

International Conference on Language

Enhancing Language Ability and Language Education

(Suzhou, China. 5-6 June, 2014)

Language and writing systems contribute to enhancing human communication and information sharing, and exert significant and comprehensive influences over societies and nations. As a trait of human beings, language ability – whether spoken or unspoken – is the primary mean by which humans express their intelligence, expand their horizons, acquire knowledge, engage socially and interact with others. It is from language that human knowledge of the world can be inherited and disseminated. As such, language cements human societies, creates and passes on cultural identities and often founds civilizations.

Language ability has become increasingly important in a globalized and culturally diverse world and a key to development. UNESCO adopted the term ‘multilingual education’ in 1999 in the General Conference Resolution 12 to refer to the use of at least three languages, the mother tongue, a regional or national language and an international language in education. This linguistic and cultural diversity contributes to creativity, innovation and inclusion. It is also critical to allow learners the possibility to participate meaningfully in their world, access employment and continuously learn throughout life.

Finally, language education deserves our full attention as an enabling factor contributing to the achievement of Education for All.

Against this background, China is convening the ‘International Conference on Language – Enhancing Language Ability and Language Education’ in partnership with UNESCO to reflect on challenges and new options for effective language education and planning by bringing together government officials, policy-makers, researchers, educators and development partners.

The ‘International Conference on Language – Enhancing Language Ability and Language Education’ is organized by the Ministry of Education (MOE) of the People's Republic of China (PRC), the State Language Commission of the People's Republic of China, the National Commission of the People's Republic of China for UNESCO, and the Jiangsu Provincial Government.

The Conference is organized in partnership with UNESCO.

The Conference will be hosted by the Language Commission of Jiangsu Province, the Jiangsu Provincial Education, the Department Suzhou Municipal Government and the China Central Television (CCTV).

I. Objectives

The objectives of the Conference are the following:

- 1) Address the importance of language ability for intercultural understanding and sustainable human development.
- 2) Enhance language ability through the exchange of information, good practices and knowledge on innovative approaches to language education, including multilingual education.
- 3) Promote collaboration amongst concerned stakeholders across different regions to enhance language ability.

II. Venue and Date

The Conference will be held on 5 and 6 June, 2014, at the Taihu International Center in Suzhou, China. Registration will begin on 4 June, and departures in the evening of 6 June or the morning of 7 June.

III. Conference Themes

The program will be structured around two plenary panel sessions (opening and closing) and three parallel breakout seminar sessions addressing **language ability** from three different perspectives:

- Theme 1 –Language ability and sustainable social development
- Theme 2 –Innovation in language education
- Theme 3 –International exchange and collaboration

Theme one: Language ability and sustainable social development

Language ability is a fundamental skill that enables humans to communicate and innovate. It also cements societies, conditions development and is at the core of human civilizations. In order to promote sustainable human development, people increasingly have to learn a variety of languages. For language policy makers this implies developing new understandings about how to raise learners' language abilities and develop plural language abilities in a continuously changing global context.

The conference will discuss effective means and new approaches to enhancing language ability that satisfy the requirements of sustainable development and the ever-changing

learning needs of learners. The seminar will also examine issues and challenges involved in language planning, and examine their impact on education systems and explore the various policy options for addressing these challenges.

Theme two: Innovation in language education

Good quality language education is the most effective means for enhancing language abilities, and is the foundation for cognitive development and lifelong learning. The context of language learning has changed in the contemporary world as today's learners should acquire new and multiple language abilities that notably enable intercommunity and international communication.

A key challenge is to develop creative and innovative ways of providing good quality language education so that it continuously responds to the needs of learners and remains relevant in our changing world. The Conference will provide an opportunity to discuss new trends and share innovative approaches in language education. It will examine effective pedagogical approaches used by educators in language teaching and explore new pedagogies for quality education. The conference will also provide an opportunity to share new policy developments and innovative practices related to multilingual education.

Theme three: International exchange and collaboration

Learning a new language can facilitate entry into a new culture, a way of being and knowing the world. It can open new doors to the future and facilitates understanding between individuals and societies. Languages are important tools for communication between individuals, groups and nations. Advancing language ability and enhancing cultural exchanges jointly support the foundations of intercultural understanding and sustainable human development. A new form of humanism is needed to operate in a global context, which is both competitive and interdependent. Educators across the world must recognize their new role as promoters of intercultural communication and understanding, with language ability as a key element of this.

Greater collaboration and exchange of information, good practices and knowledge on innovative approaches to language education are key to enhancing the quality of language education. Building on existing good practices in language education and language translation abilities, this seminar will discuss how to promote further international cooperation in this area amongst concerned stakeholders across the different regions.

IV. Participants

Participants at the Conference will include the following:

- (i) Government officials (education policy makers and planners involved in language education)

- (ii) Experts, prominent linguists and educators,
- (iii) Representatives of key stakeholder institutions and organizations (language and linguistic societies, research institutions and universities),
- (iv) International development partners including UN agencies and international organizations working on related issues.

Participation will be by invitation only and the invitations will be issued by the Government of China. Close to 400 participants are expected to attend, of which approximately 300 international delegates and 100 Chinese representatives.

V. Working Languages

The working languages of the conference will be Mandarin Chinese, English, French and Spanish. Simultaneous interpretation will be ensured in all the working languages during the plenary and seminar sessions.

VI. Provisional Agenda

The Conference will be inaugurated in the morning of 5 June by an opening ceremony with welcome remarks from corresponding government leaders of China and UNESCO leader, and keynote addresses from national and international experts.

The Conference themes will be discussed in depth within the three parallel seminar sessions (see Section III) through short substantive presentations of relevant research, case studies, new approaches and promising practices. Each cycle of presentations, will be followed by a question and answer period and debate to provide participants with the opportunity to share their views and experiences.

A drafting group will be established at the opening of the Conference and work throughout the two days to prepare an outcome statement that summarizes the main learnings of the event.

In the afternoon of 6 June, at the close of the Conference, the outcome statement will be presented to all participants.

A detailed presentation of the Conference programme will be posted on the website soon.

VII. Hotel and Transportation to and from Airport

The venue of the Conference is Taihu International Conference Center: No. 128, Huantaihu Dadao, Wuzhong District, Suzhou.

Delegates will be staying in the Xiangshan International Hotel of Suzhou City: No. 1, Yanbo Road, Huantaihu Dadao, Wuzhong District, Suzhou. Participants can check into their rooms after onsite registration. Check out will be on 6 or 7 June as required. Room and meals are being provided at no extra cost.

For the arrival and departure of delegates, the Conference organizer will provide free transportation service between the Xiangshan International Hotel and the Shanghai Pudong International Airport, Shanghai Hongqiao Airport, Sunan Shuofang International Airport, Suzhou North Railway Station.

International delegates can arrive at :

1. Shanghai Pudong International Airport, about 160 kilometers or a 2.5-hour distance from the Xiangshan International Hotel by taxi/bus.
2. An alternative is to arrive at Beijing Capital International Airport. You can take a domestic flight from Beijing to Shanghai Hongqiao Airport or Sunan Shuofang International Airport. Or you can take a bullet train from Beijing South Railway Station to Suzhou North Railway Station.

Shanghai Hongqiao Airport is about 100 kilometers from Xiangshan International Hotel, 1 hour from the hotel by taxi/bus.

Sunan Shuofang Airport is about 80 kilometers from to Xiangshan International Hotel, 50 minutes from the hotel by taxi/bus.

Suzhou North Railway Station is about 56 kilometers from Xiangshan International Hotel, 1 hour from the hotel by taxi/bus.

VIII. Additional travel information

International delegates are responsible for visa applications in the Chinese consulates or Embassy in their countries.

International delegates are responsible for their own accident or medical insurances.

Suzhou belongs to the humid northern sub-tropical monsoon climate. There are usually showers in early June. The average annual temperature is 20-30 °C.

IX. Contact Information

To learn more about the Conference please contact:

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X. A Brief Introduction to Suzhou City of Jiangsu

Jiangsu Province is located in the Yangtze River Delta of East China: West of the Yellow Sea, northwest of Shanghai and Zhejiang province, east of Anhui Province and south of Shandong Province.

Jiangsu province occupies an area of 102,600 square kilometers, with about 79 million permanent residents. Currently, it consists of 13 provincially administered municipalities.

Suzhou City is in the southeast of Jiangsu, bordering Shanghai on the east, Zhejiang Province on the south, the Taihu Lake on the west and the Yangtze River on the north. It covers an area of 8,488 square kilometers, of which 42.5% is water body. Suzhou boasts a household registered population of 6.53 million, and a larger permanent resident population of 10.54 million.

Suzhou City was built in 514 BC, approximately 2,500 years ago. The city is in the same place as it was during the Spring and Autumn Period. Suzhou is a picturesque city of parallel canal routes, land roads, streams and streets. It stands out as a unique historical garden with footbridges over flowing streams and black tiles on pink walls. Well known as the Land of Fish and Rice, and Silk Capital, Suzhou has been named Paradise on Earth.

Suzhou is a renowned cultural, historic and tourist city in China, as reflected in the old saying *Suzhou garden is unparalleled under heaven*. Over 60 classical gardens are well preserved and nine of them are listed in the Catalogue of World Cultural Heritage, including Humble Administrator's Garden, Lingering Garden, etc. Its Kunqu Opera and Ancient Guqin are listed in the *Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity* by UNESCO. Towns such as Zhouzhuang, Tongli, Luzhi and Mudu, with their thousand years of history, feature beautiful waterside sceneries.

The 28th session of UNESCO's World Heritage Conference was held in the city of Suzhou in June 2004.