Sheffield Confucius Institute named Institute of the Year

Dr Lucy Zhao reports on the 5th Annual Confucius Institute Conference and SCI’s prestigious award.

The Fifth Confucius Institute Conference was held at the National Convention Centre in Beijing from 9th to 11th December 2010. The main theme of the conference was ‘Sustainable Development of Confucius Institutes; an issue of key importance for the successful development of Confucius Institutes worldwide. H. E. Mr Li Changchun, Standing Committee member of the Political Bureau of the Communist party of China Central Committee, Madam Liu Yandong, Chinese State Councillor and Chairwoman of the Council of the Confucius Institute Headquarters, Minister Yuan Guiren, Minister of Education, and Madam Xu Lin, the Director-General of Hanban, attended the opening ceremony. The conference drew together 1400 vice chancellors and presidents of universities and representatives of Confucius Institutes from 96 countries and regions. Our delegation included Professor Keith Burnett, Vice Chancellor of the University of Sheffield, SCI Director Professor Zang Xiaowei, SCI Deputy Director Dr Lucy Xia Zhao and Professor Liang Yanmin of BLCU.

Together with 29 other Confucius Institutes, the Sheffield Confucius Institute was named Confucius Institute of the Year by Hanban in recognition for its work in the past year. During the official award ceremony, H. E. Mr Li Changchun personally handed the prize over to Professor Zang Xiaowei.

Professor Keith Burnett addressed the international audience at the opening ceremony on behalf of the Confucius Institutes in Europe and spoke about the role of the senior management in the evolution of Confucius Institutes. “My own view is that understanding more fully the diverse cultures of the world is a key role of a University,” he said. “I feel that there is a need, and significant opportunity, for Confucius Institutes to broaden the basis for people to understand issues of contemporary

Professor Zang Xiaowei collects the Confucius Institute of the Year Award from H. E. Mr Li Changchun.

importance in China.” After the Conference, Professor Burnett and the Sheffield delegation attended a private meeting with Madam Xu Lin. Madam Xu spoke highly of the Sheffield Confucius Institute’s achievements to date, and also discussed possible future developments with our delegation.

The conference also provided an ideal platform for discussion and exchange of ideas between representatives of Confucius Institutes. Drawing from our extensive experience in the field, Professor Liang Yanmin gave a talk during one of the forums at the conference entitled Teaching Standards and Training of Local Chinese Teachers.

During the opening night of the conference, SCI’s Caterina Weber, Wanlin Steele and Cherie Ashworth represented the UK in the 2nd Confucius Institute Student Performance. The show featured a lively and colourful programme of Chinese songs, dance, spoken performances and martial arts by students from Confucius Institutes worldwide. “Taking part in the show was a fantastic experience,” says Cherie. “I met people from all over the world who share my interest in Chinese language and culture, and I had the opportunity to perform in front of many important people. Preparing for the show was hard work, but I made lots of new friends in the process. Representing my country at this international event gave me a real sense of pride and accomplishment!”

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A word from our Director...

This special issue of the Sheffield Confucius Institute’s newsletter features some of the successful stories colleagues at the Sheffield Confucius Institute have achieved in the past six months. In February 2011, the Sheffield Confucius Institute worked together with five other local organisations to deliver a very successful Year of the Rabbit Celebration in Sheffield City Hall. Over two thousand people attended the event, including Minister Qin Gang of the Chinese Embassy in the UK and the Lord Mayor of Sheffield, Cllr Alan Law. The dance performed by pupils of the Sheffield Confucius Institute was very well received by the audience. Also in February, our Confucius Institute’s School for Young Learners was awarded the British National Quality Framework “Silver Award” by the National Resources Centre for Supplementary Education. We contributed to the International Language Festival organized by the University of Sheffield in March and organised a successful series of Confucius Institute Online promotion events. Nearly three hundred students and local citizens have opened an account on the website to learn more about Chinese language and culture.

We are continuing to organise a successful series of seminars on China this year. Dr Chang Xiangqun of the London School of Economics and Political Science gave a talk on personal relations in Chinese society in February. Dr Wu Xiaogang of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology gave two seminars in the Sheffield Confucius Institute in May. Professor Cui Xiliang, President of Beijing Language and Culture University, and Dr Yuan Boping of Cambridge University have already accepted our invitation for the coming semester.

With the support from the senior management at the University of Sheffield, we are also preparing ambitious plans to strengthen our teaching programmes and develop research topics to promote the study of Chinese language, culture, and society. You will read more about this in our coming newsletter issues.

The most exciting news, however, is that the Sheffield Confucius Institute was named by Hanban as one of the thirty model Confucius Institutes in the World in 2010. I received the award from Mr. Li Changchun, State Councillor of the PRC, in Beijing in December. We have been greatly encouraged by Hanban’s recognition for our work, and look forward to achieving more success in 2011 and beyond.

Professor Xiaowei Zang

Vice-Premier Li Keqiang meets Chinese language learners in London

During his official visit to the UK in January 2011, China’s Vice-Premier Li Keqiang met Chinese language learners and representatives from Confucius Institutes and other China-related organisations in the UK. Caterina Weber and Sonja Mansfield-Smith were invited to attend the event on behalf of SCI and were introduced to Premier Li by Madam Xu Lin, Director-General of Hanban. “It was a great honour to be able to meet the Vice-Premier and give him a warm welcome to the UK – in Chinese, of course!” says Sonja. Guests also included Chinese Bridge candidates and young learners from local schools, who performed songs and poems in Chinese for the Vice-Premier. Vice-Premier Li exchanged cordial words with everyone attending and was impressed by the students’ Chinese language skills. In support of Chinese language teaching in the UK, he also made a generous donation of 300 books to each organisation attending, which has enabled SCI to further develop its Resource Centre.

Caterina and Sonja with Madam Xu Lin in London
China seminar series continues successfully

In February 2011, Dr Chang Xiangqun of the London School of Economics gave a talk on reciprocity and social networks in China entitled ‘Lishang-wanglai (礼尚往来): A key to understand the “China Model”’ as part of the Confucius Institute’s China seminar series. The talk, chaired by SCI Director Professor Zang Xiaowei, was very well received.

In May this year our seminar series continued with two interesting presentations on social and economic issues by Dr Wu Xiaogang of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. Dr Wu’s extensive research triggered engaging question and answer sessions following his talks.

We have already invited distinguished speakers for the winter semester, most notably Professor Cui Xiliang, the President of our Chinese partner institution Beijing Language and Culture University, and Dr Yuan Boping of the University of Cambridge.

Sheffield Chinese Bridge candidate to represent UK at finals in China

On 19 March 2011, Chinese Studies students Adon Lawley and Olivia Jeffree from the School of East Asian Studies took the stage during the UK finals of the 10th “Chinese Bridge” international speech competition. Adon was awarded second place after a long day of competition, and will be representing the UK at the Chinese Bridge finals in Changsha this summer. With support and guidance from the Confucius Institute and the School of East Asian Studies, Adon and Olivia spent weeks preparing for the challenging contest, which tests both the candidates’ Chinese language ability and their knowledge about China and its culture.

The students had a first go at performing their cultural performances in front of a supportive local audience during a contest organised by our Sino-English Corner. Adon prepared a witty one-man cross-talk about the intricacies of Chinese language, and Olivia showcased her skills on the erhu, a traditional Chinese string instrument.

At the preliminary round of the competition in London, Adon was classified among the top ten contestants for the final round, while Olivia came just short of entering the finals. “I am very proud of both students”, says our teacher Hu Bo, who assisted Adon and Olivia in their preparation. “They have once again proved that Sheffield contestants are among the best!” Our best wishes to Adon for the finals in China.

Shining with Silver: National Quality Framework Award for SCI

SCI’s School for Young Learners was awarded the National Quality Framework Silver Award in March 2011. SCI Director Professor Zang Xiaowei and Head of the School Dr Hu Xinqun attended the awards ceremony held at Sheffield Town Hall. Dr Hu collected the award from Cllr Colin Ross of Sheffield City Council. SCI embarked on the National Quality Framework Programme in 2008 and already received a Bronze Award in February 2009. “The Framework has been instrumental in setting higher aims for our School. To meet the Silver Award criteria, we compiled an extensive portfolio that provides evidence on the ways we organise teaching and support staff and students in order to ensure the teaching and learning is made interesting and creative,” explains Dr Hu.

Seven language schools in total were given the awards, showing strong evidence of the high quality of teaching and learning taking place at complementary language schools in Sheffield.

Singing in Mother Tongue

On the occasion of International Mother Tongue Day, children from our School for Young Learners sang in Mandarin Chinese at the Winter Gardens, one of Sheffield’s landmarks. The event, called Singing in Mother Tongue, featured songs in six different languages performed by students of complementary language schools in Sheffield.

Many passers-by stopped to listen, smiling. “Children have been practicing for over a month. The first song was a popular children’s song, followed by a traditional tune and another cheerful song celebrating Chinese New Year. Children like the lively music and can clap along,” says our teacher Guo Hong.

Music has an important role at the School, explains Dr Hu Xinqun: “Singing is a special way of using a language. Children are happiest when they can learn to sing Chinese songs. Teaching children to feel Chinese music and understand the message in the lyrics is also part of the education process at our School. We hope to participate in this exciting event again next year!”
Welcoming the Year of the Rabbit

Caterina Weber reports on SCI's preparation for Sheffield's biggest Chinese New Year event.

As long-time member of the Chinese New Year Gala Organising Committee, our Confucius Institute joined this year’s event planning process from the very beginning. The Organising Committee consists of six local China-related organisations who have all established their roles in the event planning and delivery over the past years. From September 2010, preparations for the 8th Chinese New Year Gala at Sheffield City Hall were in full flow.

SCI was also fully in charge of the one-hour pre-show programme in the City Hall Ball Room. Planned and organised by Caterina Weber, this year’s programme featured guests from the University of Sheffield including the Sheffield Chinese Music Ensemble, and the Institute’s own teachers and students. Under the guidance of teacher Huang Junjie, our taijiquan class prepared a five-minute performance for the evening. Of course, also the Sino-English Corner actively participated by bringing together Chinese students and learners of Chinese on stage: the Ball Room show was presented by Chris Tucker of the School of East Asian Studies and Zhang Xin of the School of Music, who helped each other perfecting their lines in Chinese and English and entertained the audience with jokes in their target language.

On the night of the show, the Ball Room was buzzing with Chinese cultural activities: visitors preferring a hands-on experience to watching the show could learn writing a few Chinese characters, try a taiji move or take part in a chopsticks competition at our very popular stall. “People were so enthusiastic - they were queuing to have a go at the workshops, especially children!” says Chen Hu, who taught calligraphy at the stall.

The audience’s colourful cultural journey through China continued at the main Gala performance, featuring the Gansu Province Song and Dance ensemble as special guests. The evening left everybody in a festive mood. “It’s great that Chinese New Year comes just after Christmas,” one of our little performers exclaimed while waiting backstage to take a final bow. “I can’t wait for next year – and I will learn to dance even better by then!”
Many ways of celebrating Chinese New Year

Chinese dumplings? Yes. Lion dancing and firecrackers? Certainly. Chinese New Year as we know it - or not always? Year of the Rabbit celebrations in Sheffield have proved that the most popular of Chinese festivals can be reinvented to suit everyone, from the book lover to the football fan.

The Spring Festival has been taken as an important part of cultural education at mainstream schools. For the third year running, we collaborated with Libraries, Archives and Information at Sheffield City Council to deliver Chinese New Year workshops at 20 libraries across the city. Primary and secondary school pupils visited their local library to experience Chinese New Year and learn about its origins through workshops run by Confucius Institute tutors. What are the animals of the Chinese zodiac, and why do they come in a certain order? How do people celebrate in China? Why is the fish an auspicious Chinese New Year symbol? Our teachers answered these and many other questions through storytelling, supporting their vivid narration with pictures and objects. After the stories, it was time for creativity: under the teachers’ guidance, the little artists made their own Chinese New Year paintings, lanterns and dragons. Leaving with a lucky red packet each, the children repeated their newly acquired vocabulary on their way out of the library: Xin Nian Kuaile! (Happy New Year!)

On an even more unique occasion, SCI and Hallam FC co-organised a Chinese New Year football match in February at the Sandygate Road Stadium, officially the world’s oldest football ground. Mr Chris Taylor, Head of Marketing at Hallam FC, contacted the Confucius Institute and the Sheffield Chinese Students and Scholars Association (CSSA) to discuss the event, and organised training sessions for the Chinese team with support from the Confucius Institute. “Sandygate has a very personal feel to it – this is football as it used to be,” explained Mr Taylor during a first visit to the football ground. “We know how much some of the Chinese students in Sheffield love football, but probably few of them know about Hallam FC and its history. This will be a great opportunity to bring together sport and cultural exchange on the occasion of the Spring Festival celebrations.”

While the Chinese players were undergoing training under Mr Taylor’s and his son Joe’s guidance, the Confucius Institute prepared Chinese cultural workshops for the event and planned the venue decoration.

Despite the rainy and windy weather on the day, some 200 Chinese and local supporters came to watch the game. Both teams lined up to sing the national anthems before kick-off, and then the game started, with enthusiastic cries from the audience at every goal opportunity. The game proceeded in a very friendly atmosphere, with both sides showing support for each other. “Penalty, penalty for China!” one of the English fans shouted to alert some of the more sensitive supporters hiding from the rain indoors. During half-time and after the game, SCI’s team provided cultural entertainment which attracted many of the local visitors.

The celebration mood persisted even though the Chinese team was defeated 9-1. “We didn’t really expect to win – Hallam FC players are semi-professionals who train regularly. I have enjoyed the game though!” one of the Chinese players said. Uriah Rennie, President of Hallam FC, spoke to SCI Deputy Director Dr Lucy Zhao after the match. “This was a particularly interesting game as it marked Chinese New Year as well as the 150th anniversary of Hallam FC. We want to thank the Confucius Institute for all support, and hope to co-organise more events in the future” he said.
Confucius Institute Online provides a new wealth of resources

Dr Hu Xinqun reports on the new website which aims at providing an international platform for teachers and learners of Chinese.

In order to promote further exchange and cooperation in the fields of culture and education, Hanban launched the Confucius Institute Online website (www.chinese.cn) at the end of 2010. With 58 sites and over 10,000 Chinese language learning resources available online, CIO is probably the world’s largest web portal on Chinese language and culture. With Hanban’s support, SCI was one of many Confucius Institutes worldwide to organise promotional events in order to raise awareness of the CIO portal.

In February, CIO website demonstrations and assistance for online registration were organised for students in all our Chinese language classes. Several of our teachers praised the website and have been using CIO materials as support in lessons and for children’s homework. All the resources are free for registered users, and provide valuable support outside the classroom.

21 of our students have also participated in several worldwide Chinese language and culture competitions run through the CIO portal. The first round of competitions was organised locally, and all our winning performances and art works were uploaded onto the CIO website to compete against students from Confucius Institutes worldwide.

Our School for Young Learners organised challenging Chinese speech and song competitions between November and February, with contestants grouped into categories by age. Memorising a whole speech or song in Chinese can take long days of practice, but this didn’t discourage our pupils: they showed such a variety of skills that the jury found it difficult to take decisions!

For adult learners, our Sino-English Corner held a Culture Exchange Contest where several of our students showcased their China-related talents. The programme featured Chinese songs and musical performances, as well as a one-man cross-talk. Evelyn Cooper, whose rendition of Chinese pop star Wang Li Hong’s hit "唯一" (Weiyi, translates as The One and Only) won her a prize, is a student in our Beginners I course. "It was the first time I sang in public in Chinese - I was so nervous!" says Evelyn, who took the stage after just four weeks of Mandarin lessons. SEC also organised a Chinese paper-cutting workshop, where students learned the basics of this traditional Chinese art and eventually submitted their best paper-cut for the competition. First prize was awarded to Letizia Libotte, MA student at the School of East Asian Studies and active participant in SEC’s cultural events. Equally popular were the Chinese arts and crafts competitions for children organised by our School for Young Learners — all participants made beautiful paper-cuts and Chinese paintings.

Between January and March, SCI had the occasion to introduce CIO to visitors at several major language and culture events at the University and beyond. Our stall at the Chinese New Year Gala in Sheffield City Hall included information on the online resources, raising awareness about the website among the general public. SCI also contributed to the International Language Festival, a unique event organised by students at the University of Sheffield for the first time in March 2011. SCI Director Professor Zang Xiaowei represented SCI at the festival’s opening ceremony. The event featured lessons in some 150 languages from across the globe over three days, including Mandarin and several of China’s main dialects. Hu Xinqun and Caterina Weber gave presentations about SCI’s role and work, followed by Chinese cultural workshops taught by our instructors Liu Yue and Chen Xiaohua. CIO was very popular among the numerous festival visitors, who could sign up at our stall and receive a free CIO T-shirt. The role of CIO as a discussion platform was one of the main points of interest: "This looks very useful – I am learning Chinese by myself and often feel like getting in touch with other learners of the language worldwide!" one visitor said.
China in Photographs 2011

Now in its seventh year, our annual China in Photographs competition has once again drawn over 200 entries from University staff and students as well as the general public, showing China and its people from many fascinating perspectives. Witold Chudy, final year Chinese Studies student at the School of East Asian Studies and calligraphy student at the Confucius Institute, has emerged as a multiple winner in this year’s competition. "I was riding a bicycle around Yangshuo when I took a picture of this tired man, having an afternoon siesta," he says of the photograph which was awarded Best in Show 2011.

Ralph Lockyer stopped to take this shot of window cleaners at work in Beijing. (Winner, Landscapes and Cityscapes)

Gunnella Thorgeirsdottir caught a glimpse of this man pushing himself along a picturesque Suzhou canal on a quiet evening. (Winner, Everyday Life)

This little boy was completely involved in his game and hardly noticed Witold Chudy, who took a photograph of him playing with a bench. (Winner, Portraits)

Xianting Wu took this fascinating picture in Lijiang, Yunnan Province. (Winner, Famous Sites)

"When trapped, we look up", says Colin Mok of this photograph taken in Tsim Sha Tsui, Hong Kong. (Winner, Artistic Images)

Witold Chudy paid more attention to this drummer than to the actual show during a puppet theatre performance in the Muslim Quarter of Xi’an. (Winner, Culture & Customs)
Stillness in Movement, Movement in Stillness

In Spring 2011, the Confucius Institute has expanded its range of classes to include a Chinese dance course for adult learners. Along with our already very popular taijiquan course for adults, the dance classes offer a further chance to explore China through movement. In February, the first seven students have started working on Chinese dance steps and techniques under the professional guidance of our teacher Wanlin Steele, a Beijing Dance Academy graduate. “Everything is new in this course, even for students who have a dance background. It takes time to familiarise yourself with the music used in the lessons, and with every new movement. We start from single movements, and then bring all of them together into a sequence,” explains Wanlin. “Once students have become familiar enough with some of the sequences, we can go a step further and work on expression and stage presence.”

This is where the concept of shenyun (身韵, literally body rhythm) steps in - as a Chinese saying has it, ‘there is stillness in movement, and movement in stillness’. “What I want from my students is to understand and feel what we learn, and translate this feeling into dance,” says Wanlin. This may not sound easy, but Laura Appleton, one of our Chinese dance students, is up for the challenge: “Chinese dance was always something that I wanted to try, but there hadn’t been any opportunities to do it,” she remembers. “However that changed when I started university and found out about this course. It wasn’t a problem that I wasn’t studying Chinese as the course does not assume any knowledge of the language and was open to anyone who wanted to try it. The lessons themselves are fun, friendly and very enjoyable. The teacher is really helpful - if given this chance again I wouldn’t hesitate to sign up!”

On Saturday afternoons, it’s time for the younger budding dancers to practice. The Institute offers two dance courses for children: both classes are full, with interest growing. The girls warm up and stretch as the lesson starts, and then work on basic dance technique. “Is it right like this?” one of them eagerly asks, trying to concentrate on a hand movement. “It is important that the little ones develop their sense of hearing, sight and movement coordination. At the same time, they naturally enjoy everything else that dance involves – music, rhythm, and of course the use of props and costumes,” says Wanlin with a smile. One hour goes by very fast, both pupils and their parents find: “She is enjoying the class so much that she doesn’t notice time passing,” says one of the mothers of her daughter. “See you next week!”