

**Shats'ka O. P.**

## **TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES IN CHINA**

Foreign languages are the integral part of modern society. Foreign languages enhance job opportunities in many areas. In today's global economy, the demand for specialists who are fluent in foreign languages continues to grow. Therefore, it is important to study the historical experience of teaching foreign languages to improve modern techniques. One of the examples worthy of thorough study and analysis is the development of foreign languages teaching in China.

Today, the review of teaching foreign languages in Asia, particularly in China, is not a frequent subject of comparative studies. But some foreign and Chinese scientists and practicing educators do address this issue, among them: D. Anderson (communicative approach to teaching English in China), Wang Liang and James Coleman (intercultural foreign language education in China), Weihua Luo (teaching English in Chinese universities), Jill D. A. (the impact of the global language on the language situation in China), Lin Jian (targeted approach in learning English via digital devices), Ping Wang (constructivism and autonomy in teaching and learning foreign languages), Siping Liu (teaching English in China: conflicts and expectations), Xiao Long-Fu (teaching English in secondary schools in China), Xiaoye Yu (Teaching English in China: the contribution to the alternative present), Hongqing Zhao (Internet use in teaching English), et al.

The purpose of this article is to give a brief overview of the development of foreign language teaching in China from ancient times to the present. This research was conducted on the basis of available publications and Internet sites.

In China, as elsewhere in the world, globalization has led to the increased proficiency in foreign language skills; i.e., there emerged the need for further development of intercultural competence. The Internet is helpful in teaching and

learning foreign languages (e.g., language training software, wide access to the necessary information and topics, multilingual web pages and sites, online communication, correspondence with foreign peers or colleagues, etc.) [4]. Internet resources are also useful for independent (autonomous) language learning.

But it took many centuries to have such an opportunity to use the Internet in learning foreign languages.

In ancient China during the reign of Qin Dynasty (221 – 206 BC) and Han Dynasty (206 BC – 220 AD), trade links were established between China and the outside world. The emperors sent their people to different parts of the world to establish relationships. The very first school of foreign languages appeared in 1289, where Persians taught the children of wealthy families. The school trained interpreters for the state needs. In 1407, a school teaching eight languages was founded: Mongolian, Nusu (an ethnic group in China), Tibetan, Indian, Hui (ethnic group), Tai Lü, Uighur, and Burmese. Since 1426, teaching of foreign languages in China became more intensive. Private language teaching was very popular. Thus, graduates of the above mentioned School could become not only translators for the Chinese government, but also private teachers of foreign languages [9].

In 1861, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was founded, in which most of the employees could not speak foreign languages. To address this shortcoming, the next year it was decided to open Beijing School of Translation affiliated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Selected children under 13 years of age studied in this school. Every year, 10 new students were added. English and Chinese were the main subjects. Training spanned three years and, then, increased to eight. During the first year of study, students were taught reading and writing, were explained simple words and phrases, read simple books. During the second year, they learned to construct sentences and translated short notes. The third year of study included country studies. Students became acquainted with the history of different countries, they translated selected pieces. In the fourth year of schooling, students were introduced to the basics of math, algebra, physics; they translated official documents. The fifth year focused on trigonometry, translation of books. The sixth year afforded the study of various

instruments, calculus, introduction to maritime studies, translation of books. Over the seventh year, students acquired knowledge on chemistry, astronomy, laws of different countries, and topography; they continued to translate books. The eighth year was devoted to the study of astronomy, geography, topography, ancient Chinese stelae and bronze inscriptions, writing of essays on how to make the country wealthy, translation of books. In 1865, the school became a college and, in 1901, was awarded the status of Beijing University. Students studied for five years. They could choose one foreign language. They also studied the Chinese language and literature, history and geography. During the first two years, foreign language was given 16 hours a week, over the next three years – 18 hours [9].

In 1862, the missionary J. S. Burdon founded another school of foreign languages, which originally taught English only. Later, other languages were added: French (since 1863), Russian (since 1863), German (since 1872), and Japanese (since 1896). Along with foreign languages schools, there existed schools offering other professional concentrations, but teaching foreign languages as part of their curriculum. For example, in 1881, Tianjing Seaman School, which taught two foreign languages, was founded. Missionaries also established universities (University of Hong Kong, Yenching University, etc.), bringing knowledge of western religion and culture. All books, including those on Chinese history and geography, were in English. Western influence on Chinese students manifested in the change of clothing, everyday life ways and attitudes. University students were forced to celebrate Christmas, Thanksgiving, Halloween, etc. [9].

Since 1920, foreign language courses were introduced for students of non-language colleges. The purpose was to improve reading and translation skills. Therefore, most students focused on reading the original books.

Grammar translation method was used during the practical part of the lesson, whereas listening and speaking were not attended to [9].

Between 1870 and 1949, a large number of Chinese students were sent to study overseas: America, Great Britain, Germany, France, and Japan. Since 1949 to 1957,

in schools and universities in China, Russian was the first foreign language to be studied, whereas English was less prominent. [9]

During the “Cultural Revolution” of 1966-1976, the study of foreign languages was suspended. All foreign magazines, movies, radio broadcasting, etc. were forbidden. The principle of “old ideas, old culture, old traditions and old habits” was reinforced in those days. Universities and schools were shut down. Since 1978, a new era of the study of foreign languages began. China became open to the outside world. Foreign languages were brought back to secondary and postsecondary educational establishments [9]. Learning of foreign languages out of school, which began in 1958 and was suspended in 1966–1983, was gaining new momentum. This type of training included learning the language via foreign TV channels and programs broadcasted by the Central Station of China, as well as attending evening classes and correspondence schools. Some students studied foreign languages independently. They, then, took tests in the universities to obtain certificates/diplomas [9].

In the early 1980s, China allowed foreign language communities on the basis of foreign languages universities, for example, in Beijing and Shanghai University of Foreign Languages. The Ministry of Education of China introduced language proficiency tests: CET 4 (College English Test – an English language proficiency test) (since 1987) and CET 6 (since 1989). This was done to encourage students of nonlinguistic majors to devote more attention to foreign languages along with other academic subjects. If a student failed the test, he/she could not graduate [5, 9].

Today, the traditional principle of learning English in Chinese linguistic and nonlinguistic universities is based on three components: the instructor, the group, and the textbook. Of course, instructors and textbooks are reputable sources in language learning and understanding the culture, traditions, and way of life of the people whose language is studied [6, 8, 10]. Foreign languages (mainly English) are taught in all educational establishments in China (from kindergartens to universities). Majors in foreign languages are offered in specialized educational establishments, such as Beijing Second Foreign Language University, Dalian Institute of Foreign Languages, Shandong International Institute of Translation, etc.

But all Chinese universities divide the English language into two types: general (General College English) and special (Specialist College English). Students of nonlinguistic majors study General English for two years (a university-level course of English). Chinese universities afford their students a great variety of foreign language-related academic subjects (especially English). For example, prospective teachers studying in Yuncheng University (China, Shanxi province) are offered the following subjects: practical course of English, reading, listening, speaking, grammar, phonetics, theory and practice of translation, written English, theory and practice of research, second foreign language, and methods of teaching English. Among electives included into “English Language” curriculum are: country studies (Britain/America), foundations of English/American culture, English/American literature (students also read the pieces of English/American literature of their choice), intercultural communication, "Vision, hearing, speech," modern Chinese, history and culture of China, introduction to linguistics, fundamentals of English language studies, improvised excursions, tourism ethics and international relations, tourism resources, business English, English stenography, English in advertising, English in international trade, English in tourism, English for secretarial staff, office automation, English of the Internet, English film and television studies, English language print media (texts of students’ choice), listening to radio broadcasting in English [12].

In the late 1980s, foreign language instructors began to integrate electronic communication into the process of teaching foreign languages. As a result, one more component was added - electronic resources [6, 8, 10].

The system of electronic libraries in China includes: CERNET (China Education and Research Network), CADAL (China-America Digital Academic Library), MELINETS (the Modern electronic Library Information Network System), CALIS (China Academic Library and Information System). The purpose of these libraries is to provide electronic information resources and enhance cooperation on the national and international levels [7].

CERNET, a network that unites all Chinese universities, was created as part of “Project 211”. CALIS, also part of “Project 211”, is a system for the exchange of library resources and university materials. “Project 602” distributed 602 defined by the government majors taught in these higher educational establishments as follows: 255 (42%) in the field of engineering and technology, 89 (15%) – fundamental science, 66 (11%) – medicine, 62 (10%) – the humanities, 57 (10%) – law and economics, 42 (7%) – environmental science, 31 (5%) – agricultural science. Owing to CERNET, many universities began to use multimedia lectures and established electronic libraries. Information technology streamlined teaching methods [1].

Within CALIS, one more library, CADLIS (China Academic Digital Library), was established, by means of which students and instructors can find necessary information, as well as support for research and help in vocational training.

One of the modern electronic library and information network systems is the Chinese system MELINETS, established in 1998. MELINETS system has inter-library subsystems, through which users have access to literary materials through the Internet. In China, there are four national systems to access the Internet: ChinaNet (<http://www.bta.net.cn>), ChinaGBN (<http://www.gb.com.cn>), CerNet (<http://www.cernet.edu.cn>), and CSTNet (<http://www.cnc.ac.cn>) [1].

Nowadays, online language courses, programs, etc. are a fashionable trend. Therefore, network computers have turned into e-books with multimedia capacity. And this became a modern principle of foreign language teaching [4]. Various websites provide a wide range of information related to learning English (listening, speaking, reading, writing, grammar, and testing). This information can be both audio and visual. The following websites are examples: 1) <http://eleaston.com/english.html>; 2) <http://www.eslcafe.com/> [11].

Another distinctive feature of language learning via the Internet is a free access to English-language e-magazines, e.g. “English Zone”. Dictionaries, phraseological units, different stories, grammatical and lexical references, etc. are sent to students by e-mail. [11]. These electronic materials provide students with immediate assistance in resolving language issues.

Using the Internet, students can join a discussion group in English. For example, discussions occur in the following groups: intensive English forum, science and technology English forum, English writing forum, and teaching discussion forum. Moderators email a topic for discussion to 1000 people. Forums give the opportunity to ask questions and discuss different points of view. This way of language learning is time efficient and convenient [11].

There are English chats for those who seek speaking “practice” opportunities. Most Chinese students are very shy and afraid to ask questions directly, so as not to seem ignorant. Therefore, electronic communication can implement asynchronous computer-mediated communication between instructors and students. Students can also chat with instructors residing abroad and peers. This method of communication helps develop fluency in speaking and listening, better understand cultural connotations, and practice speaking. A link to one such chat is given here:

[http://events.yahoo.com/netevent/Chat\\_Rooms/](http://events.yahoo.com/netevent/Chat_Rooms/) [11].

Some websites offer to make foreign pen pals online. The student can choose anyone from any country of interest to exchange letters, share experience, and improve English language proficiency. The following sites can help:

<http://www.wfi.fr/volterre/keypals.html>;

<http://www.linguisticfunland.com/addapal.html> [11].

Engagement of foreign instructors (native speakers) to work in Chinese universities is another distinction of the study of foreign languages in China. Teachers of English can share teaching experience, ideas, techniques, and materials with Chinese teachers. Foreign teachers are provided with favorable working conditions (their salaries are twice higher than those of their Chinese colleagues) and free accommodation.

Information and communication technology helps not only students, but also Chinese instructors in teaching foreign languages. The advantages of using electronic resources include: access to professional forums, the ability to communicate with colleagues and share practices, as well as the opportunities for establishing ties that can benefit their universities. The following sites provide a wide range of

information: The English Learner; Linguist List; Linguistics Lists; NIFL-ESL; TEFL CHINA; SLART-L; English Teaching forum Online and others [2; 3; 5].

Thus, the cooperation between instructors and students in China becomes stronger. A special feature is the reorientation of the educational process from the “teacher-centered“ model to “student activities” model, i.e. implementation of various means of enhancing students’ learning, use of new technologies (media classes, TV programs, online classes), etc. Using Internet resources in learning English is effective because the materials they propose are multi-level, promising, and vivid. Online information is readily available. Thanks to the Internet, learning English is no longer a boring routine. Electronic communication with foreigners exposes Chinese students to real English (or other language) expressions that are often not available in the textbooks. Some Chinese students have the opportunity to communicate with foreign instructors who have been invited to teach in China.

Chinese instructors cannot possibly answer all students’ questions for the lack of time and large classes (some groups can consist of as many as forty or more students). Therefore, the Internet helps students find necessary answers themselves.

The facts show Chinese students to have great interest in learning foreign languages. To meet this interest and in accordance with the requirements of the society, Chinese language instructors actively use various information and communication technologies: online libraries, foreign sites, chat rooms, e-magazines, etc. On the other hand, they bear in mind that nothing can replace the teacher in the educational system.

We see promising areas for further research in the study of peculiarities of foreign language training in technical universities in China.

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### **Шацька О. П. Викладання іноземних мов у Китаї**

У статті розглянуто питання викладання іноземної мови в Китаї з давніх часів до сучасності. Представлено факти про появу перших навчальних закладів з вивчення іноземних мов. Висвітлено шляхи і процеси вивчення іноземної мови в різні історичні періоди. Подано інформацію з навчального плану одного китайського вищого навчального закладу, у якому наведено широкий спектр дисциплін з вивчення англійської мови. Розглянуто приклад інтеграції електронної комунікації у викладанні іноземних мов (веб-сайти, мовні програми освіти, онлайн-журнали, електронні бібліотеки тощо). Виявлено переваги використання інформаційно-комунікативних технологій у процесі навчання та викладання англійської мови. Визначено, як перевіряють рівень опанування англійською мовою в нефілологічних вищих навчальних закладах Китаю (за допомогою складання іспитів-тестів СЕТ 4 і СЕТ 6). Доведено, що на сьогодні китайські студенти виявляють високий інтерес до вивчення іноземних мов. У роботі автор показав різні види доступу до англійських сайтів.

*Ключові слова:* англійська мова, електронне навчання, Інтернет, Китай.

### **Шацкая О. П. Преподавание иностранных языков в Китае**

В статье рассматриваются вопросы преподавания иностранного языка в Китае с давних времен до современности. Представлены факты о появлении первых учебных заведений относительно изучения иностранных языков. Освещены пути и процессы изучения иностранного языка в разные исторические промежутки времени. Подано інформацію из учебного плана одного китайского высшего учебного заведения, в котором приведен широкий спектр предметов по изучению английского языка. Рассмотрен пример интеграции электронной коммуникации в преподавании иностранных языков (веб-сайты, языковые программы образования, онлайн-журналы, электронные

библиотеки и т. д.). Выявлены преимущества использования информационно-коммуникативных технологий в процессе обучения и преподавания английского языка. Показано, как проверяется уровень владения английским языком в неязыковых высших учебных заведениях Китая (с помощью сдачи экзаменов-тестов CET 4 и CET 6). Доказано, что сегодня существует большой интерес у китайских студентов к изучению иностранных языков. В работе автор показал широкий выбор доступа к англоязычным сайтам.

*Ключевые слова:* английский язык, электронное обучение, Интернет, Китай.

### **Shats'ka O. P. Teaching Foreign Languages in China**

The article is devoted to the teaching of foreign languages in China from ancient times to the present days. It describes the emergence of first educational institutions devoted to teaching foreign languages and outlines domineering approaches to teaching foreign languages in different historical epochs.

The author showcases a curriculum of a Chinese higher education institution to demonstrate the range of subjects relating to foreign languages. An example of the integration of electronic communication into the process of teaching foreign languages (web sites, language educational software, online journals, electronic libraries, etc.) is given. The advantages of information and communications technology in learning and teaching English are shown. The assessment of foreign language learning outcomes of undergraduate and postgraduate students in China is reported to be conducted on the basis of a national English as a foreign language test, known as College English Test (CET 4 and CET 6).

The article points to the fact that Chinese students take elevated interest in studying foreign languages. Author's analysis suggests that they enjoy access to a wide range of English-language websites. The introduction of different means of the development of educational activities of students using new technologies (media, TV, Internet, online lessons, etc.), which have proved to be effective means of

teaching/learning foreign languages, marks the shift from “teacher-centered” to “student-centered” educational models.

Further research in this area can be devoted to the investigation of the peculiarities of learning foreign languages by engineering and technical students in Chinese universities.

*Key words:* English language, e-learning, Internet, China.

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