

## TEACHING MANDARIN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

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*Foreign language learning is a hallmark of the internationalisation of university education and a key to enabling graduates to participate in a globalising world. Currently, China is both a global political player and a key market and trading partner for the West and for Africa. Linked to these economic and political factors, non-Chinese speakers in higher education systems worldwide are showing a rapidly expanding interest in learning Mandarin Chinese as a foreign language. Notwithstanding the complexity of learning Chinese, the expansion of Mandarin tuition on all levels of education has exhibited a striking linguistic pattern. In line with international trends, the demand for learning Mandarin as a foreign language in higher education in South Africa is mainly driven by China's political importance and the burgeoning trade partnership between China and South Africa. This article provides an exploratory overview of the teaching of Mandarin as a foreign language and the related study of Chinese culture in four higher education institutions in South Africa: The University of South Africa (Unisa), The University of Stellenbosch (US), Rhodes University (RU) and The University of Cape Town (UCT). The article concludes with an appraisal of the small but growing interest in Mandarin study in the higher education system of this country. An argument is presented that this promotes the internationalisation of South Africa's higher education, that the inclusion of cultural studies in language courses offers a deeper engagement than language studies alone, and that a current weakness in provision is the lack of articulation with postgraduate degrees in Chinese language study and research. Finally, the role of the Confucius Institutes in the provision of Mandarin tuition is highlighted.*

### INTRODUCTION

Most governments, worldwide, view multilingualism as an opportunity for their citizens to increase their knowledge, to enhance their understanding of international and national diversity, and to expand their influence in economic, social and political spheres. Thus, proficiency in world languages is generally considered a resource to be cherished, nourished and sustained, and the provision of world languages is an issue situated at the forefront of contemporary university curriculum offerings (Canado, 2010:2). The value attached to multilingualism is demonstrated to some extent by the position that world languages occupy in the curricula of higher education institutions in most countries. Frequently, the inclusion of world languages in university offerings is driven by non-linguistic ends, for example, by political, economic or scientific considerations (Worton, 2009). The demands of politics, national security as well as defence and economic factors often dominate cultural

considerations in language planning and provision in educational policies (Ager, 2001:1). This is also true of the rapidly growing interest in the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language to students in schools and universities outside East Asia. Commenting on the recent interest in learning Chinese as a foreign language worldwide, Bianco (2011:xiii) describes Chinese as the ‘gigantic up-and-comer.’

Mandarin Chinese is the official language of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) of Taiwan and one of the four official languages of Singapore. The PRC has long been a major player on the global stage by virtue of its size, military capacity and permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council (Zhan, 2010). Internal political and economic change in China since 1970 has seen the country emerge as a major market and a key trading partner for the West (Horst, 2007:273) and for Africa (Zhu, 2010:21). Since the ‘opening up’ of the Chinese economy, initiated in 1979 by Premier Deng Xiaoping, China’s economic growth rate has on average been unparalleled in the world. In 2010, China’s economy was ranked second largest after that of the United States (World Bank, 2011).

Linked to the growing interest in learning Chinese is a rapidly expanding body of research into the teaching and learning of Chinese in different contexts: as a foreign language to non-native speakers internationally, as a heritage language to Chinese immigrant communities worldwide, and as a second language to minority groups within China, Singapore and Taiwan (Tsung & Cruikshank, 2011a:1). With regard to the latter, China has 55 officially recognised ‘minority nationalities’ (*shaoshu minzu*) (Gao, 2011:81), each with its own language, with the exception of the Hui and Manchu, who use the Chinese language. Language reform in China during the 20th century was closely linked to political developments (McDonald, 2011a:149). In 1949, the PRC was established and in 1955, Mandarin (Putonghua) was officially accepted by the Minister of the Education Department at the national conference of Literal Reform and Modern Chinese Regulation as the official standard in terms of phonetics, vocabulary and grammar, thus becoming the common language or common speech (*Putonghua*) of the modern Chinese nation and the general language of all groups of people in China (Li & Zhu, 2011:13). Putonghua’s corresponding written form is standard written Han. The term, *Putonghua*, was carefully chosen to facilitate inter-ethnic communication between Han and minority nationalities (Tsung & Cruikshank, 2011b:97). In 1982, Putonghua was officially designated as China’s national language in the Constitution of the PRC (Tsung & Cruikshank, 2011b:98). In many English language publications, the terms *Chinese*, *Mandarin* and *Putonghua* are used interchangeably and this may create considerable confusion. Mandarin dialects, particularly the Beijing dialect, form the basis of Standard Chinese and the term *Mandarin* is most often used in contexts outside of China. Mandarin is also often just referred to as ‘*Chinese*’ in everyday use by English speakers. Chinese speakers, however, refer to Standard Chinese as Putonghua (Li & Zhu, 2011:13). In China, the term ‘*Chinese*’ is used in foreign language teaching, whereas the term *Mandarin* and the term *Putonghua* may be used in special instances, such as the Mandarin/Putonghua Evaluation Examination (Kurpaska 2010). Tsung and Cruikshank (2011a:6) argue that the interchangeable and synonymous use of Mandarin, Chinese and Putonghua relates to the experience of specific groups in terms of different language contexts. In this paper, the same approach to terminology has been adopted, that is, *Mandarin* and *Chinese* are used interchangeably, according to context and institutional preference.

The written Chinese language comprises some 50 000 different symbols called logograms. Although knowledge of 1 000-1 500 characters is sufficient to read straightforward texts, a comprehensive grasp of the language demands knowledge of 5 000 to 8 000 characters, and

scholarship would make a knowledge of at least 30 000 characters essential (Kurpaska,2010). Language reform since 1949 included the introduction of lists of simplified characters and a phonetic romanised script called (*Hanyu*) *pinyin* (Chen 1999; McDonald 2011a:37:139). Notwithstanding these developments, the acquisition of Chinese demands formidable feats of memory and concerted language study from non-native speakers, particularly English speakers (Hau-Yoon, 2002:52). Scrimgeour (2011,1970) confirms that

The Chinese language is, however, perceived to be one of the most difficult second languages to learn by users of alphabetic writing systems, due largely to the complexity of its writing system and its orthographic distance from English, making access to the printed word, and the task of vocabulary building through reading much more difficult.

This feature makes the current widespread interest in the study of Mandarin as foreign language all the more remarkable.

Learning Mandarin as a foreign language is considered the best way to gain a deeper understanding of China in many areas, including economics, trade, science, technology, culture, education, art and tourism. Consequently, as of 2010, there were some 360 000 students registered for Mandarin courses outside China (Hanban, 2011a). A development since 2004 which has added impetus to the teaching of Mandarin as foreign language has been the establishment and funding of Confucius Institutes (after the Chinese philosopher, Confucius, 650 BC to 551 BC) by the Hanban – the Office of Chinese Language Council International, which is affiliated to the Chinese Ministry of Education. As non-governmental and non-profit Chinese language institutions of learning, Confucius Institutes aim to establish a bridge between China and other countries by promoting the teaching and understanding of Mandarin and the Chinese culture. These institutes operate independently, but according to Hanban guidelines within universities and affiliate colleges in host countries around the world,the Hanban is also responsible for the design of the Chinese Proficiency Test or Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) levels 1-6, which is implemented internationally as a universal measure of proficiency in Chinese as a second language (CSL) (Hanban, 2011a). By the end of 2010, 322 Confucius Institutes had been established in universities in 96 countries and regions in the world, including South Africa (Hanban, 2011b).

Interest in key Asian languages is a feature of several higher education systems in English-speaking countries, such as the United Kingdom (UK), the United States (US) and Australia. In the UK, attention was officially given to the status of Chinese tuition in higher education during the late 1990s when a review by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) indicated that Chinese studies provision trailed behind similar provision in other European countries (HEFCE 1999). Proposals to address this issue made by prominent research universities included the re-orientation of existing provision for Chinese studies away from the traditional area studies and language/literature perspectives to focus more on language acquisition and studies of contemporary China in the social sciences (The Nuffield Foundation, 2000). Consequently, HEFCE funding was allocated to 10 higher education institutions with proven track records in the teaching of Chinese studies (Song, 2003) to build capability in Chinese language studies by providing undergraduate and postgraduate Mandarin studies through increased funding, better library provision for Chinese studies and the monitoring of the quality of tuition in Chinese. This endeavour by the HEFCE was moderately successful (HEFCE, 2005). Currently,provision for Chinese studies in the UK

consists of a mix of study centres of varying size and eminence. Some centres are larger, nationally recognised and offer broad provision. According to the Great Britain China Centre (2012), 13 universities have well-established departments or institutes undertaking teaching and research in Chinese or East Asian studies, including tuition in Chinese languages.

In the US, the initiatives to increase tuition in Chinese in higher education was driven by China's political and economic role and are well documented (Edwards, Lenker & Kahn, 2008). Since 1989, the North American Conference on Chinese Linguistics (NACCL), which focuses on Chinese language and linguistics, has been held annually, and over 40 Confucius Institutes have been established at universities (Chan, 2008). In 2005, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) instituted the National Security Education Program (NSEP) Chinese K-16 Pipeline Flagship, a model for sequenced, articulated Chinese study beginning in elementary school and continuing through undergraduate study (National Security Education Program, 2005). The United States-People's Republic of China Cultural Engagement Act (2005) included grants for Chinese language and cultural studies at the elementary, secondary and higher education levels as well as other provisions to strengthen US-China links (Edwards et al., 2008). The importance lent to the promotion of Chinese in higher education can be seen in the Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP) distribution for Chinese studies, which is very high compared to other foreign languages in the US. In 2008 the major foreign language assistance was for Spanish (36%) followed by Chinese (32%) (Edwards et al., 2008).

In comparison with the US and the UK, Australia recognised the importance of Chinese studies in higher education system much earlier, in the mid-1980s, due to its geographic closeness to China, the importance of economic ties with China and a growing Asian immigrant population (Lo Bianco & Liu, 2007). Learning and teaching Chinese forms part of Australia's formally declared national language policy (Wang, 2007). Chinese language enrolments have enjoyed a growth spurt in many institutions since the early to mid-2000s as a result of the growing number of providers at tertiary level and the increase in students from Chinese-speaking regions of Asia. The latter is an important pool of student numbers for Chinese programmes. Moreover, Australians of Chinese background also wish to enhance their proficiency in the heritage language (or to learn Mandarin if they are non-Mandarin speakers). McClaren (2011) reports that the significant growth in enrolments in Chinese courses arises from international and heritage-background enrolments, rather than from non-Chinese speakers. Enrolments of non-Chinese background students in Chinese is either static or in decline at these institutions. In all, 28 universities provide courses in Chinese in Australia; some of them on multiple campuses. Chinese language providers report that they have sought increasingly to tailor their programmes to the needs of both background and non-background speakers, including developing synergies with the campus Confucius Institute.

Against this background, we, in this article, report on an exploratory study of the provision of Mandarin at universities in South Africa with a view to an appraisal of the small but growing interest in Mandarin study in this country.

## TEACHING MANDARIN AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

In line with the trends in higher education in the US, UK and Australia, the demand for Mandarin as foreign language in South African higher education by non-native speakers has mainly been driven by economic factors: the strong trade relations between South Africa and Taiwan during the apartheid era (Pickles & Woods, 1989:510) and the currently burgeoning trade partnership between South Africa and China (Dent, 2011; Strauss & Saavedra, 2009;). The Beijing Agreement signed in 2010 by President Zuma and Chinese President Hu Jintao elevated South Africa's partnership with China to a higher level, both politically and economically (Xinhua News Agency, 2010). China is now South Africa's biggest trading partner (*Mail & Guardian*, 24 February 2012). Moreover, in 2011, South Africa joined the important BRICS grouping, (comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, which are thus identified as South Africa's largest trading partners (Wits Business School Journal, 2011).

The introduction of Mandarin as a foreign language on a tertiary level was pioneered by the University of South Africa (Unisa) in 1993. Since then, three other South African universities have followed suit, teaching Mandarin in some format and at some level: The University of Stellenbosch (US) in 2002, Rhodes University (RU) in 2009, and The University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2010. In the ensuing sections, Mandarin tuition at these universities is discussed according to the chronological sequence in which it was introduced at the respective institutions. Thereafter, the article concludes with a short appraisal of these developments.

### The University of South Africa (Unisa)

Unisa, the only dedicated distance education university in South Africa, has the longest history of Mandarin tuition in the country – almost two decades. In 1990, a Centre for Asian studies was established at Unisa to raise awareness of modern Asia, to initiate research and to promote knowledge of the region. The design and presentation of Mandarin Chinese courses at the institution emanated from this development (Hau-Yoon, 2002:1). Mandarin Chinese was introduced at first-year level in 1993 with a first enrolment of 42 students. Thanks to consistent enrolment during the first three years (1993-1996), second-year modules were introduced in 1997 and third-year modules in 2002 (Hau-Yoon, 2002). The Centre for Asian Studies is now defunct; however, in May 2011, the Centre for Asian Business was established within the Graduate School of Business at Unisa (Unisa 2011b). Today, the Mandarin Chinese Section is located in the Department of Classics and World Languages, which forms part of the College of Human Sciences (Unisa, 2011a).

A student wishing to study Mandarin can take Mandarin Chinese as a subject or as an ancillary subject for a degree course in humanities and social sciences, economics and management sciences, or theology and religious studies. A student studying education, law or science can take Mandarin Chinese as an ancillary subject. A student may also register for Mandarin Chinese for non-degree purposes (Unisa, 2011a). The Mandarin course is structured according to nine semesterised modules (i.e. a module is designed to be completed in a semester of four and half months) on three levels, as follows (Unisa 2011a):

- Level one consists of two modules that focus on the development of practical Mandarin speaking and listening abilities for the beginner student: MAN1501: Introduction to Mandarin Chinese, and MAN1502: Practical Mandarin Chinese.

- Level two includes two modules that further the speaking and listening skills developed at the first level and emphasise the development of reading and writing skills: MAN20601: Living Mandarin Chinese and MAN2602: Applied Mandarin Chinese.
- Level three is composed of five modules that continue building the conversational skills and literary Chinese developed in modules at the first and second levels. These are: MAN3701: Introduction to Chinese Culture, Customs and Traditions, that is taught only in English, to cater for any student interested in learning Chinese culture but not proficient in Chinese; MAN3702: Chinese Wisdom Tales, Idioms and Proverbs; MAN3703: Advanced Mandarin Chinese; MAN3704: Selected Readings of Modern Chinese Literature; and MAN3705: Business Chinese. Business Chinese focuses on the learning of specialist language for the business person.

The instructional materials for all modules are printed in three forms of writing: traditional characters, simplified characters and *pinyin*. In the first module, level one Mandarin is taught mainly through *pinyin* and the principles of writing Chinese characters are introduced halfway through the modules. With regard to traditional or simplified characters, students have a choice, depending on their own or career needs (Unisa, 2011a). Unisa also offers the Chinese Proficiency Test (HSK) (Unisa, 2011a). Figure 1 indicates the enrolment in all modules per level for the period 2005-2011.

**Figure 1: Enrolment in Mandarin Chinese modules, levels 1-3 at Unisa (2005-2011)**

According to Hau-Yoon (2002:55), student enrolments for the first level modules from 1993 to 1999 remained under 50 students. Enrolments for the first level modules doubled from 2002 and showed a steady increase to 2004 (Chou, 2011). Figure 1 indicates that enrolments for first level modules peaked from 2005 to 2006 and decreased somewhat from 2007. Enrolments above 150 for first level modules have been maintained for the past five years. The moderate decline from 2007 can be attributed to various factors: the competition from other South African universities has increased and the instruction of a foreign language through the medium of distance learning has several limitations. However, the history of Mandarin instruction at UNISA has indicated the existence of a small but not insubstantial niche market.

**University of Stellenbosch (US)**

Undergraduate Mandarin courses were introduced at US in 2000 (Feng, 2008b). Mandarin is presented by the Department of Modern Foreign Languages, housed in the School of Liberal Arts (US,2011). At present, four modules cater for the student of Mandarin (Personal communication with Mr L Feng, Head of Mandarin section, University of Stellenbosch. Email, 19 May 2011; University of Stellenbosch,2011):

- Mandarin 178: Introduction to the Mandarin Language and Culture is a one-year course offered for beginners; no prior knowledge of Mandarin is required.
- Mandarin 278: Intermediate Study of Mandarin Language and Culture is offered for post-beginners; prior basic knowledge of Mandarin is required. The module's duration is one year, and the course is designed to provide further knowledge of the Chinese language and culture and to extend the vocabulary of Chinese characters. It enables students to understand and to read the Mandarin language with more complicated grammar within its social and cultural context.

- Mandarin 318: Intermediate Level of Study the Mandarin Language and Culture is a third-year module of one semester (the first semester). It is offered for intermediate learners, and a substantial knowledge of Mandarin is required.
- Mandarin 348: Intermediate Level of Study the Mandarin Language and Culture is a third-year module of one semester (the second semester). It is offered for intermediate learners who have successfully completed Mandarin 318, and a substantial knowledge of Mandarin is required. Both Mandarin 318 and 348 are designed to provide extensive knowledge of the language and culture and to enlarge the vocabulary of Chinese characters. It enables students to comprehend, read and write the Mandarin language by means of more sophisticated skills and more advanced grammar in social and cultural contexts (University of Stellenbosch, 2011).

An important development at the US has been the commencement of an Honours course in Mandarin as from 2012 (Zhao, 2012). This is the first South African university to offer a higher degree in Mandarin. Figure 2 indicates student enrolments for Mandarin levels 1-3 from 2000 to 2010.

***Figure 2: Enrolment in Mandarin, levels 1-3 at University of Stellenbosch (2000-2010)***

Figure 2 demonstrates a steady growth in enrolments in Mandarin on all three levels. Ancillary developments have promoted the teaching of Mandarin courses at US. In June 2004, the Centre for Chinese Studies (CCS), which has the status of a Confucius Institute, was founded at University of Stellenbosch in strategic partnerships with Xiamen University, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the Shanghai Institute for International Studies and Development Research Council. Its mandate is an analysis of the relations between China and Africa and the dissemination of research results to stakeholders in government, business, academia and non-governmental agencies on China-Africa related subjects (CCS, 2011). A weekly and a monthly publication are available on its website (CCS, 2011). In 2007, a fully-fledged Confucius Institute University of Stellenbosch (CISU) was established to promote the Chinese language and Chinese cultural knowledge in the Western Cape region (CCS, 2011). The teaching corps for Mandarin tuition is currently provided by the Confucius Institute. In addition, since 2003, the Chinese Bridge Competition has been held annually at US. It is aimed at promoting an understanding of Chinese language and culture and testing the Chinese language proficiency of students of Mandarin in South Africa. In 2007, with the approval of Hanban, the Mandarin Section at US hosted the first HSK test centre in a sub-Saharan African country (University of Stellenbosch, 2007). Currently, the Confucius Institute at the University of Stellenbosch is managed by its co-directors, Professor Zuoxu Xie of Xiamen University and Mr H Kotze of the Postgraduate and International Office of University of Stellenbosch, in which the CISU is housed (CISU, 2011). The CISU enjoys a positive relationship with the CCS and co-operates on certain projects, especially among the Stellenbosch community. The CISU also presents Chinese courses to school pupils and interested members of the public in the Stellenbosch community (CISU, 2011). Donations from the Chinese government have also provided for learning facilities such as a multimedia language laboratory (University of Stellenbosch, 2011).

***Rhodes University (RU)***

Unlike developments at Unisa and US, the introduction of Chinese language courses at RU was linked from the outset to the establishment of a Confucius Institute at the university. In

2009, the Confucius Institute was established as a joint project of RU and the Hanban that provided approximately R1 million as start-up funding in a partnership established with Jinan University, China. This development paved the way for the introduction of Chinese Studies as a major subject, taught by the Chinese Studies Division, located in the School of Languages, a unit within the Faculty of Humanities (RU, 2011a). Chinese Studies (1-3) are language courses for non-native speakers who wish to acquire communication skills in spoken and written Chinese (RU, 2011b). All RU students are eligible to register for the courses; there is no prerequisite for registration in Chinese Studies 1, such as prior knowledge of the language. Prospective students are encouraged to enrol because of China's global importance economically and politically, the enrichment it offers to students of Linguistics, and the cultural orientation offered to students who wish to teach English as a second language in China or in any other Chinese-speaking country (RU, 2011b).

Chinese 1-3 consist of three bi-semester courses, each comprising a different proficiency level. They are structured as follows:

- Chinese Studies 1 covers Chinese characters used in everyday communication and aims to develop knowledge of the cultural aspects of the Chinese system of characters. Successful completion of the course is a prerequisite for progressing to the next level.
- Chinese Studies 2 aims to expand and refine the skills and content of the first-year course and has to be completed successfully in order to continue to the next level. During these first two years of study, students should master 1 200 single Chinese characters and obtain a working knowledge of 2 000 to 2 500 words, which is equivalent to HSK level 4.
- Chinese Studies 3 continues a rigorous focus on language and also provides an introduction to Chinese civilisation, history, philosophy and literature. On successful completion of Chinese Studies 3, students are expected to demonstrate language proficiency at HSK level 5 or above through compulsory attendance of HSK (RU, 2011b). This implies that a successful student would be able to interact in everyday situations with native speakers of Chinese; read non-technical materials, write functional Chinese, and translate everyday communications with the assistance of aids where necessary (RU, 2011b).

Figure 3 illustrates the enrolment in Chinese Studies 1-3 at RU since 2009.

### ***Figure 3: Enrolment in Chinese Studies, levels 1-3 at RU (2009-2011)***

#### **University of Cape Town (UCT)**

Developments at UCT have resulted from the establishment of a Confucius Institute on the 20th of January 2010 in terms of an agreement between the Hanban and UCT, which was signed at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Confucius Institutes Conference in Beijing. Moreover, UCT entered into a partnership with Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou, China, to promote academic exchange (Hanban, 2011b). The Confucius Institute commenced language tuition at UCT in February 2011 through two credit bearing courses: Initial Mandarin A and Initial Mandarin B, presented by the Chinese Language and Literature Section, housed in the School of Languages and Literatures (UCT, 2011). The courses are structured as follows:

- Initial Mandarin A is a first-year, first-semester course. Any student at UCT may register for the course without prior language knowledge. The aim of the course is to



provide a foundation for the pronunciation and writing of the Mandarin Chinese characters. Initial Mandarin B is a first-year, second-semester course that aims at equipping students to conduct everyday conversations and to read different types of Chinese texts. Tuition for both courses includes lectures, a conversation tutorial and a laboratory session. The final mark for the course is composed of coursework (40%); a written examination (40%) and an oral/language laboratory examination (20%). At the time of writing, figures were only available for the current enrolment in Initial Mandarin A: 75 students (Personal communication with Professor Q Wu, University of Cape Town. Email, 23 August 2011).

The Confucius Institute also offers introductory sessions in Mandarin for UCT staff and for pupils at a local secondary school (UCT, 2011).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Universities worldwide are increasingly required to provide students with an education that will enable them to participate as professionals in various spheres in the global arena. Acquiring international knowledge and skills necessitates increased access to foreign language learning, and a wide array of world languages offered by an institution will increase its global and national competitiveness (Knight, 2004).

In South Africa, interest in teaching and learning Mandarin Chinese is associated with the existence of a small but not insignificant immigrant community, trade and cultural links with Taiwan (primarily pre-1994), and the more recent political and economic relationship with the PRC. The historical development of the teaching of Mandarin as foreign language at South African universities has followed political and economic trends and has contributed to the internationalisation of four leading South African universities. Mandarin tuition at Unisa has been characterised by its lengthy history, the diversity of the course content (particularly at level 3) and its distinctive mode of delivery – distance learning. With regard to the latter, Hau-Yoon (2002) points out that the effective teaching of Mandarin courses through distance education comprises a unique pedagogic accomplishment. It is well documented that it is no easy task for non-native speakers to learn Mandarin (Scrimgeour, 2011); thus learning at a distance, mainly by means of print materials supplemented by audio-recorded materials, necessitates innovative course design and tuition. Tuition at the other three universities has the inherent advantage of involving live teaching, conversation sessions and laboratory-based tutorials.

All four universities have integrated some component of cultural learning into their syllabi, and this is commended as a modest but concrete step towards a deeper engagement with what McDonald (2011b) calls the development of ‘Chineseness’ by the foreign language student. According to McDonald (2011a), if learning Chinese is limited to the mastery of sounds and words, it has failed in giving the student the opportunity to find a personal reference point to things Chinese within a global context.

The enrolment numbers of the four universities suggest meaningful and sustainable interest on the part of both students and language departments. Several factors have played a role, as government or institutional policies alone would not have led to the implementation of an effective international higher education curriculum (Carroll-Boegh & Takagi, 2006:32). Various practical requirements also needed to be met. In the context of this paper, the provision of a competent and proficient teaching corps through the Confucius Institutes, and/or exchange agreements between China and South Africa, is vital in ensuring a steady

supply of qualified lecturing staff, which would otherwise have been a very scarce resource. The difficulty of ensuring a supply of adequately trained Chinese teachers has been identified as a major stumbling block to the provision of Chinese tuition in other higher education systems, such as the United States (Orton, 2011:152). Links between partner universities in China and the three residential universities (US, RU and UCT) by means of the Confucius Institutes also provide the attractive opportunity of student visits or exchanges, which serves as a motivation for students of Mandarin and as a promotional tool in recruiting new students. Similarly, outreaches to partnerships or outreaches with local secondary schools, and the hosting of ancillary cultural events through the Confucius Institutes, will play an integral role in engendering public interest and recruiting new students in future.

A current drawback in all the four institutions is the lack of any articulation with higher degrees specialising in Mandarin, such as a Master's degree or PhD. With the exception of the University of Stellenbosch, which commenced with an Honours programme in Mandarin in 2012, students who have already successfully completed Mandarin as a major within an existing undergraduate programme or prospective students who have already obtained a suitable qualification in Mandarin elsewhere cannot pursue a higher degree in Mandarin in South Africa at present.

Finally, this discussion necessitates some comment on the role of the Confucius Institutes, since at three of the four universities under discussion (US, RU and UCT), the teaching of Mandarin Chinese is dependent on the support offered by the Confucius Institutes – financial as well as academic. The growth of Confucius Institutes worldwide forms part of a wider endeavour by the Chinese government to increase China's cultural 'soft power' (Churchman, 2011; Cruikshank & Tsung, 2011.; Masien, 2007). According to Churchman (2011:2), unlike other state-backed language institutes, such as the Goethe Institutes which promote learning of German or the Alliance Française, which promotes learning of French, Confucius Institutes are located within host universities, where interest in Mandarin and Chinese studies could possibly be managed in ways that are deemed acceptable to the Chinese government. For example, Principles 6 and 10 of the Constitution of Confucius Institutes exclude certain topics from the teaching syllabus that are deemed politically unacceptable (Churchman, 2011: 3). Reliance on funding from China is another issue which can also potentially limit the independence of Mandarin courses (Churchman, 2011; Masien, 2007). However, Schmidt (2010) contends that, in practice, Confucius Institutes appear to have little influence on the undergraduate teaching of Mandarin at American universities in partnership with Institutes housed within their institutions. This debate, primarily conducted in Australia and North America, has not yet received attention in South Africa, but we argue that it is one that South African universities reliant on Confucius Institutes should bear in mind.

Finally, we conclude that the teaching of Mandarin in South African higher education is substantial evidence of a growing engagement with China and Chinese-speaking communities within a globalising context. The endeavours of the four participating universities to provide students with the opportunity to learn a major world language are progressive, and further and more intensive research into this development will provide a fruitful area of study for linguists, educators and policy analysts.

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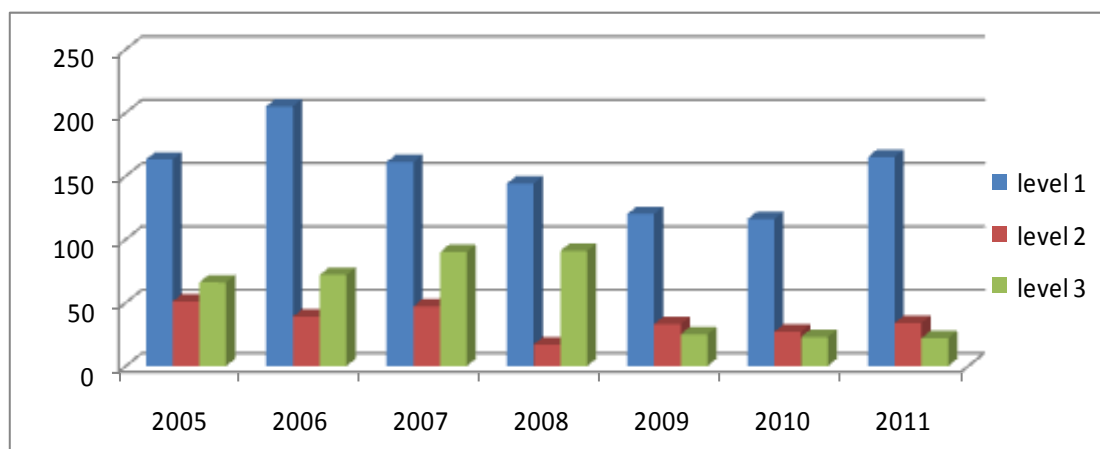
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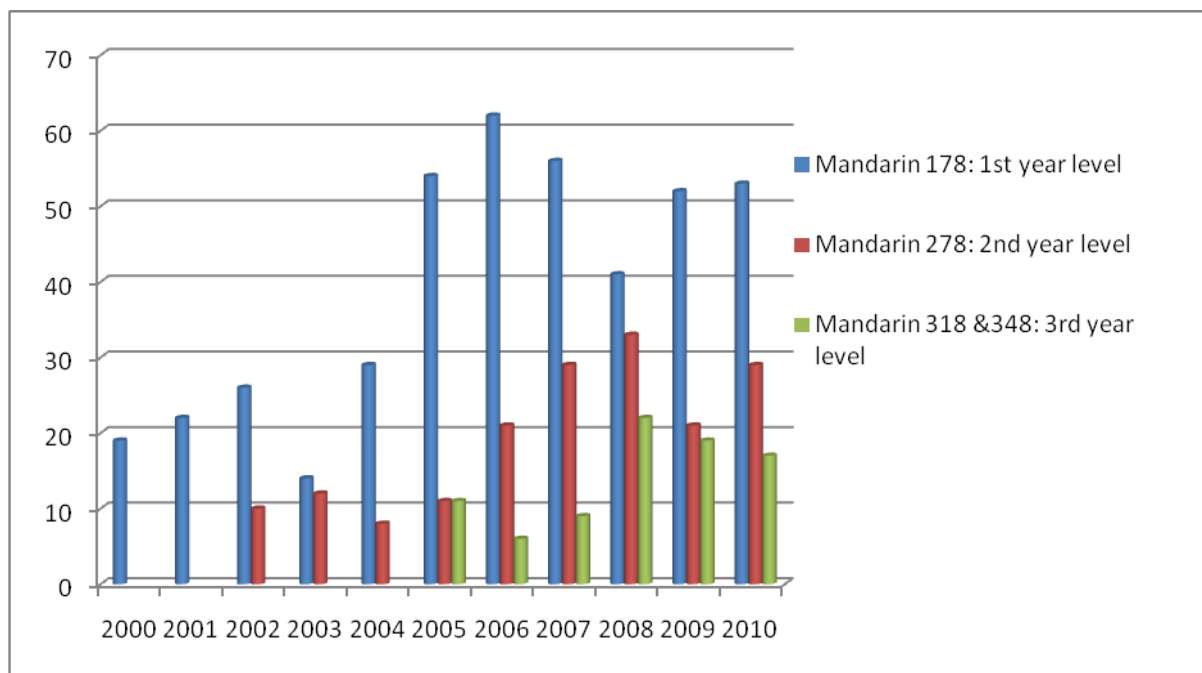
**FIGURES**

Figure 1: Enrolment in Mandarin Chinese modules, levels 1-3 at Unisa (2005-2011)



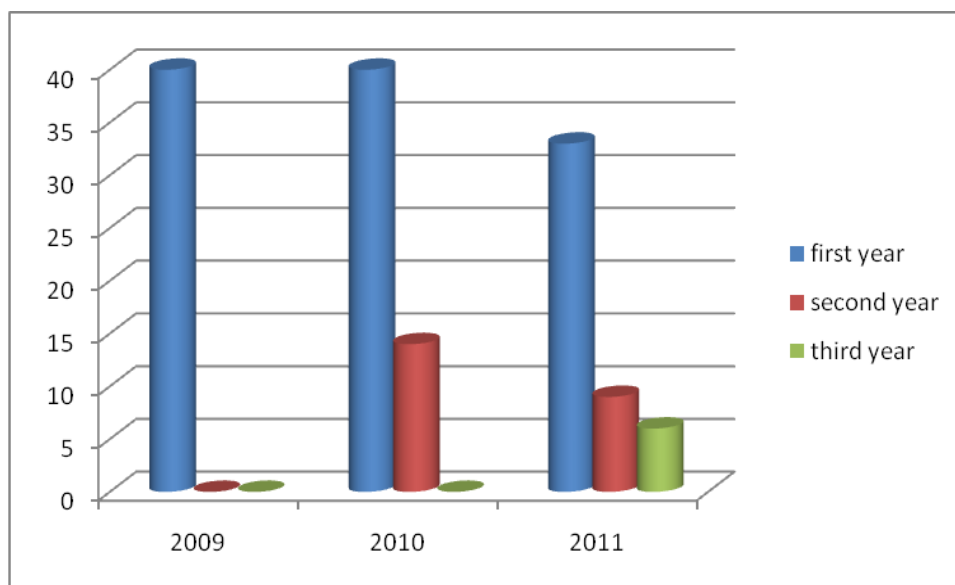
Source: Adapted from data supplied by Department of Information and Strategic Analysis, Unisa (28 October, 2011)

Figure 2: Enrolment in Mandarin, levels 1-3 at US (2000-2010)



Source: Personal communication with Mr L Feng, Head of Mandarin section, University of Stellenbosch. Email, 7 September 2011.

Figure 3: Enrolment in Chinese Studies, levels 1-3 at RU (2009-2011)



Source: Ma (2011)