Sheffield Confucius Institute sees student numbers rising and moves to new premises

Dr Hu Xinqun reports on the many developments at SCI in the past months.

To support the needs for SCI’s continuously developing activities and services, the University of Sheffield allocated No. 7 Shearwood Road to the Institute in September 2011. The new space is directly connected to the existing office, making the whole building (5-7 Shearwood Road) part of SCI and allowing for further improvements of the available services and study spaces. There are now two classrooms specifically dedicated for study and teaching, and our Chinese Language and Culture Resource Centre now occupies the entire ground floor at No 7 Shearwood Road. There is also more office space to accommodate the Institute’s local and Chinese team as well as SCI’s new Research Centre and Chinese Cultural Experience Centre.

At the same time, SCI has grown in terms of student numbers. At our School for Young Learners, known as Star Mandarin School, the new school year started in early September. 6 new teachers have joined our team this term, and free Chinese language taster sessions held in July and September have attracted a large number of students. 72 new pupils registered in September, making it the largest number of children ever enrolled for our Beginners class. “I heard that SCI’s Star Mandarin School is thoroughly managed and has a well organised study programme; my daughter has been studying Chinese for a year but I want her to learn the language properly from the start, so I have registered her on the Beginners course,” says one of the parents. With more rooms now available on Saturdays, the School has been able to cater for its need for more teaching space, increasing the number of classes from 18 to 28.

Student numbers in our Chinese Folk Dance classes at the University Drama Studio have more than tripled this semester. Regular lessons are followed by dance rehearsals for the Chinese New Year Gala at Sheffield City Hall – a demanding, but enjoyable afternoon. Dance teacher Wanlin Steele says: “Along with dance skills, I also teach the children how to develop stage presence. It takes courage for them to perform in public; full confidence in their moves will help them to show the beauty of dance to an audience.” Her students enjoy stepping up to the challenge: 20 of them have signed up for a new Chinese dance competition organised by SCI for the first time in November.

SCI has also continued to develop its Chinese language and culture classes for adults. At our School for Adult Learners, numbers of new students on the Beginners I course have more than doubled, with four classes now running instead of two. Students wanting to receive formal accreditation for their course can register for HSK (Hanyu ShuipingKaoshi), the official standardised Chinese proficiency test for non-native Chinese speakers which is on offer twice a year at the Confucius Institute. The 6 levels of the New HSK system are now matched to all our courses from Beginners to Advanced. The number of students taking HSK at Sheffield in December this year has risen to an unprecedented 43, including many candidates from the Institute’s own classes. Our Chinese culture courses for adults are also receiving excellent feedback. Following recent improvements in terms of venue and contact time, the Chinese calligraphy class now counts twice as many students as last semester, and taijiquan and Chinese dance courses also enjoy increasing popularity.
A word from our Director...

This issue of the Sheffield Confucius Institute's newsletter provides a good opportunity for me to summarize some of the major events and achievements of the Sheffield Confucius Institute this year. I would like to thank colleagues at SCI for the outstanding work they have done this year, and also extend our warm welcome to Ms Xu Bing, a Hanban teacher who recently joined our team. Ms Xu is an experienced teacher from Chengdu, Sichuan province, and will make a valuable contribution to the Institute's Chinese teaching programmes.

We have greatly expanded our office space in September thanks to the support from the University of Sheffield. The Sheffield Confucius Institute is now housed in No. 5 and No. 7 Shearwood Road. We have also developed a highly efficient library management system that allows users to browse all of our available resources online: our Resource Centre now counts more than 6000 items, and is continuing to grow and to further improve its services.

Very importantly, the Sheffield Confucius Institute has expanded its existing courses and programmes and developed a more comprehensive range of projects this year. As of September 2011, the Institute offers 35 courses, of which 19 for young learners and 16 for adult learners, and has a team of 25 part-time and full-time teaching staff. A total of 610 students have registered on our courses this year. Our teacher training programme has been a success story as several linguists and leading academic figures in the field of language acquisition have come to give seminars to our teachers.

In the past months, the Sheffield Confucius Institute has also developed new programmes including Chinese dance classes. We are scheduled to provide Chinese dance workshops at national dance festivals including Move It, the UK's largest annual dance event. Our story-telling programme is developing links with national and international festivals, and has been part of the Scottish International Storytelling Festival in 2011. Some 22,000 individuals have participated in our China-related activities and events over this past year. Finally, the Sheffield Confucius Institute has increased interaction with other Confucius Institutes in the UK and France, creating valuable opportunities to exchange ideas on running a CI and promoting Chinese language and culture outside China.

Looking back on our steady development over past months, I believe SCI will have an even more successful Year of the Dragon.

Professor Xiaowei Zang
Taking its existing links with the University of Sheffield Students’ Union a step further, the Confucius Institute has recently provided Chinese culture taster classes for ‘Give It A Go’, the Union’s popular activities programme that allows university students to try out a wide variety of activities ranging from sports and dance to cooking and crafts. The range of workshops and events is renewed four times a year, and students can participate on a pay as you go basis. Our teachers provided Chinese calligraphy, taijiquan and Chinese fan dance workshops this semester; one of them was also interviewed by Forge Radio, the Union’s own radio station. “The workshops were a successful contribution to our programme, and introduced students to Chinese culture in a fun and creative way. We look forward to teaming up with the Confucius Institute again next semester,” said Give It A Go programme coordinator Anna Tummon.

In October 2011, three SCI teachers provided a half-day Chinese paper-cutting and paper-folding workshop for visitors of all ages at Hanban’s stall at the London Language Show, as well as a Chinese Yi minority dance performance. The Language Show is the largest annual event of its kind in the UK. This year, four SCI taiji students also travelled to London and performed 24-form taijiquan during a martial arts display organised by Hanban at the central stage of the exhibition in the afternoon. "It was very exciting for us to be part of this event, as we could meet taiji and martial arts students and teachers from other CIs,” one of our students said.

In October 2011, SCI contributed to Sheffield’s annual Off the Shelf Reading and Writing Festival with a workshop on Chinese calligraphy, which introduced an audience of about 30 to the Chinese writing system by looking at the history and evolution of characters and the tools traditionally used for calligraphy writing. In the practice session, participants learned about parts composing a character and stroke order, and had a go at writing their first Chinese characters sayings, as well as their own name in Chinese. We have also worked together for the first time with the Children’s Bookshow, an annual tour of children’s authors and illustrators from the UK and abroad. SCI staff assisted the Bookshow to organise a series of talks for local schoolchildren, recommending the talks to SCI’s partner schools and helping to coordinate a Chinese cultural stage event at the Lyceum Theatre in Sheffield. The event brought together reciting, images and music in a very successful performance that illustrated the history and life in old Beijing to an audience of some 1000 pupils and teachers.

In November 2011, SCI worked closely with the Confucius Institute in Manchester to organise a performance of the Beijing Normal University Primary School Orchestra at Firth Park Community Arts College in Sheffield. The event was part of a series of concerts by the BNU orchestra organised by Manchester CI. The college invited pupils from nearby primary schools to the performance, and asked students currently taking Mandarin classes in an after-school club run by SCI to welcome the orchestra in Chinese and show them around the school premises. The orchestra delivered an excellent one-hour performance in front of about 300 pupils and teachers, who took the opportunity to meet the Chinese students after the show, exchange gifts and even practice their first Chinese sentences. This year we have also received visits from the Confucius Institute at the University of Artois, France in May, the Beijing International Education Exchange Centre in September, as well as colleagues from Lancaster CI in April and other UK Confucius Institutes and Confucius Institute Classrooms. Such visits have provided us with the occasion to exchange ideas on running courses, programmes and events, and to discuss possible collaboration.
Our journey to China with the Weston Park Museum

Caterina Weber reports on the Confucius Institute’s exciting new partnership with Weston Park Museum in Sheffield, which started with our annual China Week being partly hosted by the Museum.

During the University of Sheffield Intro Week in September, the Confucius Institute organised its annual ‘China Week’, a programme of colourful cultural events and workshops at the University and around the city, including film showings and hands-on language, calligraphy, taiji, Chinese dance and Chinese crafts workshops. Some 400 visitors attended this year, including many new students who had just arrived to Sheffield. Marking the start of the Institute’s new link with Weston Park Museum, China Week partly moved to a new venue easily accessible for the general public, with all of the programme’s family-friendly weekend events taking place at the Museum this year. Visitors could watch cultural performances and participate in Chinese language and culture workshops in the Museum’s activity rooms, the younger ones especially enjoying Chinese arts and crafts, storytelling and Chinese dancing. “Mummy, daddy... could Santa bring me a beautiful pink dance fan like this one?” a little visitor asked, her fascination with our dance props putting her parents in front of a rather unexpected challenge. “I think we will have to speak to Santa about this – but he will want to know if you remember your Chinese dance steps!” was the reply. No wonder our dance teacher was impressed by some of her students’ efforts...

As part of a long-term collaboration with Weston Park Museum in the coming months, SCI will be involved in co-organising a cultural event programme during an exhibition about China that will be on display in the Museum from December 2011 until April 2012. China: Journey to the East is part of the Partnership UK programme, a series of exhibitions promoting understanding between different cultures in the run up to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Concluding its major national tour in Sheffield, the exhibition offers a rare opportunity to see a remarkable collection of Chinese artefacts together outside London before they return to the British Museum in 2012. The exhibition layout will also feature some of the images submitted for SCI’s China in Photographs competition in previous years.

Teresa Whittaker, Senior Exhibition Curator at Museums Sheffield said: ‘China has a long and fascinating history and it’s great to offer visitors to Weston Park the chance to explore it through such a unique collection. We are delighted to be working in partnership with the British Museum to show these incredible objects in Sheffield, and are also really looking forward to working with the Confucius Institute on the exhibition’s events programme.’

Visitors take part in a Chinese language workshop at the Weston Park Museum

China: JOURNEY TO THE EAST

Weston Park Museum, Saturday 17 December 2011 – Monday 9 April 2012

This upcoming exhibition is one of a series of the British Museum’s touring exhibitions promoting understanding between different cultures. The objects displayed tell the story of China’s thousands of years of innovation and shed light on the intricacies of Chinese culture, exploring themes such as food and drink, festivals and beliefs, and play and performance. Visitors will see the forerunner of today’s calculator, the Chinese abacus, examples of the first porcelain, an oracle bone inscribed with early Chinese writing, and much more. Exhibits will include a selection of Sheffield’s own collection of ornamental ivories. China – Journey to the East will also be complemented by a varied programme of China-related events and talks, with several workshops organised by the Sheffield Confucius Institute.

For more information about the exhibition and related events, please visit http://www.museums-sheffield.org.uk/museums/weston-park

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China Seminar Series

In another successful semester, our China Seminar Series featured several distinguished speakers between September and November. Topics ranged from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) to China’s One-Child Policy.

On 4 May 2011, SCI hosted a talk by Professor Roger Hawkins from the University of Essex, a world-renowned expert on Second Language Acquisition. The talk highlighted the role of first language transfer in second language acquisition, and deepened our teachers’ understanding of cross-linguistic differences between Chinese and English, and other languages such as Arabic.

On 15 September, BLCU President Professor Cui Xiliang gave an engaging lecture entitled “Chinese Idiomatic Sayings and Chinese Society” for over 30 students and SCI teachers. Our teaching staff interacted with Professor Cui in a lively Q&A session following the talk, with interesting insights on the teaching of Chinese idioms to foreign students and on recent changes in the popularity of certain Chinese sayings.

On 21 October, Professor Ian Roberts, Fellow of the British Academy and Chair of the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages at the University of Cambridge, gave a talk on linguistics with special reference to Mandarin. Professor Roberts compared Chinese with other languages in terms of word order and investigated the implications on the relevant acquisition process.

On 22 November, Barnaby Powell and Dr Alex Mackinnon made a very successful return to Sheffield after their lectures for us in 2009. Authors of two well-reviewed books on China, they gave an engaging talk on China’s post-80s generation and the One-Child Policy, drawing from the analysis presented in their new book ‘The China Mandate: New Chalk on an Old Blackboard’. Some 30 participants attended the talk, including members of the Sheffield University of the Third Age. Mr Powell and Dr Mackinnon stayed after the talk to answer questions and sign a copy of their book for interested participants.

On 26 October 2011, the Confucius Institute organised a Chinese cultural event for residents at the Brunswick Gardens Retirement Village in Sheffield. Our dance teacher Wanlin Steele taught a Chinese dance workshop in the morning, showing some 15 participants how to use fans and handkerchiefs in a basic routine. “This is a completely new cultural experience for me,” said one of the ladies, “I have also learned that fan dance is a common form of exercise in China – we should take it up, it’s very enjoyable!” The workshop was followed by a performance programme featuring, among others, "Little Jasmine Flowers" by the Chinese dance class students from our School for Young Learners. The audience of some 50 residents and staff greatly enjoyed the event: the children were encouraged to repeat their performance by several rounds of applause, and our taiji teacher Mr Huang Junjie spontaneously added a solo Chen style taiji demonstration for some of the residents particularly interested in his art. “I was very moved by their keen interest in taiji and the culture behind it,” he remembers. “It is never too late to start learning. Activities such as taiji and dance are very enjoyable and beneficial to health, regardless of your age.”

CHINESE-STYLE ENTERTAINMENT AT YOUR EVENT

The Confucius Institute can provide performances and workshops at your event upon request. We can cater for:
- China Days/International events in schools
- Corporate events
- Community events
- Stage events/public performances

Prices depend on the number of bookings and the event location. Please contact us at confucius@sheffield.ac.uk to discuss your requirements.
Getting in touch with China

The Confucius Institute’s courses, events and programmes offer many opportunities to students learning Chinese in Sheffield to get a step closer to China beyond their course. From language exchange to Chinese culture courses, from competing and performing to assisting at major Chinese New Year events, there is an occasion for everyone to participate.

As a core centre of information on China at the University of Sheffield, the Confucius Institute offers a great variety of resources and also encourages its own students and students at the School of East Asian Studies to get involved in China-related events happening in Sheffield and the surrounding region. Our range of cultural courses provides a hands-on link to Chinese culture. In particular, students enrolled on SCI’s calligraphy course often find it a useful complement to their Chinese language lessons. For those who have acquired cultural skills during their stay in China, there is very often a chance to meet Chinese students with similar interests through the Institute to continue practicing and performing with. Students wanting to take their Chinese language skills a level further can participate in the Institute’s own talent competitions or receive support and training before taking part in national and international competitions such as Chinese Bridge. “The range of activities available through the Institute really does add a lot to your degree – it is one of the reasons why I am very glad to be studying at Sheffield,” says Chinese Studies student Kamile Pudzemyte.

Nearly in its fifth successful year of socials and events, our Sino-English Corner is now more active than ever before: up to 30 regular participants turn up to weekly language exchange socials, with new members joining every week. Newcomers this year include several students who have just started learning Chinese. Especially to them, SEC provides a much needed practice opportunity outside the classroom, according to first year Chinese Studies student Sam Mannakee: “I have started my degree at SEAS this year, and find myself progressing with more ease thanks to regular practice with Chinese native speakers at SEC. It is a fun and helpful experience since I can pick up a lot of new useful expressions and also understand China better through conversations with Chinese students. I am now gaining confidence and can hold short conversations in Chinese!”

Since September this year, the music element so characteristic for SEC’s many previous events has taken a new shape at regular ‘Sing it in Chinese/English!’ Saturday sessions, during which participants learn songs under the guidance of a volunteer teacher and native speakers of the language. “I was surprised how quickly this came in handy,” remarks Andy Kirkham, a student currently enrolled on SCI’s Mandarin Beginners I evening course. “I learned a new song and the lyrics helped me to give directions to a Chinese friend a few days later.” The upcoming SEC Christmas party will provide a first opportunity to perform a programme of merry songs in both languages in front of an audience – including, as befits the occasion, a bilingual version of Jingle Bells. “I love singing, and being able to use it as a language and culture exchange tool is both enjoyable and challenging,” says Beth Main, a final year student at SEAS. “It is a fun and artistic way to learn new vocabulary and practice reading, speaking and comprehension. Culturally, I find it important to share music specific for a certain season such as carols with Chinese people in Sheffield – they are as eager to experience our music, celebrations and festivals as we are while studying in China.”
Success for Sheffield at the 2011 CCTV International Varsity Debate

Three SEAS students win for Sheffield at a challenging international debate competition in China.

Upon invitation from Central China Television (CCTV), a team of three students from the School of East Asian Studies at the University of Sheffield participated in the 2011 International Varsity Debate in Qingdao, China in October. Adon Lawley, a final year BA Chinese Studies student, became the best debater of the round, winning for Sheffield against Tel Aviv University.

The Sheffield team consisted of Adon and his classmates Evelina Valchanova and Maksymilian Marzec. The students had two weeks to prepare for the competition and were required to debate in favour of a given topic – ‘Should girls who have undergone plastic surgery be allowed to take part in beauty contests?’.

“It was a challenge, especially as I needed to read around the subject a lot in order to be able to argue about it in Chinese – I never really discussed this issue with my friends,” says Adon. The team was supported in their preparation by Dr Lucy Zhao, lecturer at the School of East Asian Studies and Deputy Director of the Sheffield Confucius Institute, and Mr Hu Bo, who currently teaches Mandarin at the Confucius Institute.

Dr Zhao accompanied the Sheffield team to Qingdao, and congratulated them and particularly Adon for winning the debate: “This was an excellent occasion for the three students to further enhance their Chinese speaking skills and, more importantly, to learn how to structure a debate. I’m delighted that they won, especially following Adon’s success in the Chinese Bridge competition in Changsha in August this year”. Not a victory without challenge, however: “The experience of being on TV in a show which would be watched by possibly millions of people was unforgettable,” says Maksymilian. “At a certain point my mind went blank in front of the cameras and it seemed an eternity before I could find a way out of the excruciating silence!”

16 Universities took part in CCTV’s biannual competition on 16–23 October this year. The teams were separated into native and non-native speakers of Chinese, with eight teams competing in each category. The international category included students from Harvard University, Princeton University, the University of Sheffield, the University of Nottingham, Moscow State University, the University of Melbourne, Tel Aviv University and the University of Heidelberg.

“It was interesting to meet learners of Mandarin from other UK universities and several different countries in Qingdao. I’m glad we had the opportunity to participate,” remarked Evelina upon her return to Sheffield.

Our courses for adults

Short-term courses

Survival Chinese Intensive Course:
5-day course suitable for beginners
Focus on speaking and listening
Vocabulary covers everyday situations
Next course date: 30 January - 3 February 2012

12-week courses

Mandarin evening classes at all levels, intensive and non-intensive
NEW! Business Chinese course for beginners
Chinese calligraphy, Taijiquan, Chinese dance

All 12-week courses start in the week commencing on Monday 6 February 2012
Please e-mail confucius@sheffield.ac.uk for more information
Celebrating Chinese culture on a national scale

In the past months, the Confucius Institute has had the occasion to take part in several nationwide cultural events – and has already taken up new exciting opportunities for the year to come.

With active support of the experienced teaching team currently in charge of Chinese culture classes, the Confucius Institute has been widening the outreach extent of its Chinese cultural activities in the past months. We have collaborated with the London Organising Committee of the Olympic and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) and other bodies in the domains of culture and entertainment to provide Chinese cultural workshops and performances in Sheffield as part of nationwide events in the summer and autumn this year.

The countdown to the 2012 London Olympic and Paralympic Games began early in the UK with a programme of events taking place across the nation. Open Weekend 2011 provided the Confucius Institute with a unique occasion to be part of the official ‘one year to go’ Olympics and Paralympics celebrations: in July we offered Chinese cultural workshops as part of the programme, which featured over 1000 sport and arts events all around the UK. Students and teachers from our taiji and Chinese dance courses also completed a lap on the running track at ‘By Any Means’, a creative race in Sheffield city centre on 23 July. The event, also part of Open Weekend, brought local groups and organisations together on a running track with the aim to use any means possible to hit the target of 297km, the distance between Tudor Square in Sheffield and the site of the Olympic Stadium in London. After the event, SCI students and staff met the Lord Mayor of Sheffield, Councillor Dr Sylvia Dunkley, who showed her appreciation for their performance. With more Olympics-themed events planned for the year to come, the Confucius Institute will be back on the cultural running track in 2012. ‘This has been a fantastic experience for us,’ says SCI Deputy Director Lucy Zhao. ‘We would be delighted to continue being part of these celebrations in the coming year, emphasizing the link between Beijing and London.’

SCI has also successfully involved its China in Stories project into a framework of major events. The programme is increasingly popular in local schools and has developed links with local, national, and international storytelling events and festivals in the past months, most recently the Scottish International Storytelling Festival. SCI organised a Halloween-themed storytelling event for the Festival at the end of October, during which an enthralled audience of some 20 children listened to Chinese ghost stories especially prepared by our team of storytellers. Towards the end of the event, children made their own paper masks representing some of the characters in the stories. Our storytellers are currently working on a project that will add stories illustrating life in contemporary China to their existing repertoire of traditional Chinese tales and legends.

SCI already has several major events and festivals in the UK on the programme for the coming year, including two Chinese dance workshops at Move It, Britain’s largest annual dance festival. “Cultural exchange is a powerful source of inspiration,” says SCI’s Caterina Weber. “After several years of experience in organising cultural events locally, we believe SCI’s contribution to nationwide ones will be equally rewarding and will allow us to bring Chinese culture to larger and more diverse audiences.”

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