Interview with CISDSU Co-Director Professor Wei Lu

Q: What is your work day like at CISDSU?
A: Usually, I have a busy day of office work at CISDSU - doing/assisting in routine management tasks. I often continue working evenings and/or weekends in my apartment - especially when I have urgent matters to attend to. At times, my workday makes me feel like a workaholic, but because I have a strong work ethic ('Do not put off until tomorrow what can be done today'), my workdays are always good ones.

Q: Can you tell us about your educational background?
A: I graduated from Xiamen University in 1983 with a BA in English Language and Literature and earned my Master’s Degree in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics - also from Xiamen University.

Q: What did you do before the Confucius Institute?
A: At Xiamen University, I taught Chinese to international students and other courses to MA candidates majoring in Teaching Chinese to Speakers of Other Languages. I also supervised them in their master's dissertation writing. Courses I have taught include Contrastive Linguistics, Corpus Linguistics, Chinese Materials Analysis and Development, Teaching Chinese on the Internet, Multimedia Courseware Design, Modern Educational Technology, etc. My research interest covers contrastive studies on Chinese and English, L2 acquisition, technology-enhanced language learning, development of web-based corpora, etc.

Q: What encourages you to apply for the Co-Director position at CISDSU? What is special about CISDSU/ why do you choose this particular Confucius Institute?
A: I didn’t apply for the position. Actually, it was Xiamen University that recommended me to Hanban as the Co-Director at CISDSU.

Q: What year did you join CISDSU? What was your first impression about CISDSU?
A: I joined CISDSU in January 2012, but I got to know CISDSU much earlier when Dr. Lilly Cheng visited Xiamen University sometime in 2008. She shared me with basic information about CISDSU. At that time, I thought it would be a promising CI. Upon my arrival here, I found it was true. CISDSU really impressed me with its strong leadership, pioneering work and remarkable achievements.

Q: As the Co-Director, what are your responsibilities?
A: My responsibilities as the Chinese Co-Director include the following -

- to promote the Chinese language and culture at CISDSU and its affiliated CC schools
- to assist Dr. Lilly Cheng in CI’s daily administration and work with her on drawing up CI’s long-term development plan, annual work plan, annual report and various statistics for Hanban and Xiamen University
- to work with Ms. Anne Chu, CI’s program manager, to screen candidates for Hanban-sponsored Chinese teaching positions, give them job assignments, formulate and implement rules and regulations on Chinese teaching management
- to guide and supervise Hanban teachers in their syllabus design and classroom teaching, give them suggestions on how to face challenges, make annual evaluations of their overall performance for Hanban
- to prepare applications to Hanban and Xiamen University for various key programs and conduct needs surveys as requested
- to coordinate exchange programs between Xiamen University and SDSU
- to give presentations at teacher training workshops
- to respond to email and phone inquiries about HSK/YCT and CI scholarship application
- to write and edit news reports for Xiamen University and Hanban

Q: From the past 4 years working as the Co-Director, what is your opinion on Chinese education in San Diego? What are the opportunities you find in local schools or school districts that can promote Chinese education? What do you think are the most valuable criteria to develop Chinese educational programs in San Diego?

A: The Chinese education in San Diego has been developing rapidly in terms of the number of students, teachers, CC schools and course offerings since 2012. The success of the Chinese programs in CC schools has exerted a growing impact upon nearby schools and other school districts in the San Diego area. As a result, more and more students and parents have come to see the importance of learning Chinese for the preparation of the 21st century global citizen. With the increasing needs for Chinese education, a couple of schools have prepared to initiate Chinese programs for their students this fall semester. I believe more schools will consider offering Chinese courses in the future. These are the available opportunities and untapped potential for CISDSU to promote Chinese education.

As for the criteria to develop Chinese educational programs, I think we should consider such factors as the requirements of foreign language learning set by the educational authorities at all levels (e.g. Common Core State Standards, Foreign Language Framework for California Public Schools: K-12, World Language Plan of San Diego County Office of Education), the professional standards proposed by ACTFL and Hanban (e.g. Standards for Foreign Language Learning, International Curriculum for Chinese Language Education, Chinese Language Proficiency Scales for Speakers of Other Languages) and, last but not least, the learning needs of the students.

Q: What achievements have been made for CISDSU? (# of students and teachers, Chinese programs, school district administration supports...) How do you measure these achievements?
A: Recent years have witnessed tremendous achievements made by CISDSU. The Chinese student count at the end of 2015 is 3291, which is a growth of 64% since 2011. There were only 6 Hanban teachers at CISDSU in 2011, but we had 23 this past spring semester and will have 27 this fall semester. The Chinese programs have also developed steadily in terms of curriculums and classes. The 20 CC schools offer Immersion, Enrichment and FLES Mandarin courses as well as AP Chinese. The number of Chinese classes in 2015 reached 150, an increase of 114% since 2011. There’s an 81% increase in the number of cultural activities, a 9 times growth in the participant count and a 5.5 times rise in the number of participants in teacher training programs since 2011. A significant milestone in the accomplishments is Hanban’s official recognition of CISDSU as a Model Confucius Institute in 2013.

In addition, school district administration has strengthened support for the Chinese programs in CC schools, providing professional training, facilities, guidance for Hanban teachers and co-hosting China-visit programs, cultural activities, CC Forum and “Chinese Bridge” Chinese Proficiency Competition.

As figures speak louder than words, the achievements can be measured quantitatively by the above-mentioned statistics that show a sharp increase over 2011 data. Qualitatively, on the other hand, I highly value those achievements as remarkable and significant. They are the fruits of the joint efforts made by the CISDSU team and SDSU, the results of the continued support from Hanban, Xiamen University, local educational administrations, CC schools, surrounding communities and the successful collaboration with CI’s partners.

Q: What are your suggestions on Chinese education in the United States?

A: I’m afraid I don't have the ability to make suggestions on the Chinese education in the United States because situations differ from state to state in America. Without accurate first-hand information of the Chinese education in different states, my suggestions are not constructive and practical. I would, however, like to focus on the Chinese education in California.

Firstly, employ every means available to ease the shortage of qualified Chinese teachers. For example - offer more teacher education programs and conduct more in-service training, encourage and assist more local teachers to obtain CA Teacher Credential, seek more faculty support from Hanban through its Core Teacher Program, Government-sponsored Teacher Program, Teacher Volunteer Program, and Teacher Education and Training Program.

Secondly, develop more local materials and multimedia resources to facilitate teaching and learning both in and out of the classroom - especially those for young learners of Chinese, self-access language learning, online learning, and those in alignment with the Foreign Language Framework for California Public Schools: K-12 and Chinese Language Proficiency Scales for Speakers of Other Languages (as mentioned above).

Thirdly, conduct more workshops and afford more opportunities for Chinese teachers to share experiences, discuss problems and seek solutions. Following are some suggested workshop topics -
- Effective teaching techniques, activities and games for classroom use
- Application of approaches and methodologies of contemporary foreign language teaching and learning in the teaching of Mandarin
- Effective classroom management (e.g. issues of motivation, discipline and respect)
- Technology-enhanced Chinese learning and teaching.

Lastly, increase the budget and raise more funds through various channels for daily management and further development of Chinese education.

I hope those suggestions might also be of some help to other states in America.

**Q:** What were the challenges you think that CISDSU encountered during the past 5 years? What did you do to help overcome these challenges?

**A:** The main challenges facing CISDSU were a shortage of suitable teaching materials and resources and qualified Chinese teachers with CA credentials; insufficient funds for further development; and a change of school principals and students’ needs affecting the implementation of the Chinese programs in CC schools.

It took a team endeavor at CISDSU to overcome such challenges. Dr Lilly Cheng and I would discuss with CI staff how to take up the challenges. Dr Cheng has developed a set of Panda course-books and resources to ease the shortage of Chinese materials for young learners. We have run a series of workshops to help Chinese teachers with their preparation for CSET/CBEST Mandarin Subtest. As an individual effort, I gave various presentations on General Linguistics and Chinese Linguistics at the workshops and provided the teachers with useful e-books and reference on Mandarin Subtest I.

**Q:** What do you see CISDSU in the next 5 years? Do you have any suggestions?

**A:** I envision a bright future of educational excellence for CISDSU. I’m sure it will become a renowned Model Confucius Institute in the next 5 years. I’d suggest that CISDSU continue to strive for sustainable development with support from all available channels - domestic and international. I regard three tasks as important steps towards its long-term strategic goal. That is, to make every endeavor to develop CISDSU into a center of Chinese teaching, resource and research; a center of Chinese teacher training; and a center of “Six Arts” Chinese cultural exhibition and exploration within the next 5 years. These three centers are expected to be models for the other CIs in California and the U.S. and make exemplary contributions to the promotion of Chinese language and culture and the mutual understanding between Chinese and American peoples.

**Q:** You are planning to retire after your term ends this year. What is your plan after retirement?
A: In fact, I already retired this May because professors in Xiamen University retire at the age of 60 in their birthday month. Since my retirement will not begin until the end of my term this early December, I haven’t thought seriously about retirement plans.

I’ll probably exercise daily, travel widely, pay frequent visits to relatives and friends, etc. Perhaps I’ll continue to update my *L2 Cyberspace* website to provide more hypermedia resources for e-learning of the Chinese and English language and culture, expand the existing Chinese and English web-based corpora and upgrade the retrieval programs to support over 2200 registered users in their language learning, teaching and research. Of course, I’ll spend more time at home with my family so as to make up lost time serving five years at CISDSU. I hope my life after retirement will be happy, healthy and colorful.

Q: Do you have any words to say to your students (CC school students)?

A: To be competitive and become successful global citizens, our students are encouraged to have a good command of a foreign language and a keen cross-cultural awareness. The Chinese language is one of the high demand languages that are increasingly important in the global economy. With considerable proficiency in the Chinese language and adequate understanding of the Chinese culture, our students are linguistically and culturally prepared for successful intercultural communication with other global villagers. So, keep learning Mandarin and explore the time-honored Chinese culture.

Q: Anything else you would like to mention or talk about?

A: I’d like to take this opportunity to express my heartfelt thanks to Dr Lilly Cheng for her great and continuing support for my work over the past years. My sincere thanks also go to all the faculty and staff of CISDSU for their substantial assistance and close collaboration.