanings of words, and give examples. Such as “好” (good) constitute by “女” and “子” from Oracle-Bone Inscription, in the character “女” is bigger than “子”, which means mother and child, and can also be understood as primary and secondary relationship. “Origin of Chinese Characters” explain “好 means 美” (beautiful). “美” constitute by “羊” (sheep) and “大” (big), in Oracle-Bone Inscription “美” is a standing person wearing a feather headdress, simplified Chinese characters written as “羊” and “大” is a mistake. In addition, Chinese Characters often used homophonic, In the Spring Festival, people paste Chinese Character “福” (good fortune) upside down, because it sounds like “good fortune is coming”. People eat “Niangao”, because it sounds like “Increased every year.”

In the first lesson, teacher need to show the cultural significance contained by Chinese characters to the foreign students, at the same time, teacher can also introduce Chinese characters influence in the world, to foster a sense of the cultural awareness and cultural identity, in order to stimulate their interest in learning Chinese characters. For example, as early as in the Sui and Tang Dynasties, Chinese characters spread to Korea and Japan with diplomatic relations, and made a positive and far-reaching impact on their culture. China's neighbors such as Vietnam and other Southeast Asian countries also deeply influenced by Chinese characters. For a long time, in East Asia has formed a “Chinese character culture circle”. Today, not only the Chinese people's social life cannot be separated from the Chinese characters, and the social life of Korean, Japanese and Singaporean is also the same, Chinese characters play an important role in inheriting civilization and spreading culture.

III. REDUCE THE FEAR OF FOREIGN STUDENTS IN LEARNING CHINESE CHARACTERS

A. *To Establish a Correct View about the Number of Chinese Characters*

The number of Chinese characters is very big, but some of them are not used frequently. There are only more than 3000 Chinese characters will be commonly used in daily life. These characters covering 99.9% words in general books. For the vast majority of learners, to learn one thousand or two thousand Chinese characters is enough. (Liu

Yanmei,2014) It is necessary to set up this correct view about the number of Chinese characters. Foreign students will produce the idea of "Chinese characters are difficult to learn", the large number of Chinese characters is also one of the reasons, Therefore, we should first get rid of the learners psychological fear about the number of Chinese characters, to distinguish the actual number of Chinese characters and the number of Chinese characters to be learned. (Li Quan, Ruan Chang, 2012) To tell students no need to worry about the number of Chinese characters in the first lesson. In addition, we also can from a native speaker's perspective, to tell the students that even learning Chinese from a young age, we cannot recognize all the Chinese characters, some of the Chinese characters are not commonly used and rare words, for teachers, also need to refer to the dictionary. Teacher can ease the fear of foreign students in this way.

B. Chinese Characters Stroke Order and Structure Have Regularity

Strokes are the lines use for construct Chinese characters, it's the smallest unit of Chinese characters. In modern Chinese the smallest Chinese character only have one stroke, such as “一, 乙” etc., and in modern Chinese Dictionary the most strokes of Chinese character is “龘”, the pronunciation is “nàng”, it has 36 strokes. When foreign students see a complex Chinese character has a lot of strokes, may cause fear to write these Chinese characters also. Therefore, teacher should tell them, the strokes of Chinese characters is fixed, the stroke order and the structure also has a lot of rules. Compare with English, when we learn 26 English alphabet, we can write English words, it's same in Chinese, if we master the order of Chinese characters strokes and structure, the writing of Chinese characters will not be difficult.

For example, Chinese Characters have 5 basic strokes: 丶 一 | 丿 ㇇, on this basis, there are 26 different shapes about these 5 strokes. (Su Peicheng, 1994) In the first lesson we should tell students that there are some basic orders when we write Chinese Characters, such as 1. “一” before “丨”, e.g. 十, 干, 丰. 2. “丿” before “㇇”, e.g. 八, 人, 入. 3. From top to bottom, e.g. 三, 京, 高. 4. From left to right, e.g. 川, 衍, 做. 5. From the outer to the inner, e.g. 月, 匀, 同. 6. The middle before two sides, e.g. 小, 水, 办. 7. Inside before surround, e.g. 回, 目, 国.

In addition, we can also show the Chinese characters regularity for foreign students in terms of structure, Chinese characters can be divided into Single-component characters and Multi-component characters from the structural point. Single-component characters only have one independent, integral part, such as 一, 人, 书, 乙, 水, 牛, etc.. The proportion of Single-component characters is not much, there are 280 Single-component characters in “Simplified Chinese Single-component characters table”, but most of them are very common to use, we need to master them, because they are often an integral part of compound characters. Compound characters consists of two or more parts, like above mentioned characters “龘”, teacher can ask students this character consists how many parts, When students answer correctly, teacher should encourage and praise them, let them reduce their fear of Chinese characters. And then introduce the structure of multi-component characters. Such as 1. Left-right structure: 你, 汉, 的; 2. Top-bottom structure: 字, 写, 是; 3. Enclosed structure: 厅, 起, 这 (enclosed on both sides), 风, 同, 医 (enclosed from three sides), 国, 因, 困 (enclosed from four sides).

3.3 The split and combination about multi-component characters' component

Most Chinese characters are multi-component characters, and these characters are composed of two or more components, it seems difficult to remember, but if you observe them carefully, it's easy to find that a lot of multi-component characters are composed of some single-component characters, such as “龘”, because of we studied one multi-component character, we will learn a few single-component characters at the same time, then Chinese characters is not as difficult as we imagine. Another example is “意”, this character is composed of “立” “日” “心”, and when “立” “日” composed together, It's another Chinese character “音”, it means when we master the character “意”, actually we can learn 5 different characters. Another fantastic character is “树”, this character is composed of “木” “又” “寸”, and these three components can combined into three characters (“权” “对” “村”) by each two of them. it means when we master the character “树”, actually we can learn 7 different characters. It is very interesting to split and compose Chinese characters, and the study in this process becomes easy and happy.

C. The Meaning Radicals and the Phonetic Radicals of Pictophonetic Characters

According to the statistics, more than 80% of Chinese characters are pictophonetic, Obviously it is the main characters, and also the focus of teaching. Pictophonetic characters always grouped together because of the same meaning radials or phonetic radials. In the first lesson, in order to give foreign students such a recognition that "Chinese characters have a strong regularity", we can put some characters (pictophonetic) which have some kind of contact together, according to the combination rule of Chinese characters, and give some examples, to let students recognize the rules of Chinese Characters, and reduce their fears of study. For example “江, 河, 湖, 海” these characters, we can let the students find out the common ground of them, and then let they guess the meaning of “氵” after giving affirmation for students' correct answer. Finally by the explanation of “氵”, let students to know this meaning radials have relationship with “water”, when they meet other characters like “汗, 滴, 流”, etc. they will know these characters also have relationship with water. Another example is “我”, the students have studied this character in other courses before, first, teacher can let students write down the Pinyin of “我”, And read it out, then show them some other characters like “鹅, 蛾, 哦, 娥, 峨, 俄, 饿”, etc. It's easy to find out the common ground of these characters is

“我”,and then tell the students that the pronunciation of these words is similar, “我”is the phonetic radicals for them, so if meet a character like this, we can roughly guess it's pronunciation.

IV. THE BENEFITS OF FOREIGN STUDENTS LEARNING CHINESE CHARACTERS

From the above we discussed the teaching contents of the first Chinese characters lesson from two aspects, that is to stimulate interest in learning and to reduce the psychological fear. On the basis of this, we need to tell them the benefits of learning Chinese characters.

A. *It Is Good for Learning Other Chinese Language Courses*

Generally speaking, the foreign students who learning Chinese at the beginning, they not only need to learn the Chinese comprehensive course, but also need to learn listening, speaking, reading, writing and other basic skill courses. These Chinese courses are not isolated from each other, but have a close relationship with each other. The learning effect of one course will affect the other courses' learning, and the most typical one is Chinese characters course. Chinese characters as the written expression form of Chinese language, that you learn Chinese characters well will be very helpful for other Chinese language courses' learning. For example, May be a lot of spoken language learners believe that Chinese characters is not important, they can learn them or not, and only to learn spoken language is enough. However, learning Chinese characters will take all good result for spoken Chinese learning undoubtedly. Oral language and written language are the two most common forms of expression, mutual influence between the both is obvious, Foreign students to learn Chinese characters will enable the expression of spoken Chinese more proficient and authentic.

B. *Avoid Some Mistakes about Chinese Language*

In the first Chinese characters lesson, also need to give some examples and let foreign students understand that if they do not learn Chinese characters, may often make a variety of jokes in daily life. For example, there is a foreigner who knows a little Chinese, and he has a chat with Chinese friends, saying that the Chinese people are not modest. "Chinese people are very good, China Construction is very good, China Industrial and Commercial is very good, China Agriculture is very good, even China is very good" can be seen everywhere on the street, and point to a brand not far away at the same time. Originally, the brand which the foreigner pointed is a bank, because of “银” looks like “很”, and “行” has two different pronunciations, except xíng, we also can read h áng, “银行” is bank, “很行” is good, which foreigner could not distinguish, the Chinese friend listen to laugh. Through the joke, let the foreign students understand that if they can't learn Chinese characters may also make a similar mistake.

C. *Learn Chinese Character Well Can Help Them Understand Chinese Culture Better*

Chinese characters are the root of Chinese culture, and an important part of Chinese culture. In addition, Chinese characters also are the information carrier of Chinese culture. Xu Shen said in “Origin of Chinese Characters”, “The character is the basic of teaching knowledge and skills, it's the beginning of politics, and the way of the communication between the past and the future generations.” This classic comments, both pointed out Chinese characters is a tool for communication, but also play a very important role for the inherit of ideology and culture. If foreign students to learn Chinese characters, they can understand Chinese culture better and deeper.

V. FOREIGN STUDENTS SHOULD ESTABLISH A CORRECT VIEW OF CHINESE CHARACTERS LEARNING

A. *The First Step Is Always Difficult*

“Everything is difficult at the start”, Chinese character learning is no exception. As a kind of ideographic, Chinese characters are very different with phonographic. So, whether students from European and American, or students from Japan and Korea, at the beginning of Chinese character learning, they can't adapt and feel confused even difficult. It's very normal. Therefore, the students do not need to be panic and pessimistic, they will find that learning Chinese characters is a very interesting thing after some time.

B. *Hard Work and Perseverance Is the Foundation of Learning Chinese Characters*

“There is no shortcut to learning a foreign language, everyone is equal, have to work hard, what method cannot do without the efforts of the individual and hard work.” (Ji Xianlin, 2000, P.25) For many learners, Especially for the learners whose mother language is phonographic, Chinese and Chinese characters are a kind of new life, new habits and new thinking mode, so cannot be expected to master Chinese and Chinese characters easily, everyone should have a constant enthusiasm, enough investment, and patience. (Li Quan, 2010) In the process of learning Chinese characters, a lot of students often ask the teacher, is there a faster and better way to learn Chinese characters? Indeed as mentioned above, Chinese characters have a certain regularity, But only depend on a little method and some regulations, rather than hard work, easy to give up, work by fits and starts is definitely impossible.

C. *The Requirements of Chinese Characters*

In the first Chinese characters lesson, also need to mention some requirements about the class, such as finish the

homework on time, cooperate with teacher actively on the class, there will be a dictation in each class, these will be included in the student's usual performance, and so on. These strict requirements are good for students to really keep up with the rhythm of the class, to learn Chinese characters better.

VI. CONCLUSION

Chinese characters learning is a difficult problem in Chinese language learning, in the past, there are many studies focus on the teaching of Chinese characters, but this article discusses from four aspects, they are "To stimulate foreign students' interests in learning Chinese characters", "Reduce the fear of foreign students in learning Chinese characters", "The benefits of foreign students learning Chinese characters", "Foreign students should establish a correct view of Chinese characters learning". From the design of the first Chinese characters lesson, help foreign students to establish a comprehensive understanding of Chinese characters, stimulate their interests, reduce their learning pressure, then lead the students to enter the rich and colorful hall about Chinese characters relaxed and gladly. To help them learn more about China's long history and splendid culture, finally achieve the ideal effect of teaching.

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Leixin Su was born in XiAn, ShannXi, China in 1983. She received Master degree in linguistics from Nankai University, China in 2008.

She is a Chinese teacher in International College of Northwest A&F University, ShannXi, China. Her research interest is Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages.

Zhu Zeng (Corresponding author) was born in Hengyang, HuNan, China in 1981.He received his PH.D. degree in linguistics from Nankai University, China in 2011.

He is a Chinese teacher in International College of Northwest A&F University, ShaanXi, China. His research interests include Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language and linguistics.

Dr. Zeng is a member of The International Society for Chinese Language Teaching.