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**Discipline-specific Chinese Language Teaching in Higher Education: A Case Study in Hong Kong**

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**Abstract**

The study of Chinese language teaching for specific purposes provides an important criterion for measuring the continuity and sustainability of language education. As Hong Kong and mainland China get closer economically and politically, there is a need to actively promote discipline-specific Chinese (DSC) to meet the diverse needs of local Chinese students. The present case study discusses the definition of DSC, the theoretical framework, core principles, needs analysis, textbook compilation and teacher training, and illustrates some guiding principles of DSC teaching that cater for the specific needs for the Chinese language in different workplace contexts in Hong Kong. In the design of DSC curricula, the subject knowledge and genre-specific language use of each professional community are combined to develop language-focused activities and assessments. Close collaborations between the different academic departments and the Chinese language teachers are crucial for ensuring that the subjects reflect the genuine Chinese language needs and use.

**Introduction**

In order to align the city's education system with those of most countries in the world and to implement a more flexible, coherent and diversified curriculum, the Hong Kong Education Bureau implemented a new "3-3-4" academic structure from the school year of 2009-10, which consists of three years of junior secondary education + three years

of senior secondary education + four years of higher education (Education Bureau, 2005). The four core subjects in the new secondary school curriculum are Chinese language, English language, mathematics and general education. Importantly, a variety of elective subjects were added to the new curriculum to develop students' interests and abilities. After the secondary school curriculum was successfully implemented, the four-year university scheme was launched in the 2012-13 school year.

The reform in academic structure requires that a whole-person education curriculum be designed for university students, and Chinese language education has a decisive role in developing students' vision and cultivating their critical thinking as most local students are native speakers of Chinese (spoken Cantonese and Standard Written Chinese). All the tertiary institutions in the city have revamped their Chinese subjects to align with the requirements of the new academic structure (typically consisting of one to two subjects). The teaching and learning of DSC, which is the focus of this case study, makes up one compulsory 26-hour subject with 2 credits for all full-time undergraduate students at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

The Hong Kong Polytechnic University (hereafter PolyU) is one of the eight government-funded local universities for training academics and professionals. It has eight faculties which are applied science and textile, business management, construction and environment, engineering, health and social sciences, humanities,

design, and hotel and tourism management. As a research university, PolyU puts strong emphasis on providing professionally-oriented education. With the implementation of the new university curriculum in 2012, it re-examined and adjusted its subject offerings in response to both the education reform and the societal demand for professionals. Under the new curriculum, all students must successfully complete the Chinese language and communication requirements (LCR) as well as the Chinese discipline-specific language requirements (DSR) to meet the University Graduation Requirements as stipulated by PolyU. Against this background, the DSC subjects were established to enable undergraduate students majoring in different programs to develop Chinese language skills for professional needs. This language component has gradually become part of the four-year major curriculum. Pilot DSC subjects were set up for the first time in the 2013-14 school year for full-time bachelor's degree programs. As a large-scale project supported by the university, DSC subject design was completed for 28 departments/disciplines for all full-time bachelor's degree programs at PolyU by 2016-17. The same DSC subjects were also gradually adapted for use by some part-time bachelor's as well as two-year top-up degree programs.

DSC takes a learner-centered approach to teaching Chinese that focuses on developing communicative competence in a specific profession based on the major programs offered by the respective host departments, such as business, hotel

management, aviation, design, engineering, and nursing. Learners are also exposed to Chinese workplace terminologies and real-world Chinese communication practices in professional workplace contexts, spoken and written. DSC subjects are different from general Chinese language subjects, for example, “University Chinese”, at PolyU, as they tend to focus on the discipline-specific needs for Chinese rather than the enhancement of basic competence in written Chinese or creative writing. In principle, a DSC subject has the following characteristics:

1. Meeting the specific professional language needs of the learners;
2. Including themes and topics relevant to particular disciplines or occupations;
3. Involving authentic work-specific documents and materials as the basis of the subject material design;
4. Promoting cultural awareness and seeking to improve intercultural competency;
5. Delivering intermediate and advanced levels of workplace language training.

Designed for a particular professional discipline (e.g., nursing, physiotherapy, social work), each DSC subject at PolyU emphasizes training that targets the use of the Chinese language, especially profession-specific genres and skills needed for real-life communication in Chinese-dominant workplace contexts. In the following sections, we will outline the three guiding principles that inform the curriculum design of DSC subjects at PolyU: conducting needs analysis, monitoring the teaching and collecting feedback from teachers and students, and summative evaluation. The role of the DSC subjects in promoting the overall teaching quality of universities and improving the

competitiveness of students will then be analyzed. We hope our experience at PolyU will have reference value for the development of a wider range of Chinese language subjects in higher education.

## **DSC Subject Design and Interdisciplinary Preparation**

### ***Literature Review***

Before looking at the concept and design of DSC subjects, a brief review of English for specific purposes (ESP) is in order, as ESP has existed in English education for several decades. Many of its insights can serve as a valuable reference for DSC educators. ESP includes curriculum design for professional purposes, aiming at developing and cultivating learners with the level of English proficiency required in the workplace, so that they can understand and use English at a specialized level (Brown, 2016; Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Li, 2001; Yang, 2010). As Bracaj (2014) points out, an ESP curriculum must recognize the specific needs of the learners because most of them have different purposes for employing the English language skills. Nowadays, owing to globalization and the demands in the foreign language markets, ESP has become an important subject in higher education.

With the development of internationalization, the adaptation of authentic professional materials to the needs of learners will help increase their learning motivation and interest (Chen & Chen, 2006). Learners of ESP recognize clearly that they learn the language not only out of interest but they also value practical benefits as

it improves their prospect of being hired easily in the future workplace (Bracaj, 2014). Thus, an ESP curriculum is expected to integrate theory and practice to equip students with high levels of communication, interaction and social skills with English in the workplace. Bracaj (2014) further identifies three types of expectations of ESP subjects by the learners: (1) cultural-educational, (2) personal and individual, (3) academic/occupational. The third expectation gave rise to different types of ESP subjects, for example, English for occupational purposes, English for academic purposes, and English for science and technology.

In the area of “language for specific purposes” (LSP), Chinese has been relatively less researched compared to languages such as English. Tao & Chen (2019) help to fill the gap by exploring Chinese for specific purposes (CSP) from theory to practice based on the experiences of a wide range of international practitioners in the field in four focus areas: (1) academic Chinese, (2) business Chinese, (3) Chinese for medicine and health care, and (4) Chinese for other broadly defined services and industries. Their work is undoubtedly an important contribution to the advancement of CSP research by drawing the international scholarly community’s attention to this rapidly growing branch of LSP.

Meanwhile, Wang & Jiang (2019) provide an overview of CSP against the background of language for specific purposes (LSP), and delineate how CSP has

progressed over the years from isolated instruction of Chinese for business to a broader range of specific purposes and interdisciplinary content areas. They found that the theory and practice of CSP have benefited from advances in LSP research. More importantly, they have identified several challenges that CSP faces. As the specific needs in CSP change, CSP programs may require more utilization-focused evaluations to sustain growth. Moreover, there has been a lack of quantitative and empirical studies in the field of CSP. Additionally, there is insufficient recognition of the accomplishments of CSP practitioners by their overseas institutions. Despite these challenges, Wang & Jiang (2019) are hopeful that CSP research and practices will continue to develop and cater to the workplace-specific needs for learners' future career and professional development.

### ***Societal Needs and Curriculum Design***

With the rapidly increasing demand for professional Chinese in Hong Kong, universities and community colleges ought to make a greater effort to assisting students/learners to raise the level of Chinese language proficiency (written Chinese and spoken Mandarin). In order to better understand the trend of language use in Hong Kong, Leung (2014, to appear) conducted two large-scale questionnaire surveys on the use of Cantonese, Mandarin and English in Hong Kong in both workplace and non-workplace occasions in 2014 and 2019. 1,001 and 1,013 valid questionnaires were collected in the two years respectively, and each survey consisted of three parts. The

first part dealt with the respondents' background information, such as gender, age, education level, occupation, and job title. The second asked the respondents to indicate what particular languages they used in different situations (e.g., listening to the radio, making inquiries with the government departments, discussions in business meetings, and casual chats with coworkers, etc.) and frequency of use. The third part focused on the respondents' attitudes towards the three languages.

Among the respondents, people engaged in "import and export, wholesale retail" were the largest in number, while people engaged in "construction industry" and "miscellaneous social and personal services" were relatively few. Respondents who worked in the "accommodation and food service industry" used Mandarin most often, followed by those in "finance and insurance industry", "transportation, warehouse and courier service industry", "import and export, wholesale and retail industry", and "engineering, industry". In terms of the use of Mandarin in the workplace, "financial and insurance industry" was the profession in which Mandarin was used most frequently, followed by "construction industry", "import and export, wholesale and retail industry", "transportation, warehouse and courier service industry", and "information and communications industry". Table 1 summarizes the use of Mandarin in the major industries collected in the 2014 and 2019 surveys.

**Table 1**



*Use of Mandarin in Different Industries in 2014 and 2019 in Hong Kong*

Industries	No. of respondents		Frequency of use of Mandarin <sup>#</sup>		Change in frequency over the 5-year period
	2014	2019	2014	2019	
Construction	48	16	1.16	0.59	↓ 0.57
Industry/engineering	61	53	1.00	0.83	↓ 0.17
Import and export, wholesale and retail	242	194	1.09	0.95	↓ 0.14
Transportation, warehouse and delivery service	61	48	0.98	0.83	↓ 0.15
Accommodation and catering Services	90	131	0.73	0.84	↑ 0.11
Information and communication	82	45	0.98	0.65	↓ 0.33
Finance and insurance	107	42	1.22	1.09	↓ 0.13
Real estate, professional and business services	137	118	0.92	0.85	↓ 0.07
Education, medical and social work	131	146	0.79	0.75	↓ 0.04
Miscellaneous and personal services	40	131	0.47	0.39	↓ 0.08

*#NB: The surveys adopted a 6-point scale to measure the frequency of use of the different languages, with the following meanings: 0 = never used; 1 = most infrequently used; 2 = infrequently used; 3 = generally used; 4 = frequently used; 5 = most frequently used. Each number in the “frequency of use” columns is an average value of the respondents’ responses.*

Despite China’s resumption of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997 and the expected need to use Mandarin more frequently in different professions ever since, Leung (2017) observes that there are currently relatively few workplace Mandarin subjects in Hong Kong. She suggests that the educational institutions should provide more DSC subjects or workshops that meet workplace language needs and to help the practitioners in various industries improve their written Chinese and spoken Mandarin skills. Among the educational institutions, universities are supposed to be the most ideal place to offer training in the use of Mandarin in the workplace (Zhu et al., 2012). As Chan (2014) points out, one of the purposes of university training is to prepare the

students to enter the professions after graduation, and the training for appropriate workplace-specific language use in the workplace based on social expectations forms an integral part of university education. Specifically, the “language competence” expected by the society includes (1) good mastery of the languages; (2) high-level critical thinking and creativity in the languages; and (3) an ability to use the languages to solve real problems.

Practitioners in different industries use different levels of Mandarin in the workplace. The normal Chinese curriculum which focuses more on the grammatical structures and the general writing is apparently too basic for the specific workplace needs. With the introduction of the new academic structure in Hong Kong, an important opportunity arose for the development of new language subjects in the university curriculum. Naturally, the design of the new subjects must be based on clear goals related to the needs of the students and the workplace requirements of different professions. In addition, the design of such subjects also needs to match the official “biliteracy and trilingualism” language education policy in Hong Kong, enhancing students’ competence in written (Chinese and English) and spoken (Cantonese, Mandarin, and English) languages, though in some contexts the exact content of the policy is subject to different interpretations (Chan, 2016; Leung & Li, 2020). Therefore, the DSC subjects in higher education should have the following characteristics:

(1) Combining language teaching and professional knowledge teaching: For university students, the most important thing is to learn professional knowledge. In order to increase students' interest in Chinese language learning in DSC subjects, teachers should find the best combination of Chinese teaching and professional knowledge teaching and establish a profession-oriented Chinese teaching model with two distinctions. Firstly, Chinese learning at the university level should no longer be a basic language class but advanced language learning for professional needs. Because of the various needs of different majors, the content of Chinese teaching should be adjusted to the different disciplines accordingly. Secondly, there should be an innovation of teaching methods. Classroom learning should no longer be passive, but students should be encouraged to form discussion groups. In the groups, these future professionals discuss the major and difficult learning points in class, from both linguistic and professional perspectives. In this way they are trained in oral presentation skills as well as engaging in conversations which deepen their professional knowledge.

(2) Employing different assessment methods for different disciplines: Students with different majors have different expected levels of Chinese language mastery, and the weightings of different assessments should not be the same. For instance, students in humanities-related majors require language skills related to history and

culture and their Chinese assessment methods can focus more on writing skills.

Since business management students have a stronger need for oral communication skills, speaking abilities can be chosen as the focus of their language competence assessments. By establishing different assessment criteria of DSC subjects for different majors, students can intuitively realize the practicality and fun of learning Chinese.

### ***Implementation of DSC Subjects***

The effectiveness of language teaching for specific professions is affected by the availability of suitable teaching materials, which should include a series of special-purpose textbooks with appropriate themes, learning levels, and language exercises. The development of PolyU's DSC subjects is based on the above rationale, and a lot of preparation work went into the creation of such subjects as detailed below.

A DSC subject development working group (referred to below as "DSC working group") was assigned to undertake the design of each DSC subject to be created for a particular professional discipline or a group of related disciplines. The DSC working group first interviewed the current students and graduates of various major disciplines, collecting detailed information about the Chinese language needs and use in the professional settings. The interviews with the students sought to find out: which industries the students will be engaged in after graduation, each industry's needs for Chinese (Cantonese/Mandarin listening and speaking, and Chinese reading and

writing), and current students/graduates' evaluation of their own Chinese proficiency in all four skills. If the students were already employed or had internship experience during their study periods, then the working group would inquire about the language use in the relevant industries.

Industry representatives made up another important source of information. Only by understanding their workplace requirements of Chinese language ability for current or prospective employees could the compilation of teaching materials be more targeted. In this connection, the main interview questions to them included: (1) on what occasions people in the industry use Chinese; (2) which genres are involved, the theme, focus, communication purpose or function of each genre; and (3) specific requirements in a certain genre, such as the choice of words, phrases, and level of formality and politeness. To facilitate the working group's understanding of the actual use of Chinese, some employers even provided copies of documents in their industries, as far as permitted by company policies. Having gathered employers' views about workplace Chinese language requirements, the DSC working group also held discussions with teacher representatives of various major disciplines to understand their expectations and requirements of the DSC subjects to be created.

Moreover, as the Chinese language teachers of the DSC subjects are not experts in the various major disciplines, to ensure that course design was appropriate to the

specific professional Chinese language needs of different disciplines, a Chinese language instructor partnered with a teacher of the particular discipline to form a teaching team for each discipline. Before the start of the teaching sessions, the language instructor would discuss with the teacher of the major to learn the relevant disciplinary/professional knowledge which ensured the accuracy and effectiveness of the DSC teaching. As an example, the following table shows the learning needs analysis made by the DSC subject development working group for the Department of Mechanical Engineering:

**Table 2**

*DSC learning needs analysis of students in the Department of Mechanical Engineering, PolyU, Hong Kong*

	1. Program representatives from the discipline	2. Industry representatives	3. Student representatives
Occasions where Chinese is used	<p>Graduates are likely employed by (1) major trading companies; (2) design houses;</p> <p>Chinese, especially Mandarin, is likely to be used in the following situations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sales of products</li> <li>• Monitoring production progress</li> <li>• Monitoring product quality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening and speaking in Cantonese or Mandarin: (1) communicating with colleagues; (2) negotiating with the manufacturers</li> <li>• Reading: (1) product test reports from mainland China; (2) patent documents</li> <li>• Writing: (1) emails; (2) different types of documents; (3) different types of reports</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Listening and speaking: in both Cantonese and Mandarin</li> <li>• Reading and writing: (1) emails; documents provided by the manufacturers; (3) descriptions of parts and materials by the manufacturers</li> </ul>

Genres involved	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Product promotion copywriting or posters</li> <li>• Writing reports in Chinese</li> <li>• Small-scale conference presentation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Patent descriptions</li> <li>• User manuals</li> <li>• Work guidelines</li> <li>• Proposals</li> <li>• Market research reports</li> <li>• Meeting minutes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Design reports</li> <li>• Maintenance reports</li> <li>• Presentations</li> <li>• Emails</li> </ul>
Recipients	People of the industry; users	Cooperating manufacturers; users	Manufacturers, customers, colleagues
Special points to note	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• While selling products in mainland China, it is necessary to use localized language features</li> <li>• When the recipient is not an insider, the language should be concise and professional</li> <li>• It is necessary to master the industry's jargon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is necessary to master the mainland's engineering terminology</li> <li>• Beware of the errors which are prone to occur when converting Cantonese into written Chinese</li> <li>• Beware of the choice of words and phrases</li> <li>• There is still room for improvement for Mandarin</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is necessary to express ideas clearly</li> <li>• The writing must be concise</li> <li>• It is difficult to translate professional terms between English and Chinese</li> </ul>

In short, the three groups of representatives stressed the importance of proficiency in written and spoken Chinese in their profession, and representatives from other departments had similar opinions.

Using the information gathered from representatives of major programs and professionals from various industry sectors, the DSC subject development working group completed the design of the teaching materials. In each subject, the listening, speaking, reading, writing, and other parts were tailor-made to meet the DSC language needs as revealed in the needs analysis. After the subject teaching was over, the subject

development team made a detailed evaluation of the subject and revised the teaching materials and subject's curriculum structure based on the feedback received from students and program leaders (more details are provided below in section 4). As an integral part of the general plan, each DSC subject needed to go through the following stages from design to completion (Liu, 2008):

Determine subject objectives and basic framework → Professionals provide discipline-specific materials → Compile teaching materials → Teaching → Gather and analyze the subject-specific feedback from the stakeholders → Revise teaching materials → Professionals confirm the appropriateness of the revised curriculum

### **Merits of Effective DSC Teaching**

#### ***Well-organized Subject Structure***

Each DSC subject is designed for a total of 13 weeks' teaching in a semester with 26 contact hours. Since the teaching materials are custom-made according to the specific needs of each department, the number of modules and module divisions in a DSC subject for different departments may differ. There are two types of content organization in the DSC subjects. For disciplines where there are several genres of writing involved, the DSC subject is organized based on such genres. For example, for the Department of Mechanical Engineering in Table 2, employees in the industry often need to write "product proposals", "feasibility reports", and the "product description and promotion", and so these three genres are the themes of the module. The content of each module mainly includes writing strategies and methods of solving specific



problems (with discussions of good and poor examples), case study and analysis, group written work and oral reports. For majors in which there are not many genres involved and the focus is simply on oral communication in Mandarin, the modules are divided according to “language use scenarios”. For example, the DSC subjects designed for Optometry majors are composed of three sections: “optometric diagnosis and treatment”, “optometry marketing techniques” and “optometry community service”.

### ***Task-based Teaching Approach***

Each language point of the textbook is connected by a task-based teaching method. Task-based language teaching is a teaching approach developed in the 1980s that emphasizes “learning by doing” and is also currently a method widely adopted by foreign language teachers worldwide. Task-based language teaching is organized by “tasks”, and learners are always in a positive and active state of learning in the process of completing tasks. Through the interaction between teachers and learners and between learners themselves, an “interactive classroom” is formed and the purpose of learning and mastering the language with the aim of acquiring communicative competence is achieved (Fu & Guo, 2012). In each task-based teaching session, the instructor devises the lesson plan taking different perspectives into account: in terms of the learning materials and tasks, authenticity is emphasized; for specific themes of individual lessons, form-function mapping and continuity are stressed; as for approaches and

delivery, operability, practicability, and fun are all important considerations (Jia, 2005).

In this way, students' potential can be developed as far as possible.

As mentioned above, the DSC subject development working group at PolyU made every effort to understand each industry's requirements for and actual use of Chinese before compiling DSC materials. As a result, the learning materials that were produced enabled students to apply what they had learned in the classroom to actual workplace scenarios. When students realize the practical benefits of DSC subjects, their interest in learning will be stimulated, forming a virtuous circle of "learning for use, learning while using, and applying what has been learned" (Fu & Guo, 2012) within the study period of the DSC subject.

To help students clarify the relationship between language form and function in the learning process, the texts are arranged according to different genres, with an appropriate number of tasks forming a coherent "task chain". The task chain of each teaching unit constitutes a series of teaching ladders so that learners can achieve the intended learning outcomes step by step (Jia, 2005). Moreover, the forms of tasks are diverse, which can better arouse student interest in learning. For example, in the role-play and situational dialog tasks designed for nursing majors, students are guided by the teachers to play the roles of nurses and patients and experience realistic examples of practice, for example, asking about the patient's health conditions.

Furthermore, “the teaching of professional terminology” is an important embodiment of the principles of authenticity and practicality of the subject content. The professional language serving a certain field of activity has its own grammatical and vocabulary characteristics (Liu, 2003). Therefore, teaching of the special-purpose language should start with the analysis of the form and meaning of professional terms and phrases, and proceed to the study of grammatical features and text structure relevant to each discipline. This emphasis was echoed by the program leaders, employer representatives and students who repeatedly mentioned the importance of professional terminology in related work during the interviews with them.

For the time being, there are obviously at least three sets of professional terminology, namely in English, Cantonese and Mandarin, in the work environment in Hong Kong. It may be difficult for practitioners to find the right word or express the meaning clearly when the language is switched. Therefore, the DSC subject development teams not only added the learning of field-specific terminology when designing the teaching materials, but also listed each professional term in the three languages. For example, in the first module of Optometry, i.e., verbal communication in optometry setting, the focus is on the introduction of the professional terms in Chinese commonly used in optometry clinics, for example, *glaucoma*, *cataract*, *myopia*, *presbyopia*, *trachoma*, and *conjunctivitis*.

In order to reduce the pressure on students in the final exam, DSC subjects at PolyU use a “task-based” approach to assess students’ performance. In this approach, the student’s participation and quality of task completion are the most important criteria. The focus of the assessment is on task completion, strategies employed, and suitability of language use (Chan, 2014). Each module has one or more assessment criteria with corresponding evaluation standards. Students are given a variety of tasks to demonstrate their knowledge and abilities. Enough time is allowed for them to complete the reflection and demonstrate improvement in order to make progress in the subsequent modules. For example, in the environmental engineering major, there are five assessed assignments with one assessment per module: abstract writing, oral presentation of the abstract, group report, class discussion, and thank you letter writing. After the completion of each module, students can revise their learning strategy in order to prepare for the learning at the next stage according to the teacher’s assessment of the completed task or the peer evaluation among fellow students.

### **DSC end-of-teaching subject evaluation**

The evaluation of the overall teaching achievements of DSC subjects is mainly through student interviews, and meetings among teachers and program leaders. In order to understand the views and needs of students on the subject as early as possible, the first student interview is held around the sixth week of each semester for a period of two to

three weeks. Interviews are conducted in the form of face-to-face interviews or telephone calls that last about five to ten minutes. During the meeting, students' opinions on subject design, usefulness to improving Chinese proficiency, and assessment methods will be collected. By the end of the semester, students' opinions on the above three aspects will be collected again. The questions include the following five major areas: the subject's learning outcomes, teaching contents and curriculum, teaching activities, assessments, and subject offering arrangement. After opinions are collected, the data are submitted to the respective program leaders for follow-up. In general, students' ratings of the DSC subjects are fairly satisfactory. They find that the subjects are practical, the content design and learning activities are highly relevant to their future career, and the training in Mandarin presentation is useful. They also appreciate teacher feedback on their assignments.

Student feedback provides an important reference for future subject optimization. First, the content of the subject can be revised in a timely manner at the end of each semester according to the opinions of the students and the deficiencies of the teaching materials. In addition, feedback can also help teachers to grasp more accurately the effectiveness of their teaching based on students' opinions and performance in the assessments. The team leaders meeting held right after the end of the semester is also an important part of the subject evaluation. At the meeting, the teacher of each class

first reports on the professional Chinese learning results of their class from the participants. Then team leaders would respond to the opinions collected from student interviews, propose subject improvement plans, adjust assessment patterns and arrangements, and gradually improve the planning and implementation of the new subjects with a view to improving teaching effectiveness.

### **Characteristics of DSC subjects and subsequent development**

Although the professional Chinese subjects started relatively late in Hong Kong compared to the development of ESP in the Western world, there is plenty of room for subject development at the tertiary education level, both regionally and nationally.

#### ***Positive effect on the cultivation of interdisciplinary talents in universities***

From the perspective of colleges and universities, professional Chinese subjects are complementary to university language subjects and an effective way to cultivate practical talents. “University Chinese” subjects provide basic training of the core general knowledge of the language, not restricted by the region, education level, social status or occupation. This part of language knowledge must be mastered by any university student in Hong Kong, regardless of the purpose of learning and the student’s future profession (Liu, 2003). But general language learning is apparently inadequate to deal with different types of jobs and specific working environments. This is where the professional Chinese subjects can play a key role in supplementing the teaching of Chinese language for workplace tasks. As mentioned above, unfamiliar professional

vocabulary, or ignorance of specific workplace practices or cultural factors, will affect the quality of language communication at the expense of efficiency and productivity at work. The professional Chinese subjects cultivate student command of the Chinese language in their majors and facilitate their language use in the actual workplace environment.

DSC teaching is a kind of interdisciplinary cooperation. Tang & Liu (2014) believe that the development of disciplines at universities today has shifted from being highly differentiated to highly integrated and diversified. Interdisciplinary research requires cooperation between disciplines or branches within the same discipline, triggering close interaction toward achieving a win-win situation.

The DSC subjects can also be seen, first and foremost, as an attempt to interconnect between Chinese subjects and humanities subjects on one hand, and between Chinese subjects and scientific subjects on the other. Furthermore, some majors (e.g., design) are already part of interdisciplinary research, and the professional Chinese subjects for these majors are thus the second level of interdisciplinary teaching. Taking the teaching materials designed for the School of Design as an example, design itself is an interdisciplinary and forward-looking field. It not only requires students to have innovative ideas, but also knowledge of related disciplines such as industrial systems engineering, industrial manufacturing, and materials engineering (Liu, 2008). When

creating a DSC subject for design students, the interdisciplinary knowledge characteristics must be reflected in the teaching materials. In addition, the differences in the use of Chinese in various disciplines deserve special attention and care.

***Positive effect on Hong Kong's competitive advantage***

Professional Chinese subjects are helpful to the development of professionals in Hong Kong. The further integration of economic, trade and cultural exchanges between Hong Kong and mainland China will bring about a greater demand for people with excellent professional and language skills who are well versed in the cultures of the two places. Additionally, such professional Chinese courses can benefit the ethnic minorities in Hong Kong. In 2016, there were more than 80,000 residents of South Asian origin (mainly India, Pakistan and Nepal) in Hong Kong (Census and Statistics Department, 2016), mostly permanent residents of Hong Kong. Due to their lack of knowledge of Chinese and cultural differences, their education and employment are severely restricted, which in turn give rise to various social problems, including discrimination, a lack of social mobility, inequity.

The Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) government has long realized that to help South Asians overcome language and cultural barriers and promote social solidarity, the promotion of Chinese in this community must be strengthened. Nevertheless, most South Asian students who lack a Chinese-speaking family environment have encountered difficulties in learning Chinese. It is not easy to fully



improve the Chinese proficiency/level of the South Asian ethnic groups without effective teaching and learning. We believe that Chinese teaching for the South Asian community should also be based on the different needs of the learners. Chinese language teaching for South Asian working people should be aimed at helping them understand Hong Kong's workplace culture and language needs of target industries and adapt to the specific working environments awaiting them (Leung, 2016; Leung & Li, 2020; Li & Leung, 2020).

Starting from the 2015-16 school year, the Hong Kong Education Bureau has provided the “Applied Learning Chinese for non-Chinese speaking students” programs with different themes for South Asian students, such as “Chinese for the Service Industry” and “Practical Chinese in Hospitality”. The “Applied Learning Chinese Subject” program provides a simulated applied learning context to help students build a foundation for using Chinese in the workplace and obtain an alternative Chinese language qualification to prepare them for further studies and career pursuits. In the language learning process, students apply reading, writing, listening and speaking skills in an integrative way and learn Chinese language in different contexts including daily life and the general working environment, in the hope that non-Chinese speaking students will learn in a practical and applied way to improve their Chinese ability (Hong Kong SAR Government, 2020). Although the service industry and hospitality are

common industries for South Asians, the practical Chinese subjects should not be limited to these two types of work. This would not only reinforce the stereotype of society towards South Asians, but also limit the development of South Asian students and even suppress their learning motivation (Shiu et al., 2013). If we can apply the experience of professional Chinese courses to the teaching of “Chinese as a second language”, design a diversified and career-oriented Chinese language course of study for South Asian students to improve their Chinese proficiency, it could benefit more young South Asians and even the entire South Asian ethnic groups.

## **Conclusion**

With Chinese, spoken and written, being used increasingly across many disciplines, the DSC subjects at the The Hong Kong Polytechnic University have been designed to meet the future professional needs of students. They also provide practical Chinese language training in listening, speaking, reading and writing Chinese in daily work, including skills necessary for writing professional reports and proposals, oral communication skills, and business correspondence. As the first DSC program at the university level offered in Hong Kong, the main challenges in its planning and implementation were two-fold: firstly, teaching materials had to be developed from scratch across a wide range of academic and professionally oriented disciplines; secondly, the learning

materials must be highly authentic, in keeping with expectations of actual Chinese language use by future professionals.

With the joint efforts of the Chinese Language teachers and the relevant academic departments, DSC subjects for different majors at PolyU have been implemented to the satisfaction of the students and departments. Each DSC course takes into account the experience and opinions of future employers, graduates and students of the discipline. Each one also strives to approximate the future working environment of the students as closely as possible, in addition to adapting to new demands in the industry sectors.

To seize various domestic and international development opportunities, the DSC subjects not only meet the requirements of PolyU for discipline-specific curriculum development, but also respond to the needs of society for professionals in future. If PolyU can deepen cooperation with other universities, build high-quality teaching teams, and achieve resource sharing, its contribution to regional and national development of Chinese teaching and learning will be greatly enhanced.

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