

*An Analysis of the Promotion of Chinese Culture within an L3 Language Experience at the P5-7 Stages in Selected Scottish Primary Schools*

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### **1. Background to research**

This study investigated the promotion of Chinese culture in selected Scottish primary schools through a third language experience, giving distinctive insights into current classroom practices, stakeholders' cultural views and the programme's impact on pupils' understanding of the country and its people. It used a mixed methods approach employing a quantitative survey with 374 P5-7 pupils, across 5 schools in 3 Local Authorities. Qualitative data was also gathered through focus groups involving 18 Scottish teachers, 11 Hanban teachers, 3 Professional Development Officers and 140 pupils.

### **2. Short summary**

The results highlight classroom practices promoting Chinese language and culture (CLC) that can construe China, its culture and values through a traditional lens, emphasising 'large culture' or national narratives at the expense of exposure to 'small cultures' that may help exemplify everyday life and better balance pupils' experiences. The L3 model in operation is almost entirely dependent on Hanban teachers with very few Scottish counterparts engaging due to a lack of confidence and training, which potentially distorts cross-cultural understanding, content and potential collaboration. Though worthwhile classroom practices certainly exist for expansion, curriculum delivery issues can impact on pupils' progressive understanding and awareness of Chinese culture across the Primary 5-7 continuum and, at times, their attitudinal development.

### **3. Key findings/ conclusions against original research questions**

#### Research question 1

*Within the selected schools, what type of L3 Chinese cultural programme has been experienced by pupils at the Primary 5-7 stages?*

An important starting point for this particular question must be to reinforce that the L3 models in operation across all 5 primary schools were largely the same, though with some differences in the timescales in which these ran over the school year. Schools participated in a cluster-based approach overseen by the local Confucius Classroom in their associated High School, however in addition, school 3 also had resource allocated to perform this role. The visiting Hanban teachers were absolutely central to the delivery of CLC, but those involved in this study indicated that their teaching was split across both education sectors in ways that created time pressures. In primary schools, pupil inputs were relatively short, usually 50-60 minutes per week within blocks of 6-8 weeks for each of the P5-7 stages on an annual basis with the possibility of some engagement also at other levels. All adult participants

recognised CLC as a worthwhile initiative as part of the '1+2 languages' agenda, but that creating time and space for its reinforcement and development within the wider primary curriculum was difficult.

There was a very strong focus on presenting China, its people and culture from what has been termed in this study 'large/ national' cultural perspectives with a focus on tradition through activities reinforcing the 4 Fs: food, festivals, folklore and facts. This created a very uniform view of Chinese people and culture with much less engagement with aspects of small/ local cultures to which pupils may be better able to relate. The data showed that across P5-7 as a whole, there was clear repetition in pupils' learning with a need for better progression in their experiences and understanding. Though there were certainly examples of interesting application and contextualised learning across the curriculum taking place, mainly in school 3, this was in the minority and something that needed sharing more widely to show the potential of CLC as a balance to the promotion of traditional culture. Broad indications for its language element existed within the framework for L3 practices from Education Scotland (2019), however there seemed to be no specific national guidance and little at local/ school level on the cultural base. As a result, this was most often left to the Hanban teachers' own judgments around what would best constitute Chinese culture. This was recognised by this group as being very open to individual interpretation and, as a result, could encourage a fall back to some strong cultural messages from organisations such as Hanban given in pre-departure training, which were recognised as not always suitable for local contexts. The work of Professional Development Officers from the associated Confucius Institute (CI) tried to promote balance and other perspectives. However, these messages were hampered by structural issues such as lesson duration, perceived lack of resources and general expectations around the dual delivery of language and culture within the same lesson, which some Scottish teachers felt prioritised the former over the latter.

### Research question 2

*What similarities/ differences exist in how a 'Chinese cultural programme' is construed by those Scottish teachers and visiting Hanban teachers involved in the study?*

In answering this question, it was clear across both datasets that the relationship between the Hanban and Scottish teachers is fundamental to the success and sustainability of CLC as an L3, but in many ways is currently very imbalanced and this impacted on the delivery and reinforcement of the cultural dimension of classroom experiences. Hanban teachers were understandably regarded by their Scottish counterparts as linguistic and cultural experts, thus expected to manage content delivery with few problems. However, without specific guidance, the cultural element delivered was often a mix of strong internal beliefs surrounding what it meant to be Chinese and competing external influences on how China can/ should best be presented through the training support from Hanban and CI organisations, which created tensions. The expression of cultural values and their contrast to those in Scotland/ UK reinforced the notion of 'Chineseness' in these teachers' minds, but with a realisation that this thinking had to adapt and adjust to a different curriculum and classroom context, which posed challenges for this group, particularly in secondary schools. For a number of Hanban teachers, the response to these changes was to echo a traditional view of China in the activities delivered, but that this was not ideal and had to be broader to give relevance to pupils' learning CLC. Content was being delivered against a backdrop of other pressures over which this group had little or no control such as time, resourcing and a lack of others' understanding of their role. This led to frustrations that only a superficial cultural experience was being offered with the potential for more positive impact limited by these factors.

In terms of Scottish teachers in the study, the approach for most could be summed up as interested/ disinterested passivity in contrast to more active engagement by a very small minority that reflected

hopeful future models of practice. Those within the former category were very open and honest about their lack of engagement and knowledge base in relation to Chinese culture which led to even more reliance on the Hanban teachers. From the earlier discussions, there was a clear demarcation of roles in terms of handing the delivery of CLC over to the Hanban groups. The Scottish teachers' cultural knowledge gained from the observing of lessons, as expressed through focus groups, most often reinforced the view of the delivery of culture as centring round traditional notions for many. It was interesting that the groups' lack of confidence to engage in CLC activity was set against views that some of the approaches being used by the Hanban teachers needed refinement when compared to their own teaching/ observations of primary languages such as French. This showed potential for Scottish teachers to assist classroom practices for mutual benefit. However, the lack of any meaningful collaboration in most schools between both sets of teachers meant that the opportunities for further cultural insight, joint planning and delivery for the wider improvement of all involved were limited in most, but not all contexts with school 3 standing out in this respect. Issues surrounding the purpose and delivery of CLC highlighted views that its goal was primarily to be seen as an awareness raising tool, rather than achieving anything specific in terms of curricular goals. This assisted the points made in relation to question one surrounding a lack of progression and repetition of learning. Scottish teachers questioned the sustainability of an L3 model so dependent on the Hanban groups, but also indicated other fundamental long-term problems at the heart of enhanced cultural knowledge and understanding such as an apprehension about getting involved and a perceived lack of training activities. These would develop a sound knowledge base that would complement the input of the Hanban groups, but also allow Scottish teachers to act with confidence independently of this resource and allow reinforcement over the school year as a whole. Further, there is scope to consider the deployment of Hanban teachers to support Scottish teachers in developing a sustainable model. For example, teaching them CLC and working with these teacher groups to develop a pedagogically effective model, rather than just teaching pupils. The current model seems not to be designed or intended by anyone to be sustainable.

### Research question 3

*How has an L3 cultural programme shaped the knowledge and attitudes of pupils at Primary 5-7 towards China, Chinese people and Chinese culture?*

Though the notion of impact on pupils across the P5-7 stages should be a key goal in the evaluation of initiatives of this type, it seems very underplayed in terms of the available grey literature base. Within this study, this was often more connected in teachers' minds with successful, enjoyable activity, rather than clear purpose and outcomes. At times, there seemed a disconnect between the notions of observed impact from the perspectives of Scottish teachers and those expressed by pupils in their classes.

The knowledge base developed in pupils' minds, mostly reinforced the notion of China as a place of tradition and reflected back many of the points raised within question 1. With some worthwhile exceptions, pupils seemed largely to highlight their thinking around CLC as culturally distant and based more on touristic experiences, rather than application of their learning across the curriculum and into the local community. The lack of shifts in their thinking was often a feature of the results across P5-7 as a whole, but with elements of ambivalence or negativity towards CLC at P7 that may be explained by the models in operation, lack of progression and application in their learning.

Pupils' views on the purpose of CLC gave interesting results that emphasised the language element of their learning over the cultural experience and that these would support future activities in China. However, this seemed to be the reverse for many pupils at P7 where they seemed clearer about the application of their learning in Scottish/ UK contexts. For a sizeable number of pupils, notions of

understanding the purposes behind CLC were vague in their mind, though there are interesting initiatives being taken forward to apply their learning which need to be shared more widely. In contrast, the teachers in the focus groups recognised the potential of CLC in an everchanging world where the impact of China is being increasingly felt, suggesting the need for purpose to be better clarified and shared with learners.

Attitudes towards cultural difference between the people of both Scotland and China showed that rather than narrowing over time, these increased. One possible reason for this may be the focus on traditional Chinese society which has the potential to artificially emphasise views of cultural difference as opposed to similarities that would be more obvious when looking at day-to-day life, thus feeding into the conclusions reached for question 1. Though promoting interest in people of other cultures beyond China gave rise to mixed results from a longitudinal perspective across P5-7, there were signs of a more positive trend over time, supporting the need for on-going exposure to CLC, rather than cultural one-off inputs. Views on continuing the study of CLC into secondary schools showed the potential was there to build on a sizeable positive group of interested and motivated pupils and scope to influence others. Where negative views existed, highlighting purpose, relevance and application more as a feature in the teaching and learning process would be very beneficial in reshaping such attitudes. However, it is also accepted that the precise reasons behind these views would need further investigation and that other factors were potentially at play e.g. timing of interviews, maturity of thought, (in)ability of young pupils to link tasks in the here and now to their distant future.

#### 4. Recommendations

These are specifically offered for 5 key stakeholders involved in the promotion of CLC in Scottish Schools.

<b>target audiences</b>	<b>Schools</b>	<b>Local authorities</b>	<b>Initial Teacher Education provision</b>	<b>Education Scotland</b>	<b>Hanban organisation</b>
<b><i>broad implications/ recommendations</i></b>					
<b><i>Wider L3 policy, regardless of language context</i></b>					
Revisit the intended meaning behind the notion of an ‘inverse methodology’, promoted in the ‘1+2 policy’ as well suited to L3 delivery, to better reinforce understanding of the complementary contributions of language and cultural learning to each other.				•	
At the broader level of L3 provision, and across both language and culture themes, give a clearer articulated position on what is expected of schools given the limited time available for its delivery.		•	•	•	

<i>Curriculum guidance in relation to CLC</i>					
Give a much greater steer towards interdisciplinarity where blocks of time to focus specifically on the teaching of CLC would be part of larger initiatives to build CLC into project work across the year.		•	•	•	
Issue clearer advice/ good practice exemplars to Scottish and Hanban teachers on how to make the teaching of culture accessible to primary aged pupils		•	•	•	•
Plan for progression in cultural content within CLC experiences across the P5-7 stages to balance new and previous learning in ways which avoid unhelpful repetition.	•	•		•	
<i>Training for CLC</i>					
Engage with the Hanban organisation with regards to pre-departure events to encourage further country specific curricular inputs/ background knowledge.				•	•
Promote the view of CLC as something that could be taught by any interested teacher, not just by its cultural and linguistic natives.	•	•	•	•	
Be more explicit about the roles and expectations of Scottish and Hanban teachers to encourage shared professional insights and sustainability.	•	•		•	•
Extend the use of cross-curricular projects to give relevance to learning inside and outside the classroom with a range of groups/ organisations, including enhanced primary-secondary liaison.	•	•	•	•	
Require schools to reinforce CLC learning over the course of the school year.	•	•			
To support all of the above, divert more of the Hanban teachers' time towards the promotion of CLC in primary schools, including enhanced interaction with staff.		•		•	•
<i>Research into CLC</i>					
Draw upon the growing network of Confucius Classrooms in Scotland as a base for further 'voiced' research involving those delivering and receiving input, especially at the primary level.	•	•	•	•	•
Engage pupils in attitudinal surveys with follow up discussions to explore areas for future improvement.	•	•	•	•	

## 5. Implications

These recommendations give rise to a number of implications and should place particular responsibilities on the different stakeholders mentioned to help extend and improve CLC practices, capabilities and sustainability within models of delivery at present.

The **Hanban organisation**, and its recent successor ‘The Chinese International Education Foundation’, has a central role in providing funding and training for the visiting groups of Chinese teachers in Scotland and also in supporting the CI to which they are attached. The nature of pre-departure activities needs to better recognise the national contexts in which these teachers will operate and build in mechanisms to introduce the host curriculum, teaching models and approaches. This includes adaptations of resources, content and thinking to these contexts, rather than what seems to be a one-size fits all model. In this respect, there is room for continued collaboration with the Confucius Institute for Scotland’s Schools and other Scottish educational organisations. This can assist the transition from China to Scotland prior to arrival, as once in schools it seems easy for the Hanban groups to become overwhelmed by all that is expected of them. The focus on building up quality experiences at primary school level should be the goal so that pupils are progressing into the secondary curriculum with a more secure knowledge and understanding of the nature and purpose of CLC and hopefully positive attitudes as a result. In this respect, the continued extension of Confucius Classrooms into the primary sector should be seen as beneficial.

In terms of **Education Scotland**, firstly there are some broader implications arising out of this research for its promotion of L3 provision, regardless of language context. It should revisit the notion of an ‘inverse methodology’, uniquely cited in the ‘1+2 policy’ document (Scottish Government, 2012), and used as a specific underpinning for the promotion of CLC in Scottish schools. Though well intentioned, the meaning of this phrase is ambiguous in practice and creates a false dichotomy between the relationship of language and culture in language learning and indeed, in the context of CLC, may suggest that these dimensions are in opposition to each other. Secondly, in relation to L3 guidance, deeper consideration is required as to what should be expected from the initiative in terms of both linguistic and cultural goals as what is on offer, at present, may not be in a position to achieve measurable gains due to a lack of meaningful guidance and clarity of expectations. In the current iteration of the L3 model, Education Scotland needs to take a more direct role in framing broad expectations of the cultural dimension within language learning, not just within CLC, especially as it is one of the pillars that underpins L3 provision across all languages being offered. Whilst one of the aims of L3 policy is to offer flexibility in models, and approaches, this has created a vagueness in what has to be achieved in a cultural sense, which is unhelpful in terms of a progression in pupils’ learning. The current model in operation works under the implicit assumption that CLC will be delivered by visiting Hanban teachers for the foreseeable future and as such there is not always clear impetus for schools to create their own capacity. Work should continue with the Confucius Institute for Scotland’s schools and other education providers to build a base of teachers that have the knowledge and confidence to create such a situation.

The researcher’s existing role in Scottish **Initial Teacher Education (ITE) programmes** gives rise to an important context where these recommendations have application with the potential for wider reach. Scottish postgraduate subject specialist and undergraduate generalist degree programmes are making space to further develop the 1+2 policy agenda. Designing modules that draw upon input from both native and non-native speakers from the outset will reinforce the notion that CLC is achievable for all teachers to develop. In terms of L3 practices, for those training to work in either the primary or secondary school sector, student teachers need to be given clear messaging on the role of the cultural dimension. Encouraging them to think of purposeful and creative ways to engage pupils would emphasise some of the potentially positive messages of good practice in the area mentioned in this research, so that these are being taken forward at the earliest stages of students’ careers. Links on such courses to existing thinking in interdisciplinary learning can be usefully combined with L3 provision in this respect. This may provide scope for small scale student-based practitioner research and, more

widely, the location of CIs within a number of Scottish ITE institutions should provide the links and research synergies required to explore CLC delivery further than at present. Much of this practice within ITE could equally apply to other non-traditional L3 languages.

Within **local authorities**, an emphasis on securing the long-term future of CLC needs to be the focus in similar ways as for European languages in the past. It was clear from the Scottish teachers participating in the study that the model was essentially reliant on Hanban teachers to take forward with doubts that it could be sustained out with this. Local authorities need to continue to work with schools and with the Confucius Institute for Scotland's Schools to build capacity for non-native language speakers to take on the delivery of CLC practices. From this study, resource allocation that allowed motivated and confident Scottish teachers to work to support others in their school and cluster showed that the capacity for change is there. It should be a condition/ strong expectation that schools taking part in the CLC programme commit to staff being upskilled.

At individual **school level**, the roles and responsibilities of CLC need to be shared much better between the Hanban and Scottish teachers. Though issues with the language will take time and training to overcome, both sets of teachers already have a base of expertise to be shared to the benefit of the pupils in terms of content development and teaching approaches that may help to further engage pupils in purposeful learning. As has been stressed both in policy and comments, there is scope to draw upon project base learning more fully, which is one of the intended goals of L3 learning. A more embedded and collaborative model would see greater understanding between both groups of teachers and lead to points of enhancement and embedding across the curriculum as a whole over the school year. Though likely a minority view, the notion of CLC being a 'free resource' with no strings attached to schools' involvement creates a lack of impetus for change.

Across **all stakeholders**, mindsets that CLC is simply an experience within the curriculum may seem to be understandable at one level in a generalist primary curriculum, but this limits the ambitions of the L3 policy and practices. Without proper consideration at various levels, there is a danger that CLC presents an attractive outward picture, but when scratched below the surface has achieved only a small element of its huge potential. Though external groups have questioned the operation of Chinese initiatives in school from political viewpoints, it is curriculum practices that are acting against further progress. In a programme which enjoys government support and funding to encourage the sort of cultural engagement that would promote 21<sup>st</sup> century thinking in pupils, the positive stories of impact need to be shared and built upon. Though there is, understandably, an argument that this provision is in the early stages of development and not fully integrated into the primary CfE curriculum, this suggests the need for monitoring and evaluation of progress and a robust discussion about sustainability, which this research highlights. In this respect, there is ample room for further research into CLC that would open up healthy debate on not just L3 practices in Scotland, but within the UK more widely and internationally thus driving the programme ever forward.

## **6. Generalisability/ transference of results**

Rather than statistical generalisation, this study and the various tools used have created results with a very high level of 'transferability', which is seen as the application of findings from one situation/ issue to another. The key factor in this is the notion of similarity of context. Based on what is understood of CLC practices in the L3 landscape from the literature review and the datasets presented and discussed, the same broad commonalities in the practices within this study are very likely to be replicated across the majority of Scottish primary schools delivering CLC as an L3 input due to these shared factors:

- CLC is most often delivered as an L3 model in the primary sector;
- all schools work to the same guidance on L3 practices published by Education Scotland (2019);
- use of Hanban teachers is central to classroom experiences and delivery;
- working within the age/ stage range parameters of the 1+2 policy;
- school cluster-based approaches overseen by local High Schools with support of a Confucius Classroom at secondary and/or primary school level; and
- ability to draw upon support from the CI assisting the promotion of CLC as a Scottish educational initiative.

\* Please give due acknowledgment of the author in any use of this summary.

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