

Teaching the Chinese Language Remotely

“What do you do when there is not enough knowledge available to solve the problems you face in challenging educational situations? This book provides an overview of efforts by colleagues around the world to meet the challenges of teaching Chinese remotely during the pandemic, to learn from the experience and to pass this knowledge on to others. Real educational engineers in the truest sense of the word.”

—Dr. Jozef Colpaert, *University of Antwerp, Belgium;*
Editor-in-chief of Computer Assisted Language
Learning (Taylor & Francis) since 2002

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Editor

Teaching the Chinese Language Remotely

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Preface

The Chinese word 危機¹ (*wēi jī*, crisis) was made famous by John F. Kennedy in a speech he gave in 1959 prior to becoming a US president. Kennedy stated that the word “crisis” in written Chinese is composed of two characters—“one represents danger and one represents opportunity.” Zimmer (2007) pointed out that this interpretation should also be credited to an unsigned editorial of the *Chinese Recorder*, a long-standing English-language journal for missionaries in China. In its January 1938 issue, it says, “The Chinese term for crisis is ‘danger-opportunity’ (危機). Without the danger there cannot arise the opportunity” (Vol. LXIX, No. 1, p. 2). Mair (2009) provided a comprehensive explanation of this word from the linguistic perspective and claimed that the above interpretation was a misconception. As a native speaker with over two decades of professional experience teaching the Chinese language and with two academic degrees related to Chinese language, linguistics, and literature in China, I agree with most of Mair’s explanations and applaud that he made a convincing argument. However, I still believe that the interpretation of the word by President Kennedy and others (including Dorothy Thompson, a noted journalist, 1940, cited in Zimmer, 2007) is acceptable based on the following considerations. First, while it is true that the meaning of the second character 機 in 危機 is

¹ The character 機 was officially simplified as “机” in Mainland China in 1964.

similar to its usage in the word “時機” (meaning *time, occasion*), yet 機 is the same character as used in the words “機會” and “機遇,” which do mean *Opportunity*. Besides literal meaning and linguistic explanation, we should allow literary interpretation and creative usage of some words in certain contexts. Second, the paradoxical interpretation of this word has also been acknowledged in Chinese-speaking society and often seen in speeches and texts. For instance, Cao (2017) includes this word in an article title to indicate that opportunities for business lie in crises.

While the interpretation of the Chinese word 危機 may remain controversial, people across different cultures continue to find similar encouragement from a related quote “in every crisis lies an opportunity” (often credited to Albert Einstein). Although one can doubt whether this quote is originally from Einstein, it is unquestionable that the Chinese idiom 禍福相倚² (*huò fú xiāng yǐ*, misfortune and fortune interdepend) derives from the verse 禍兮福之所倚，福兮禍之所伏 (*huò xī fú zhī suǒ yǐ, fú xī huò zhī suǒ fù*) in the sacred ancient Chinese book 道德经 (*Dao De Jing*, also spelled as *Tao-Te Ching*).³ This expression can be roughly translated into English as *Misfortune is where fortune leans, fortune is where misfortune hides*. Langan-Riekhof and coauthors wrote an article titled “Sometimes the World Needs a Crisis: Turning Challenges Into Opportunities” in 2017. While the contents of their article are insightful, its title might be subjected to criticism in 2020 for indifference to the pain and loss that millions of people suffered in the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. For those over three-million people who lost their lives during the pandemic,⁴ it is a cold fact that they no longer have any chances left for themselves in turning challenges into opportunities in the world they have now left behind. For those of us who remain and who have survived this crisis, it is imperative for us to find fortune from misfortune, if not only for ourselves but for our fellow human beings who no longer have the opportunity to do so. To a certain extent, this

² 禍 (*huò*, misfortune, disaster) 福 (*fú*, fortune, blessing) 相 (*xiāng*, mutually, each other) 倚 (*yǐ*, lean on, depend).

³ Many sources can be easily found online on this influential book, such as <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tao-te-Ching>.

⁴ According to the website of World Health Organization at <https://covid19.who.int>, as of May 21, 2021, there were more than 3.4 million deaths among more than 164 million confirmed cases.

book's existence is one type of "fortune" fashioned out of the misfortunes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and a silver lining amid the dark clouds that had been hanging over the globe since the beginning of 2020.

Before the pandemic, only a limited number of programs offered Chinese language courses fully online and there was scant research on online Chinese teaching and learning. To help prevent the spread of the COVID-19, educational institutions worldwide, one after another, urgently switched instruction to the remote mode primarily to maintain social distancing, beginning with China in February 2020. Remote teaching and learning via the Internet have therefore become a hot topic in education across many countries. Unsurprisingly, teaching and learning of the Chinese language remotely has also received unprecedented attention from related stakeholders worldwide since the outbreak of COVID-19 as a global health emergency. Zimmerman (2020) suggests turning the challenges caused by the coronavirus into opportunities for doing online-learning experiments. Hodges et al. (2020) insightfully pointed out the differences between "emergency remote teaching (ERT)" and "online learning." Nonetheless, Chinese language instructors and students worldwide have gained valuable experiences in fully online teaching and learning through the emergency caused by the pandemic. Documenting and studying what they did and perceived in managing remote teaching and learning in different countries in 2020 is beneficial not only for practice and research in Chinese language education but also for education in general including online education.

Except for the overview, the first drafts of the 14 other chapters in this book were completed in 2020. These chapters recorded the fresh and first-hand experiences of Chinese language instructors and students from five continents in the early stages of the prolonged pandemic, which makes the book unique and important. To learn lessons from this moment and to put those lessons into practice is not only forward thinking but can serve as a measure of respect to all those that have been lost. Additionally, while the perceptions and practices of the instructors and students being studied probably may have changed since then or possibly may differ in the future, what is reported in these chapters remains valuable for research and practical purposes. In a sense, the book itself is also meaningful as part of our historical human record.

I was thankful that my educational background and experiences led me to this book project. My research interest in online teaching and learning began in the fall semester of 2003 when I took the course, *Online Learning Pedagogy and Evaluation*, taught by Dr. Curtis Bonk for my doctorate in Instructional Systems Technology in the School of Education at Indiana University Bloomington (IUB). During my study and part-time employment at IUB, I completed several research projects and published articles individually (e.g., Liu, 2005) or collaboratively (e.g., Kim et al. 2005) related to online education. I would like to especially thank Dr. Bonk and Dr. Barbara Bichelmeyer for their mentoring and guidance, and thank Dr. Xiaojing Liu for her friendship and support. Most of the empirical studies I conducted during that period were not specifically related to Chinese language teaching and learning, partly because fully online courses and programs were mainly offered at the graduate level concerning professional training (e.g., MBA, nursing, and teacher licensure) at that time. Prior to pursuing my doctorate in the US, I was a full-time faculty member of Renmin University of China, Beijing, for five years (1996–2001), teaching Chinese as an international language to students from all over the world. I owe a debt of gratitude to the four-year Chancellor Fellowship from IUB that supported me to systematically study how to apply instructional technology in Chinese language education and to conduct interdisciplinary research.

Liu (2004) was one of my early endeavors in exploring the use of the Internet in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, in which I used *the ten-level web integration continuum for higher education* as the framework. The first and lowest level was to put the syllabi online; the sixth level was to include substantial and graded activities online. The eighth level was to use the web as an alternate delivery system for residential students, which was comparable to the hybrid/blended mode (some class meetings onsite and some online). The ninth level was to put the entire course on the web for students located anywhere. And the tenth level, the highest level, was at the program level, which is to put series of courses and the entire degree program online. I resumed my full-time teaching of the Chinese language in 2008, and my instructional practice concerning technology integration was mainly at or below the eighth level on this ten-level web integration continuum prior to the pandemic. While many colleagues

were anxious about the challenges in needing to switch courses from onsite to online due to the pandemic in March 2020, I was excited to some degree for the unexpected opportunity to practice teaching Chinese fully online. Additionally, in Liu (2018) I intended to provide a comprehensive overview regarding online Chinese teaching and learning based on an invited speech I gave in 2016 at the 2nd Online Chinese Teaching Forum and Workshop (OCTFW2) held by the Michigan State University. In that paper, however, I was unable to include the case of teaching and learning online caused by emergent reasons such as the unforeseen pandemic. To some extent this book can be considered an expansion to what was discussed in that paper.

As another Chinese idiom “独木难成林” (*Dú mù nán chéng lín*) states, one tree (木 *mù*) does not make a forest (林 *lín*). I could not have completed this edited book alone. I have received valuable assistance from so many colleagues. I feel particularly honored in having been able to work closely with 20 outstanding scholar-teachers from 10 countries whose chapters are included in this book. Below are only brief acknowledgments to some people who have contributed to the birth and growth of this book.

My sincere appreciation first goes to Drs. Tianwei Xie, Debao Xu, and Jun Da, who welcomed me to the family of Technology and Chinese Language Teaching (TCLT <http://www.tclt.us/>) in 2010. Dr. Xu, the founding chair of TCLT, further invited me to serve as the editor for the column of the *Journal of TCLT* since its inaugural issue in December 2010. I have been working closely with Dr. Da, the executive editor of the biannual journal (<http://www.tclt.us/journal/>), over the past 10 years. The experience I gained from editing journal articles benefited me greatly in this book editing process. I am also thankful for their encouragement when I told them of the book project idea and for further assistance from Dr. Da.

In preparing for the Call for Papers (CFP), I also received suggestions and encouragement from many other colleagues, including Drs. Curtis Bonk, Chengzhi Chu, Shih-chang Hsin, Xinsheng Zhang, Hong Zhan, Chin-Hsi Lin, Rui Zhou, and Mei Huang, and Professors Xia Liang and Weibing Ye. Dr. Jue Wang Szilas further helped distribute the CFP in

Europe. A special thank-you note goes to Dr. Zhengsheng Zhang who always is generous in sharing his professional editing skills when needed.

The chapters included in this book only account for approximately one-quarter of the total articles received. Numerous colleagues were involved in the double-blinded review process. The following list only includes some of them who helped review articles published in this book but not as contributing authors: Drs. Helena Casas Tost, Lijing Shi, Ka Ho Tse, Jun Xu, Chin-Hsi Lin, Chuan Lin, Chenqing Song, and Zilu Jiang, and Professors Jingjing Ji, Xiao Zeng, and Chen Gao. In addition, I would like to thank the following colleagues for their support to this project in various ways: Drs. Yea-Fen Chen, Wayne Wenchao He, Cecilia Chang, Sue-Mei Wu, Gang Liu, Avijit Banerjee, Diane Neubauer, Naraindra Kistamah, Chun Zhang, Jiahang Li, Hsin-hsin Liang, Ninghui Liang, Jianhua Bai, Yi Xu, Yang Zhao, Mairead Harris, and Mr. David Surtasky.

I owe heart-felt gratitude to each of the chapter contributors for their collaboration and dedication in the process, who responded with great patience to multiple requests from me. Each article went through at least two rounds of review and edits for highest possible quality. To make the book a coherent volume, some authors were even asked to rewrite and shift the focus of their original articles. Additionally, nearly each author helped review articles in the book anonymously, and many of them helped read more than one. I would like to specially thank the following colleagues for their tremendous help in the review process: Drs. Shenglan Zhang, Michaela Zahradnikova, Siu-lun Lee, Yue Ma, Ching-Hsuan Wu, Ye Tian, and Michael Li. Dr. Zahradnikova further allowed use of her article as a sample chapter for formatting and indexing.

Of course publication is not possible without a publisher. Ms. Cathy Scott, Senior Editor of Language and Linguistics of Palgrave Macmillan, has patiently answered numerous questions I had, and always in a detailed and timely fashion. Her professional assistance proves that I have found a good home for this book. I am also thankful for the help from Mr. Steven Fassions and the meticulous work of the production team led by Ms. Divya Anish.

Last, but not least, I want to thank my family members in both China and the United States for their unconditional love and unwavering

support. I am especially indebted to my husband, Jian, for taking care of everything else, and to our two boys, Alvin and Kevin, for taking care of themselves, while I have been occupied with my professional work including this book. I would like to conclude the preface with a commemorative note to those who have unfortunately left this world during the pandemic, including my beloved 98-year-old maternal grandmother (though her departure was not due to the coronavirus). I will continue to look for opportunities from crises together with others who remain alive on earth, and this book is just one of our products.

Indiana, PA

Shijuan Liu

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