

CHINESE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN BULGARIA'S EDUCATION SYSTEM

Gao Wei

Abstract: With China's rapid development, we have seen an emerging "Chinese fever" throughout the world. Bulgaria has a long history of Chinese teaching and is diversified in education. A better understanding of the current Bulgarian education system situation and Chinese Language Teaching in it can help us put forward better suggestions for its sustainable development. The paper is divided into five chapters: Bulgarian education system overview; Basic education stage of Chinese teaching; Secondary education stage of Chinese teaching; Chinese language teaching in Higher education; Strengthening Bulgaria's top-level design of Chinese teaching. The last chapter puts forward suggestions for sustainable development of Chinese language teaching in Bulgaria: Chinese teaching should be brought into the Bulgarian national education system; relevant education policy to guarantee the healthy development of Chinese language teaching; Conditions are ripe for Chinese teaching institutions to apply for a Confucius classroom; Strengthening the internal management of Chinese teaching system.

Keywords: *Bulgaria's education system; Chinese teaching; sustainable development*

As we know, with the increasing importance of global integration, China's economic development and international significance in recent years, the learning of Chinese boom continues. Bulgaria is the second country which recognized the People's Republic of China as a nation. Also when the government of the People's Republic of China decided to send Chinese teachers overseas, Bulgaria was one of the four places where pioneer and famous linguist Mr Zhu Dexi began teaching in 1952. Today this practice is still evolving.

Bulgaria's Chinese teaching started early and the foundation is strong. However, it is lagging behind the development speed of some other countries with a shorter history of teaching Chinese. Development of foreign language teaching has a national, political, economic and cultural aspect. A better understanding of the Bulgarian education system, education principles and policies, is the necessary condition to guarantee the sustainable development of Chinese teaching.

I will use those aspects to explain my understanding of the Bulgarian education system, as well as the characteristics at different stages of education of

Chinese teaching and students. Taking into account the characteristics of the Chinese teaching in Bulgaria I will put forward some suggestions.

1. Bulgarian education system overview

The education system is a combination of institutions and a standard. It also includes an education institution subsystem and a standard subsystem of education. An equal access to quality education has always been the priority for the Bulgarian government. The national standard is 12 years of education. According to statistics, Bulgaria now has 5298 teaching units of all kinds, 1314836 students, and 106024 teachers, 2201 primary and secondary schools, 782 secondary vocational technical schools and vocational and technical training centers, 51 higher education institutions. The number of college and university students is 287086. The number of college and university teachers is 22662.¹

1.1 The Education Administration

The Bulgarian council of ministers is in charge of administrative management of education system. About Administration of the public education system principal part is Bulgarian Minister of Education and the Science Ministry; Regional education supervision; the principals of kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools and colleges. Bulgarian education system includes three levels – national, regional and school level.

1.2 Education laws and Regulations

1.2.1 Public education law of 1991: all Bulgarians under the age of 16 must have normal and compulsory education;

1.2.2 Minimum general education and curriculum Act (1999); Vocational Education and Training Act (1999);

1.2.3 Higher Education Act (1995);

1.2.4 National development plan of primary school, secondary school and preschool education (2006–2015). This is the first programmatic document of specification confirmed education development. According to the stipulations of this file, every year on October 1, the Ministry of UNESCO should be reported to the National Assembly about the implementation of the national education strategy of the previous year and specific measures outlined for the coming year.

¹ Data sources, Chinese Embassy Education Section in Bulgaria

1.3 Bulgaria's education system structure is divided into four stages

In the first stage, preschool education, the education practice is about 3 years; the age of the students is 3 to 6. Bulgaria's preschool education also follows the principle of recreation. This stage of the learners' learning content is mainly based on life skills, to cultivate children's good habits of life and understanding of the basic language and culture. During the 2011 – 2012 academic years, the number of children in kindergarten is 227 900.

The second stage, primary stage, I called the stage of basic education. Students at this stage aim to improve their knowledge in mainly natural and social sciences, language knowledge and learning life skills, and many other capabilities. Students can learn at this stage 1 to 2 foreign languages.

The third stage is the stage of secondary education. Grade 5th to grade 7th belong to junior middle school stage and grade 8th to grade 12th belong to the high school stage, which continues to increase the number of subjects. Social practice continues to increase. This stage is mainly to improve students at each level of knowledge of culture. Learning is characterized by more subjects, and with the deepening of studies, students can choose to study content according to their characteristics.

The fourth stage, higher education, is the university and higher education stage. At this stage students are interested in career planning and choose according to their respective professional interests and further studies. In the meantime, to improve their level of knowledge, they accumulate social experience. In recent years the proportion of people studying tertiary education is increasing. This has a certain relation with the economic development and corresponding policies. During the 2011 – 2012 academic years, the total number of university students is 284 900.

Bulgaria's schools can be divided into public schools and private schools, and these schools have different types. High schools, for example can be divided into ordinary schools, foreign language middle school, sports school and art schools, etc. The study of a foreign language is a very important subject. Primary and secondary school foreign language education has gained popularity in Bulgaria.²

2. Basic education stage of Chinese teaching

According to the relative research of the theory of second language acquisition, the learning of a second language is affected by many factors. Regarding mechanisms for language acquisition among academic circles there is still some controversy, but an argument accepted by most scholars is that the age

² SUN Shuguang, "Bulgarian foreign language education impression and enlightenment", Journal of Huainan teachers college, No.2 2001.

of language learners will influence learning. For foreign language teaching and learning the basic education stage is very important. With the continuous development of Chinese teaching the basic education stage of the Chinese teaching is increasing year by year in Bulgaria. Survey results show five basic education stage schools in Bulgaria now but in 2012 it was only one – “Vasil Levski” School in Russe. Exposure to Chinese in primary school can not only increase students’ interest in learning, but also influences their decision to continue learning Chinese in the future. According to my observations and classroom practice, the classroom atmosphere in primary school is very active, and students have the courage to imitate the teacher’s pronunciation and intonation. Most students have good pronunciation. Some of the more difficult sounds for senior students, for example: ū; [Eng. Ong], elementary school students imitate very well.

This stage of the teaching of Chinese requires teachers to be stricter in their performance (combining language teaching and culture teaching). First of all, regarding language usage, most of Chinese teachers don’t know Bulgarian and the English level of students is also poor, so that not only affects the communication and exchange between teachers and students, but also has a direct impact on Chinese teaching. This requires Chinese teachers to learn Bulgarian or to teach together with a Bulgarian teacher, but due to the lack of native Bulgarian teachers, this situation can be realized only in certain schools.

Secondly, a higher standard of teachers’ Chinese pronunciation. The basic stage of foreign language education is the cornerstone of a process like building the language fortress, so teachers should pay attention to their Chinese pronunciation, at the same time doing more practice about the student’s pronunciation. Lastly, a qualified Chinese language teacher should meet the students’ interest in learning and combine language teaching with Chinese culture teaching.

3. Secondary education stage of Chinese teaching

The students of secondary education stage of Chinese teaching are from grade 5th to grade 12th. Grade 5th to grade 7th belong to junior middle school. Grade 8th to grade 12th belong to the high school. This stage continues to increase the number of subjects and social practice. This stage seeks mainly to improve students’ level of knowledge and expand their studies. Through interviews with Chinese teachers I found that more than half of the teachers believe that classroom management is an important part of secondary education. In the junior middle school stage students should learn the basics of Chinese so that interest in China can be sparked. In high school they should learn how to master this language; improve their speaking and listening skills; know the grammar system; overall improve their Chinese.

In recent years middle school students who learn Chinese actively participate in the “Chinese Bridge” Competition which is organized by “Hanban”³ and HSK exams are held annually in Bulgaria. Students actively participate in the exam, hoping to get a scholarship to go to China. In 2013, ten new schools have begun teaching Chinese. Eight of them are middle schools, showing that the demand for Chinese teaching in secondary education has increased. This is a major goal of the Bulgarian language teaching sustainable development.

4. Chinese language teaching in Higher education

Bulgaria’s higher education stage of the Chinese language teaching mainly refers to passing the entrance examination to universities. Chinese language teaching in higher education is divided into: academic education and non-academic education. Teaching is primarily to undergraduate students based in: Sofia University, the University of Veliko Tarnovo and Plovdiv University, which is mainly academic education. On the other hand, the Ruse University and Southwest University provide mainly non-academic education. Sofia University has a four year, full-time undergraduate Chinese language program, and the University of Veliko Tarnovo and Plovdiv University have a four-year full-time bilingual undergraduate program which includes Chinese and another language. Those majors include, Bulgarian and Chinese, French and Chinese, German and Chinese, Russian and Chinese.

Regarding the latter, there are still some problems to be solved. The amount of hours spent only by teaching a comprehensive course, which not only increases the difficulty of preparation of teachers, requires a number of teachers in the schedule, but is also prone to repeated Chinese teaching knowledge and omissions. Moreover, the classes are too concentrated in four consecutive hour sessions, so students cannot concentrate. Students have an improved level of cognition. They should be engaged with debate competitions and seminars. A holistic understanding of Chinese language and cultural knowledge is important. Teachers should spur enthusiasm for learning.

5. Strengthening Bulgaria’s top-level design of Chinese teaching

The measure of a country’s importance should not only be the number of students or schools but also the potential for development.

The development of the Chinese teaching in a country needs to be considered at the top of the Chinese teaching design in the government’s education policy. According to research about the state of Chinese teaching in Bulgaria,

³ Hanban: Confucius Institute Headquarters

and interviews with officials from the Chinese Embassy in Sofia, I think that Bulgaria's top-level design of Chinese teaching is very important.

5.1. Chinese teaching should be brought into the Bulgarian national education system

In 2003 the United States had the Chinese language and culture teaching integrated into their national education system. After that, many schools began to teach Chinese and the number of students who learn Chinese increased rapidly. Bulgaria attaches great importance to cultivate the students' foreign language ability. On average, each of the students in the learning phase can learn two or three foreign languages. Bulgaria's national education system includes many languages such as Asian languages including Japanese and Korean. In recent years, the development of Chinese teaching as a new language in Bulgaria has attracted much attention. Even though Bulgaria's Chinese teaching has improved, it is still in its infancy. Therefore schools which dare to try to begin Chinese lessons are still a minority. If Chinese teaching can be brought into the Bulgarian national education system, we can expect:

5.1.1 It will enhance the influence of each part of the Chinese teaching in Bulgaria and facilitate popularity. Chinese courses will be incorporated into the national approbatory credit system. Basic, secondary and higher Chinese teaching stages can form a complete system and benign development.

5.2.2 Chinese schools can get more support from the government. For example, government could provide more financial help and increase investment in human resources.

Chinese education groups, Hanban, Bulgarian institutions of Chinese language teaching have work together to bring Chinese teaching into the Bulgarian national education system. It will be a new milestone in the development of Chinese teaching in Bulgaria.

5.2. Relevant education policy to guarantee the healthy development of Chinese language teaching

The promulgation and implementation of education policy is one of the important factors that affect teaching. There are some problems between the secondary stage of Chinese teaching and the advanced stage of Chinese teaching in Bulgaria. The number of higher stage Chinese learners is less than ten percent of the number of secondary stage learners. In university, most of the Chinese learners are beginners, which means a lot of students who had learnt Chinese in middle school give it up in university. Two important reasons for that are: first, entrance examination for Chinese majors in most universities requires the

use of another language, so students who learned Chinese lose their advantage. Most Chinese learners are beginners, and teaching time is limited. That means having a high level of Chinese becomes a difficult problem for a student. Second, Chinese learners have an employment problem. In addition to the problem of the students' Chinese level, the cultivation of the local teachers is still facing some problems. Also, communication between universities and companies is very important.

Teaching institutions adjust content and time of Chinese teaching to make it reasonable. Bulgaria should introduce corresponding policy to encourage Chinese learners engaged in Chinese education career. Therefore, the connection between the learning stages of Chinese in Bulgaria can make a virtuous cycle of education system and employment system, to guarantee the sustainable development of Chinese language teaching.

In February 2014, the Veliko Turnovo University and a middle school in Ruse signed such an agreement. The middle schools directly recruit students who learned Chinese by Chinese language examination.

5.3. Conditions improve Chinese teaching institutions can apply for a Confucius classroom.

Confucius classrooms are Chinese teaching institutions which are usually set up abroad in elementary and middle schools by Hanban, and they are one of the important carriers of Chinese international promotion. "Setting up a Confucius classroom of primary and secondary schools in foreign management method 2012" issued by Hanban. Hanban provides the necessary start-up fund, and provides a set amount of annual funds according to the needs and provides online courses such as Chinese teaching resource sharing.

Bulgaria has 2 Confucius Institutes, 3 Confucius classrooms are under preparation. So far, Bulgaria has 2 Confucius Institutes, 28 Chinese teaching institutes. They all belong to Confucius Institutes. Most of their teaching resources and funding for Chinese culture activities come from Confucius Institute. But with the rising school development, Confucius Institutes will face greater pressure. Confucius classrooms have direct support from Hanban. That is to help ease the pressure on the Confucius Institutes, and Confucius classroom can also help expand the institution's regional influence of Chinese language teaching. It will ensure the long-term development of Chinese language teaching in Bulgaria.

5.4. Strengthening the internal management of Chinese teaching system

Management system plays an important role in execution efficiency and development. To improve internal management of Chinese teaching system in Bulgaria, I recommend starting with the following two aspects:

5.4.1 Unified standards must be formulated to strengthen the connection between schools

In Chinese teaching, taking into consideration the teaching situation of Bulgaria, a unified syllabus should be formulated. It will provide favorable guidance for Chinese teaching institutions. Chinese teaching institutions also have rights to improve and complement to it. In terms of management, officials who are responsible for a Chinese teaching institute can hold meetings on a regular basis. They can communicate and discuss the situation in the institution of Chinese teaching, the problems in Chinese teaching, activity planning, institutional change of management, and the direction for future development. The meeting can not only solve the problems of teaching and management, but also can allow for the benign competition and cooperation between Chinese teaching institutions. Bulgaria's nine schools which have Chinese teaching set up a Chinese language teaching union in 2012. This is a big step forward made by Chinese teaching organization management system, and I hope more and more Chinese teaching institutions will join it.

5.4.2 The communication between Chinese teachers should be improved

Chinese volunteer teachers, native teachers, Chinese instructors, formed a team of Chinese teachers in Bulgaria. Those include: volunteer teachers with rich cultural knowledge and skills, understanding the latest research achievements of domestic Chinese teaching; native teachers proficient in Bulgarian language, and know more about Bulgarian students' characteristics; Chinese instructors who have rich teaching experience abroad, and have their own set of teaching methods. To set up a "Bulgarian Industry Association of Chinese Teachers", it will enable the discussions about developing problems of Chinese teaching and academic exchange activities on a regular basis. Through this association, they could communicate with each other and help each other, whether in life or on the job.

REFERENCES

Polina Tsoncheva, "Brief remarks on concept of education and implementation of education policies in Bulgaria and China Journal "65 years of diplomatic, economic and cultural relations between Bulgaria and China" Veliko Turnovo Confucius Institute, Faber 2014

ZHANG Weilei, "American Foreign Language Education Policies in the Early 21st Century", Foreign Language World, No.2 2014.

MENG Zhen, “On Foreign Language Education Policy Research”, Journal of Guangdong Polytechnic Normal University, No.4 2012

XIE Qian, “A Comparative Study of International Foreign Language Education Policies”, Doctoral Dissertation of East China Normal University, 2011.

Gina Wisker, “The Postgraduate Research Handbook”, Dongbei University of Finance and Economics, 2012年, P129-130.

SHEN Qi, “Value of Foreign Language Education Research”, Foreign language education, mar.2011.

SUN Shuguang, “Bulgarian foreign language education impression and enlightenment”, Journal of Huainan teachers college, No.2 2001.

DONG Shuhui, “The fifty years of Bulgarian Chinese teaching”, Sophia jade publishing company, Jun.2005.

“Newsletter of the International Society for Chinese Language Teaching”, The International Society for Chinese Language Teaching.

<http://www.shihan.org.cn/>“(International Society for Chinese Language Teaching”

<http://www.chinese.cn/>“Confucius Institute Online”

<http://www.hanban.edu.cn/>“Confucius Institute Headquarters”