

State and Local

Professor claims students have few problems in learning Chinese

By Christina De Leon
Reporter

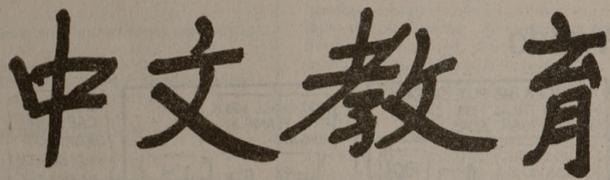
For many people, the thought of learning Chinese implies a complicated task, if not an impossible one.

However, Chinese professor Dr. Susan Shen of the Texas A&M modern languages department says learning Chinese is not any more difficult than learning other foreign languages.

What makes Chinese so different, Shen says, is that it is a tonal language, which means it relies on four distinct tones and a variety of pictographs, called characters, to communicate a message. Indo-European languages like English have a phonetic alphabet that indicates how a word is pronounced, and therefore what it means.

"Chinese doesn't have an alphabet," Shen notes, adding that the Chinese character does not tell how a word is pronounced. Students must learn how an object is represented in the characters.

At the end of the first semester, Shen says, a student masters about 800 Chinese characters, most of which concentrate on everyday vocabulary.



Graphic by Teresa Lagace

This phrase, written in Chinese, means 'Chinese education.'

She says that to read a newspaper, a person must know the meaning of approximately 3,000 characters.

In addition, the students also must learn to write the eight basic strokes which make up the endless number of character representations.

The students in Shen's class learn to speak, write and read Mandarin, or standard Chinese, which is the official language of China and is written horizontally. Shen says more than 100 dialects of Chinese exist, some of which are written vertically, such as in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

Because learning Chinese requires

more memorization than learning other languages, Shen says, taking a Chinese class is a good way for students to improve their memorization skills. It also takes about three years of Chinese classes before students can begin reading and analyzing Chinese literature, she says.

The A&M Chinese program does not offer Chinese literature classes because it is a two-year program that just began last fall, Shen says. It could expand in the future depending on the success of the two-year program, she says.

Although students must accustom themselves to the differences in

learning Chinese, Shen says, most of her 21 students are learning the language fairly quickly.

Terry Helton, a chemical engineering graduate student from Fort Worth, says the hardest part about learning Chinese is pronouncing the four basic tones. He says the meaning of a word can change from a compliment to an insult if the tone is pronounced incorrectly on similarly pronounced words.

"It does take practice," Helton says, adding that the use of Pinyin in Shen's class has helped in teaching the students to pronounce words correctly.

Pinyin is the official Chinese spelling system that uses Roman letters to approximate how a Chinese word is pronounced.

Paul Wyatt, a junior English education major from Houston, says students studying Chinese have a lot of opportunities to practice at A&M. He says many Chinese international students have been especially helpful as practice partners.

Both Wyatt and Helton say they hope to become fluent in Chinese eventually through both study and perhaps a visit to China in the future.

El Paso diocese tries to raise funds for amnesty loans

EL PASO (AP) — The Catholic diocese wants to raise more money to lend to destitute immigration amnesty applicants as the May 4 deadline approaches.

The diocese could use about \$43,000 in addition to the \$15,000 that has been contributed or promised, the Rev. Rick Matty said Monday.

The Immigration and Naturalization Service charges \$185 per person or a maximum of \$420 per family for amnesty applications, and some eligible for the program can't afford the fee, said Matty, director of Diocesan Immigrant and Refugee Services, which helps aliens apply for amnesty.

"There's a perception that people can find the money," Matty said. "We contend that in some families, especially single-parent families, it's not that easy."

Last month, the diocese began loaning money for application fees to people or families who fall below federal poverty levels and have good amnesty cases. Matty said the El Paso Diocese is the only one in the nation that provides interest-free loans to pay amnesty application fees.

Under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, people who have lived in the United States illegally since before 1982 are eligible for amnesty and temporary residency. The application deadline is May 4. Amnesty recipients may eventually apply for permanent residency and citizenship.

The diocese has lent or has loans pending on the initial \$12,500 that constituted the loan fund; the money ran out last Thursday, Matty said, and about 50 or 60 people remained in line for loan applications that day.

"We originally projected a need for \$60,000," he said. "I still stand behind that, but judging from the lines of people we've seen, that's a conservative estimate."

One contributor has promised to give \$5,000 in the second week of May. Matty said he was happy about the \$5,000 pledge, but added, "that's 20 loans. That's not all that many loans. You see the need for more."

Bullock supports changes for equitable funding of public schools

AUSTIN (AP) — Comptroller Bob Bullock, not revealing specifics of his plan, said Monday the state should sell bonds and use state education funds in new ways to make sure Texas public schools offer quality programs to all students.

The state is now appealing Austin State District Judge Harley Clark's decision that the current funding system is unconstitutionally inequitable to students in low-wealth districts.

"We believe we have turned up some funding mechanisms," Bullock said in a Monday speech. "Oh yes, it's not traditional, but these are not traditional times."

Bullock pitched his plan to aides to Gov. Bill Clements Monday, and planned to discuss it with legislative leaders later this week.

The comptroller spoke Monday to the Equity Center, a group that includes officials from many of the school districts that filed the lawsuit challenging the current education finance system.

Bullock and state Treasurer Ann Richards, who also addressed the group, both said they side with the districts that are challenging the system.

"There's no way around it," Richards said.

"Taxpayers in some districts pay more to

get less, and that's not fair," she said.

After her speech, the treasurer said she had no specific proposals concerning school financing, but said there would be a "jillion" ideas tossed around in coming months.

"There is going to be a different scenario every other week," she said.

Bullock said he was not ready to give details of his plan, but drew a standing ovation from the Equity Center members after promising to work for changes that could help poorer school districts.

"We have tentatively proposed, basically, the use of certain state bonds which have been authorized, but unissued, which will eventually, if they are not used, dissipate

and be gone with," Bullock said.

"Furthermore, we do propose taking part, a very small part, of the public school fund which was created for the very purpose of schools in Texas today, and to be used for operational money as well as the construction of facilities in Texas," he said.

He was referring to the Permanent School Fund, the interest from which is called the Available School Fund and is allocated to school districts.

Bullock said Clark's ruling was correct and that lawmakers should re-work the school finance system even if the decision is overturned on appeal.

"Yes, we do have discrimination in fund-

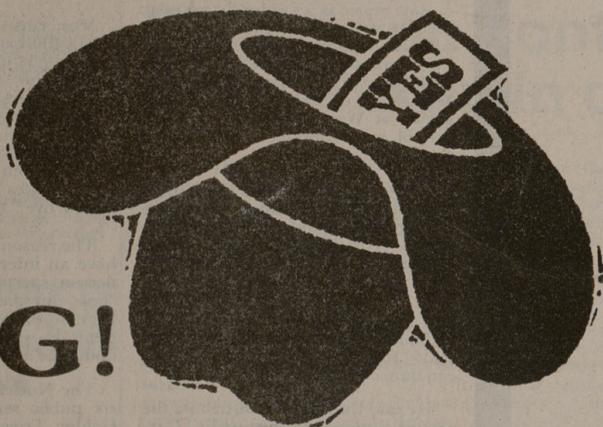
ing and it works to the detriment of our students and it works to the detriment of future development of Texas," he said.

"I'm firmly convinced that if you people from the poor school districts would come forth tomorrow and tell the leadership of Texas that you didn't have enough money to suit up a football team, the governor would call the Legislature in session tomorrow and the problem would be solved before dark," Bullock said.

"And I ask you, why should we do less for the student in the classroom than we would do for the football player on the field?" he said.

BEEF PROMOTION!

LET'S KEEP IT GOING!



✓ The Beef Checkoff

Aggies

You are eligible to vote in the Beef Referendum if you owned one or more beef or dairy animals at any time between October 1, 1986 and March 31, 1988.

To vote absentee, report to Room 129, Kleberg Center Wednesday, Thursday or Friday (April 27, 28, 29). Samille Stovall will provide you with an absentee ballot.

Remember, Friday, April 29th is the last day that absentee ballots will be available.

Ballots must be received in the Extension agent's office in the county of your permanent residence by May 3.

Mason Hogan '87 Animal Science
Stacy Stone '87 Animal Science
Teresa Anthony '89 Animal Science

O.D. Butler
Head, Department of Animal Science,
Emeritus
Chairman, Texas Beef Referendum
Steering Committee

VOTE YES
May 10
at your county
extension
office

Beef is coming back because
beef producers are fighting back!

Today, more consumers are eating more beef
and cattle prices and profits are up.

Let's vote to continue The National Beef
Promotion Program. It's working! May 10,
vote "YES!"

FACT! The program is controlled by producers.
Cattlepeople run it. It's not a government
program.

FACT! Each state decides how to spend 50 cents
of every dollar.

FACT! Beef importers and all producers pay their
share — \$1 per head. This money is invested
in consumer education, promotion, advertising
and research.

FACT! Only 5% is allowed for administrative costs.
95% of every dollar is spent on the program itself.

NATIONAL BEEF
PROMOTION IS GREAT!
VOTE YES
IN '88