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Chinese Studies: Where does it lead to?

Michelle KAWAMURA

Abstract

China's large population and its recent economic growth make it a significant force in the world today. Some believe that China's place internationally will one day go hand in hand with its economy. From environmental issues to human rights, from fair trade issues to world contribution; whether it's positive or negative, one cannot overlook China's potential global involvement which is ascending at a rapid pace. Currently, 20.1 percent of the Internet websites are in Chinese, second only to English with 29.1 percent (Internet World Stats, 2009). Chinese is spoken by over one billion people, and there is no doubt that learning Chinese can benefit one's personal career and interests. However, a more profound reason for understanding the Chinese language is that it can benefit everyone globally by opening communications between people, and removing the mystique and barriers which often lead to misunderstanding and distrust, thus creating a friendlier and safer world.

Introduction

China has made remarkable advancements in its economy and its corresponding position in the world. It is not easy for a country consisting of one-fifth of the world's population and multiple races to progress without conflicts and problems. Whether it is facing domestic policies or international relations, China still has many hurdles to overcome. The growing importance of China's involvement in private and government sectors is inevitable. Studying China and its language can help us to understand how its culture and mentality form the logic which has led to the rapid changes in the country. This knowledge can benefit us in various sectors of the market as well as in non-profit cooperative activities. This study will take a closer look at the relationship

of China to the rest of the world. Brief highlights of its language, economic growth, environmental and security issues will be discussed. Additionally, the advantages of learning a foreign language such as Chinese will be addressed.

The Growing Popularity of the Chinese Language

Recently, the study of the Chinese language has gained popularity in the U.S. as well as many other countries. In 2006 over 100 schools in the UK offered Chinese (BBC News, 2006). The number of students taking advance level exams in Chinese increased fourfold in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland from 2000 to 2004 (Ramsy, 2008). Brighton College, located in Sussex in the UK, made Chinese compulsory (BBC News, 2006). In Korea in 2006, the number of students studying Chinese had increased 66 percent during the past 5 years to 160,000 students (Ramsy, 2008). Japan reported that between the period from 1993 to 2005 the number of secondary schools teaching Chinese tripled (Ramsy, 2008). Japanese universities are following the same trend, and taking more interests in the Chinese language. Reasons for this recent rise in popularity are contributed to China's growing economy, its involvement in the world trade organizations and its relevancy in global security issues. These reasons make understanding the Chinese language a practical and advantageous skill in today's society. For very simple reasons, young people take Chinese in the hope that it will broaden their job advantages in the business or government sectors. However, there are reasons beyond the surface which are worth investigating. A brief analysis of the role of China in the world allows us to understand where knowledge of the Chinese language may lead.

China's Language Diplomacy

While many countries today are making Chinese language study a part of their foreign language programs, the Chinese government has an agenda of spreading its language further through the Confucius Institute project operated by the Chinese National Office for Teaching Chinese as a Second Language (Forbes, 2006). Although China is not the pioneer of such language expansion programs, it stresses that there are no political or ideological motives in their curriculum (Forbes, 2006). However, the scale of the Chinese language diplomacy has had a stronger impact due to the size and the number of people involved, both in and out of China. Over 300 U.S. universities have adopted the Confucius program, and more U.S. high schools have added Chinese as one of their foreign language choices. Unlike English, which is spoken in several countries and is the number one second language in the world, Chinese is primarily promoted by and represents the People's Republic of China. It is not yet known, but

the cultural effects of learning Chinese are probably different from learning English. This leads to an interesting question: "Where will the study of the Chinese language lead?"

Chinese growing economy and how it relates to the world

The Chinese economy is expanding in many directions and becoming a stabilizing force in this world. Opportunities abound in practically every market. Cutting edge firms have either already put a foothold in or are planning to enter the Chinese market. Singapore's United Overseas Bank, a major Southeast Asian bank with establishments in Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Thailand, is expanding and opened a branch in Tokyo. Its next planned step is to open a branch in China (Lim, 2009). China in 2008 had the second largest economy after the United States (CIA World Fact Book, 2009). China's 2008 gross domestic product (GDP) estimates, ranked number two, stood at nearly \$8 trillion, behind \$14 trillion in the United States and above \$4 trillion in Japan (CIA World Fact Book, 2009). To put this in a different perspective, when assessing the GDP on a per capita basis, China is still nearly only one-sixth of Japan and one-seventh of the U.S. (Morrison, 2009).

The current global economic downturn has shed new light on the importance of the Chinese economy. For the first time, Asia is leading the world out of the economic slow down with Chinese leading the pack (Schwartz, 2009). In the first half of 2009, China became Japan's leading trade partner (Schwartz, 2009), and it is also the biggest trade partner of South Korea (Ramsy, 2008). To keep its economy moving, China's leadership continues its infrastructure expenditures and ease of lending (Subler & Xin, 2009). China positively influenced its domestic economy by reducing taxes (Kimes, 2009). China's foreign reserves are the largest in the world at \$2 trillion and twice the amount of the next largest Japan. China's economy may have already benefited the economic recoveries of countries from France and Germany to Korea and Taiwan (CIA World Fact Book, 2009) (Schwartz, 2009).

China is also playing a more direct roll in assisting the United States. In September of 2008 President Bush spoke directly to President Huo Jintao of China to discuss assisting the U.S. The focus of the conversation appeared to be for China to hold more U.S. bonds and assets (Morrison, 2009). In September of 2008 China became the largest holder of U.S. Treasury, pushing Japan to number two. As of July of 2009 China owned over \$800 billion in the U.S. Treasury, with a 45 percent increase over the past year (La Monica, 2009). A decade earlier China helped smooth another crisis during the 1997-1998 Asian Financial Crisis. China was highly praised by the U.S. for keeping its currency stable while others neighboring nations lowered theirs (Morrison, 2009).

Many Chinese businesses have established themselves in other countries. Chinese telecom suppliers are now gaining a foothold in South American countries such as Argentina, Chile, and Colombia, which were traditionally dominated by Alcatel-Lucent, Ericsson, and Motorola (Whelan, 2009). In Africa the story is the same; Chinese telecom suppliers now command 29 percent of the market, ranked second behind Sweden's Ericsson at 30 percent (Whelan, 2009). Many contend that these expanding firms are unfairly supported by the government (Whelan, 2009). One way to help in solving this and other issues is to open communication between the people, businesses, and governments. Understanding the Chinese language and the country's culture is the first step toward achieving this goal.

Security Issues: China's Potential Role in the World

As China's economy grows, its role in world security also becomes more significant. Two areas of concern are China's involvement with North Korea and Iran, and the country's agenda in taking over Taiwan.

I. Taiwan and the territorial dispute

Major military flash points exist between the U.S. and China in the Taiwan Straits (Chairman Robinson, Jr., 2004). In 1949 the Nationalist Chinese lost to the Communist Chinese on the mainland and retreated to Taiwan (U.S. State Department, 2009). Today the government of Taiwan still calls itself the Republic of China (U.S. State Department, 2009). The United States government passed the Taiwan Relations Act in 1979 which commits the U.S. to defend Taiwan when under military attack (Copper, 2005). In 1996, when Taiwan was about to hold elections, the Chinese government waged war games near Taiwan which prompted a U.S. response by sending its naval carriers to confront China (Copper, 2005). In 2005 China passed the Anti-Secession Law aimed toward Taiwan (U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, 2005). China's military buildup and modernization is related to maintaining China's territorial integrity, including Taiwan (Chairman Robinson, Jr., 2004).

There are also many territorial ambiguities between China and its various land and sea neighbors. On land China has boundary issues with India and Bhutan (CIA World Fact Book, 2009). In regard to the seas, the Senkaku-shoto or Diaoyu Tai Island is claimed by China, Taiwan and Japan (CIA World Fact Book, 2009). The Spratly Islands are claimed by China, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam, and possibly Brunei (CIA World Fact Book, 2009). The Paracel Islands are claimed by China, Vietnam, and Taiwan (CIA World Fact Book, 2009). China and Taiwan also dispute with Japan's unilaterally declared equidistance line in the East China Sea (CIA World Fact Book, 2009). In early 2009, Chinese vessels and U.S. military vessel had a near

miss incident because U.S. claims international waters in the Yellow Sea, whereas the Chinese claimed that the U.S. ships were in the waters of the Chinese economic zone where it has authority (Star, 2009).

II. North Korea

North Korea's nuclear weapons program, with nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, is alarming to the international community (CIA World Fact Book, 2009). China, considered to have the most influence on North Korea, attempted to bring North Korea into disarmament negotiations by hosting the first six-party talk in 2003 (Chang, 2009) (Choe, 2009). The countries involved were North Korea, China, the United States, Russia, Japan and South Korea (Chang, 2009). This six party talk, which has occurred many time, was considered stalled (Choe, 2009). In a statement to a Chinese envoy in September 2009, North Korea indicated that it may be open to discussions on its nuclear program; the United States has communicated with China to persuade North Korea to follow through with this (Choe, 2009).

III. Iran

Iran has been accused of sponsoring terrorists and developing weapons of mass destruction (WMD), specifically nuclear weapons (Ilias, 2008). The U.S. and other major world powers have attempted to force Iran to the negotiating table to discuss WMD by economic sanctions and an effort to cut off the supply of gasoline (Blas, Hoyos, & Dombey, 2009). Though Iran is a major petroleum exporter, due to its lack of refining capacity, Iran is forced to import gasoline (Blas, Hoyos, & Dombey, 2009). As gasoline is not listed as part of the UN sanctions and international petroleum firms shut off the supply of gasoline to Iran, Chinese petroleum companies are filling the gaps, thus undermining the effectiveness of U.S. pressure on Iran (Blas, Hoyos, & Dombey, 2009). Major countries such as India, China, and Russia are reluctant to apply too many sanctions (Ilias, 2008). The U.S. is currently seeking cooperation from China (Blas, Hoyos, & Dombey, 2009).

Environmental

China's economic development has come at the price of its environment and cannot be sustained (Whittington, 2004). China is now the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, displacing the United States (Schuman, 2008). China contains 20 out of 30 of the world's most polluted cities. The economic cost could be as high as 10 percent of its GDP (Morrison, 2009). However, China appears to be committed to improving its environment. In December of 2007 China and the United States signed a memorandum to create the Environmental Industry Forum, which brings together the government officials of both countries to help solve Chinese environmental issues (Forbes/AFX

News Limited, 2007). In 2008 a joint announcement between the U.S. and China was made stating that the two countries had signed a Ten Year Energy and Environment Cooperation Framework with initiatives encompassing energy, transportation, water, air, and the ecosystem (McLaughlin, 2008). The opportunity for technologically advanced nations such as United States and Japan to assist China in clean energy is essential for global well being (Mohammed, 2009). Our world environment cannot withstand the greenhouse gas emissions from China and India if these countries follow the path already taken by the current industrialized advanced nations (Mohammed, 2009). Japan, which has become one of the greenest countries, has much to gain in assisting China and other developing countries (Schuman, 2008). Besides goodwill, Japan can reap economically from eco-technology sales (Schuman, 2008). In fact, the Japanese government, which pledged billions to help the developing world with reducing greenhouse gases, and Japanese firms are already in the process of establishing ties and selling technology (Schuman, 2008). In May of 2008 the leaders of Japan and China pledged to cooperate on the environment (Schuman, 2008). However, not everyone in Japan agrees due to factors such as historical distrust, fear of competition, and Chinese lack of intellectual property laws (Schuman, 2008). But as in any market, other high tech nations are eager to fill the vacuum (Schuman, 2008).

Other Concerns

As in any dynamic country, China has many issues it must contend with. Despite all the good reporting, the current global crisis has negatively affected the Chinese economy (Morrison, 2009). As of January 2009 as many as 20 million migrant workers lost their jobs. This in turn forced the government to induce domestic demands (Morrison, 2009). There are also many issues that bind its economic potential from corruption, pollution, non-performing bank loans, state-owned-enterprises, imbalanced trade, a less than robust judicial system, to economic class gaps (Morrison, 2009).

Many in the United States contend that China uses unfair trade practices which result in the huge trade surplus and loss of American jobs. In a 2007 CRS Report to the Congress of the United States, Chinese trade surplus is unlikely to cause net job loss in the U.S. economy (Elwell, Labonte, & Morrison, 2007). U.S. officials are against the heavy Chinese governmental subsidies to certain Chinese firms (Elwell, Labonte, & Morrison, 2007). Though the subsidies would lower the overall price for the U.S. consumers, they negatively affect U.S. employees in the same industry (Elwell, Labonte, & Morrison, 2007). From a Chinese perspective, it also introduces inefficiencies to the beneficiary companies (Elwell, Labonte, & Morrison, 2007). For best results, it is to the good of the world for the Chinese economy to become truly market based (Elwell, Labonte, & Morrison, 2007).

Summary

Intercultural awareness is important knowledge, which we must possess in the world. China, a country on the rise which has the potential to influence the world with its economy, military, population, environment and more issues, needs our attention to know more about its contemporary culture. There are many reasons to learn about the Chinese society and political movements; it can fulfill one's personal interests, business negotiations and other cooperative activities. By learning Chinese, we can potentially promote cross cultural learning for the benefit of our world. "Where does learning Chinese lead?" The answer to this question will be discovered in the near future.

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