

# Discussion on the Reform of Chinese Major Curriculum Setting in Cambodian Universities

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**Abstract:** With the implementation of the strategy for Chinese international promotion, the diversified social development needs are constantly adjusting the direction of Chinese education promotion, onefold course setting can no longer meet the increasingly abundant practical needs of Chinese. In order to make Chinese education and teaching in Cambodia better, it is necessary to analyze and evaluate the setting of Chinese courses in colleges and universities from the perspectives of social-based value orientation, and reform the relevant Chinese curriculum by developing special-purpose Chinese courses, filling in the gaps in cultural courses, and adding courses to cultivate students' innovative thinking and scientific spirit.

**Key words:** Cambodia; University; Chinese curriculum setting; Curriculum reform

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## 1 Introduction

In 2009, the Confucius Institute at the Royal Academy of Sciences of Cambodia was officially inaugurated. Today, the Confucius Institute has gone through ten years in the beautiful Khmer land. With the "One Belt One Road" plan and the development and implementation of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, Chinese language education in Southeast Asian countries also plays an important role in the international promotion of Chinese language. The arrival and development of the era of informatization and intelligence has deepened the economic and trade cooperation between countries,

and also put forward new requirements for the Chinese language education model.

## 2 The status of Chinese courses in Cambodian universities

In recent years, with the strong support of the Cambodian government and departments at all levels, Cambodia not only offers Chinese courses in universities, middle schools and primary schools, but also supports enterprises, social organizations, and government agencies to participate in Chinese education. Currently, three colleges and universities in Cambodia have opened Chinese departments, incorporating Chinese learning into academic education. According to Liu Yi's(2000) classification of foreign language majors<sup>[1]</sup>, this research analyzes the Chinese language curriculum in Cambodia's Royal University of Phnom Penh, Asia Euro University and Meanchey University.

### 2.1 Overemphasize the language skills, culture knowledge and lack vocational courses

From the perspective of the types of courses, the curriculum focus of Chinese language teaching in Cambodia is biased towards language skills courses and culture courses, while vocational courses and professional knowledge courses have considerable room for development. Whenever, vigorously promote special purpose Chinese teaching and meet the diversified needs of Chinese application are the direction of the curriculum reform efforts<sup>[2]</sup> (Li Quan, 2011).

### 2.2 Monotonous form and content of culture courses

The integration of language structure, language

function, and cultural teaching is an inevitable trend in teaching Chinese as a foreign language. Among the schools, the lack of cultural courses at Meanchey University is more serious, and only one "General Knowledge of Chinese Culture" is offered. The Cambodian cultural curriculum is developed in a monotonous form, mainly in the form of teaching-based. There are not many exploratory and cooperative cultural learning courses; the content is too focused on the understanding of declarative knowledge, and lack of practicality and pertinence.

### 2.3 Half-day teaching mode and limited class schedule

A solid language foundation is the prerequisite for everything, but the survey found that the school hours of basic Chinese courses in various schools in Cambodia are not sufficient. For example, the freshman year of Asia Euro University has only 240 class hours per semester. The half-time teaching mode not only restricts the opening of courses and class schedules in colleges and universities, but also affects the division and management of classes. The uneven Chinese proficiency of students in the same class further affects the quality of Chinese education and teaching.

## 3 Enterprises' demand for Cambodian Chinese-language employees

In recent years, the volume of China-Cambodia trade and the investment of Chinese companies in Cambodia have been increasing. Affected by the COVID-19, the reception of foreign tourists in Cambodia will drop sharply in 2020, but China is still Cambodia's largest source of foreign tourists. It can be seen that China and Cambodia have increasingly close exchanges in the fields of economy, trade and tourism, and society's requirements for Chinese language talents will also change, which requires Chinese teaching to be adapted to local conditions and time.

The teaching content is organized in accordance with the logical sequence of knowledge, which one-sidedly emphasizes the role of the curriculum in promoting the development of the subject <sup>[3]</sup> (Zhang

Shaoxiang, 2001). As talent training party, the school should proceed from the perspective of supply-side reform, fully consider the development of students and the needs of society, and actively promote reforms to meet the society's needs for innovative talents.

The author took 17 Chinese-funded enterprises in Cambodia as the survey subjects. The results of the survey show that the number of companies with half of the total number of employees who can speak Chinese in Cambodia has reached 23.5%, which shows that Cambodia has a high demand for Chinese language learning (Figure 1). When asked about the professional knowledge of employees, 47.1% of enterprises believed that the professional knowledge of employees could not meet the needs of the work and even differed greatly (Figure 2). Among Chinese skills, companies especially value the listening and speaking ability of employees (Figure 3). In addition, companies hope that employees can improve their innovation, translation, and cross-cultural communication skills.

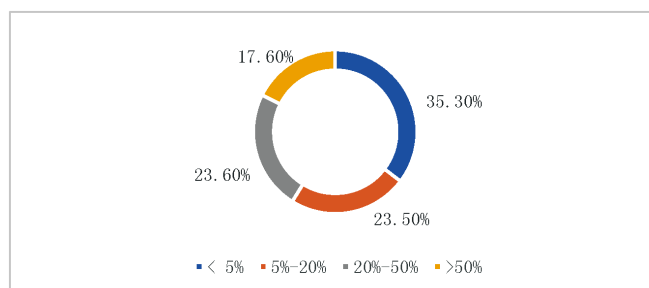


Figure 1. Proportion of Cambodian Chinese-language employees in enterprises

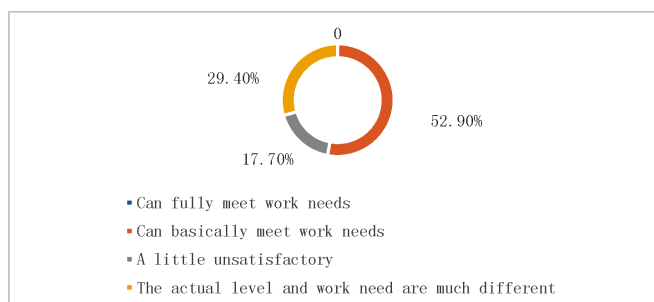
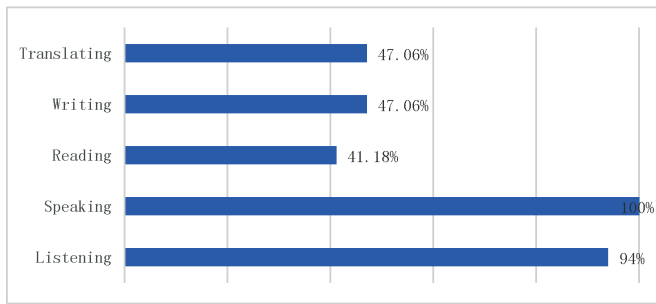
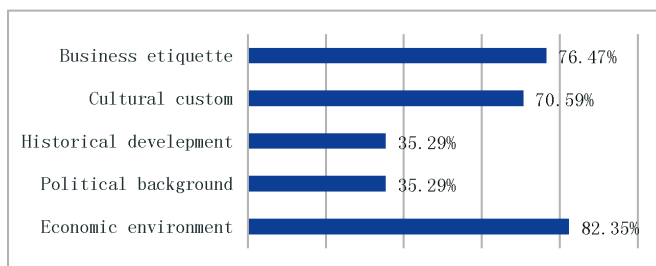


Figure 2. Degree of satisfaction of enterprises with professional knowledge of employees



**Figure 3.** Requirements of enterprises in Cambodia for employees' Chinese skills

In order to improve cross-cultural communication skills, enterprises believe that employees should strengthen their understanding of China's economic environment, business etiquette, and cultural customs. More than 70% of enterprises emphasize the importance of business etiquette (see Figure 4). If relevant vocational courses can be offered, more than half of the companies hope to focus on cultivating students' business information communication skills and courtesy communication skills.



**Figure 4.** Chinese knowledge that employees should know

Today, when the concept of supply-side reform is in full swing, the development of Confucius Institutes has shifted from focusing on development speed and scale growth to focusing on development and structural balance<sup>[4]</sup> (Ning Jiming, 2019). Colleges and universities should transform the change of social needs into internal motivation, actively promote reforms, and strive to cultivate innovative talents that meet the needs of social development.

#### 4 The Reform Path of Chinese Curriculum in Cambodian Universities

On October 12, 2020, China and Cambodia formally signed the Free Trade Agreement between the Government of the People's Republic of China and the Royal Government of Cambodia. While promoting bilateral economic and trade relations, it also brought new opportunities and challenges

to Chinese language education in Cambodian universities. In view of the current situation of the Chinese curriculum in Cambodian universities and the actual needs of society, the author has considered the curriculum reform path from the following perspectives.

### 5 Development of specialized Chinese courses

#### 5.1 Offer CSP (Chinese for Specific Purposes) courses

Confucius Institutes in countries along the "Belt and Road" offered a total of 667 specialized Chinese courses from 2007 to 2018, of which business courses occupies an absolute advantage[5] (Liu Shuaiqi, 2020). The Confucius Institute at Nanyang Technological University in Singapore, which has the highest proportion of specialized Chinese courses, has developed a model of "training classes—system courses—professional diploma programs" to gradually improve the business Chinese curriculum system.

The exchanges between China and Cambodia in the fields of economy, trade and tourism are becoming increasingly close, and there are also very broad prospects for the development of specialized Chinese courses such as business Chinese and tourism Chinese in Cambodia. The CSP course, which focuses on Chinese language learning, is more flexible. High-level Chinese learners can choose to study CSP courses after they have mastered the basic Chinese.

#### 5.2 Set up Chinese language major or direction

The Asian-African Confucius Institute has set up majors such as "Chinese + High-speed Rail" and "Chinese + Flight Attendant" to train professional single-disciplinary talents. The "China-Thailand High-speed Rail Chinese Training Program" launched by the Confucius Institute at Khon Kaen University in Thailand has already trained a large number of technical talents for Thailand's high-speed rail project. Various universities in Cambodia can also try to set up Chinese language (+ direction) majors according to their own conditions, such as Chinese language (education direction), Chinese language (business direction), Chinese language (tourism direction) and other courses, and develop a sustainable program with Cambodian characteristics.

### 5.3 Provide Chinese minor courses for other majors' students

The Chinese minor courses are designed to form interdisciplinary crosses, to inspire divergent thinking, and to cultivate compound talents, thereby providing students with more choices and learning channels. This can not only expand the influence of Chinese language, but also cultivate compound Chinese talents that meet the needs of society. Refer to the Chinese minor courses set by the Confucius Institute at Western Michigan University in the United States and Ramkhamhaeng University in Thailand, the content generally includes elementary Chinese, intermediate Chinese, business Chinese, Chinese culture, etc.

## 6 Fill in the cultural curriculum gap

Culture teaching and language teaching have always been inseparable. The language teaching foundation supports the development of cultural teaching, and the cultural teaching background sublimates the language teaching content. There is a serious lack of Chinese cultural courses in some universities in Cambodia, and filling the gaps in cultural courses is a key to the reform of Chinese courses.

Cultural courses not only exist as the background of language learning, but also the carrier of language learning content, and it is the key to stimulate students' interest in learning. Regarding the reform of cultural curriculum, in terms of content, the focus of cultural curriculum should shift from cultivating literary literacy to practical cultural teaching, and some business-related cultural knowledge can be added appropriately. In form, cultural curriculum can be application-oriented and supplemented by explanations through lively activities. In various cultural activities, students can experience Chinese

culture by themselves and learn by doing, which enhance the applicability, diversity and practicality of cultural courses.

Chinese teaching in Cambodian universities has gone through more than ten years of ups and downs. Under the background of the new era, we must have higher requirements for ourselves. In order to build a more open, inclusive, and standardized modern international Chinese education system, we must take the road of reform and development, but the difficulties in the reform cannot be ignored. Whether it is setting up a CSP course or setting up a "Chinese +" major, how to obtain high-quality teachers is the most difficult problem to solve. China and Cambodia have always been good neighbors living in harmony. With the strong support of the two governments and the active cooperation of all sectors of society, Chinese language education in Cambodia has achieved unprecedented development. We believe that in the near future, Chinese language teaching in Cambodia can be improved through reasonable and effective curriculum reforms.

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