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## [Campus Life] CUHK Offers Top Chinese Courses

By Lim Bo-mi  
Contributing Writer

China's moves to further liberalize its economy have opened windows of opportunity not only for businesses but also for jobseekers wishing to tap into the unexplored market.

This has naturally led to a growing tendency among non-Chinese speakers to learn the Chinese language, a vital prerequisite to working and living in mainland China.

The New Asia Yale-in-China Chinese Language Center (CLC) of the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) is determined to meet this growing demand with well-thought-out language programs developed over half a century, according to CLC director Weiping Wu.

“The CLC of CUHK is at the forefront of Chinese learning techniques,” Wu told The Korea Times. “It is one of the largest institutes of its kind worldwide, with nearly a half-century of history.”

One of the best features of the center is its small classes with less than 10 students each, which enables students to get the individual attention they need in fine-tuning their language skills, according to Wu.

Another strong point of the center is that its instructors are of an international standing. “The CLC has an amazing group of language instructors who are very skilled in explaining the intricacies of the Chinese language in a way that is very clear,” said Kathleen Berroth, who has been learning Putonghua, or Mandarin Chinese as it is more commonly called, for nearly a year.

“They also make every effort to teach students with a variety of techniques from speaking and reading to writing characters, and explaining their background to providing real life situational drills,” Berroth said.

Each class has up to six different teachers each week, which helps create a more diverse learning experience and expose students to a variety of Mandarin accents, she added.

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The center offers two language programs \_ Putonghua and Cantonese, a Chinese dialect used in the Guangdong region, including Hong Kong.

The center' s two-year certificate course for each program can be covered in four regular terms of fulltime study and two summer terms, Wu explained.

Students will be issued a certificate of graduation upon passing a graduation exam after successfully completing the course.

``Study at the center has been recognized by major international universities for degree credit,' ' Wu said. ``For students from institutions that do not use the credit system, transcripts are prepared in sufficient detail to present a clear picture of the work completed by the student.' '

As of June, CUHK had signed exchange agreements with over 115 institutions all over the world, including four Korean universities \_ Ewha Womans University, Korea University, Yonsei University and Pusan National University.

One of the major concerns of students wishing to study Putonghua at the CLC is that it is located in Hong Kong, where Cantonese is the most widely spoken dialect.

Wu dismissed these worries, citing the growing use of Putonghua in Hong Kong since it was returned to China from the British government in 1997.

``Hong Kong is a place where east meets west, which makes Hong Kong an ideal and attractive place to study the Chinese language and culture,' ' the director said. ``Students here have more choices on what to learn. For example, they can study materials from Hong Kong, from mainland China as well as from Taiwan.' '

As part of efforts to give students as many opportunities as possible to practice the language in practical settings, the center organizes a series of language-related activities throughout the year, according to Wu.

These activities include lunch chats, excursions with CUHK students from mainland China, task-oriented school outings, language exchanges with CUHK students, speaking contests and New Year' s parties.

``Even though I am not surrounded by Putonghua when I move around Hong Kong, I' ve found the program gives me a solid means for interacting with native Putonghua speakers in my ongoing work,' ' Brian Shroeder, an American student who has been at the center for four terms, said. ``There are opportunities to use Putonghua here socially,' ' he added.

The activities that go beyond the boundaries of classrooms are also aimed at helping students build a network of friends from all over the world.

`` I especially like the fact that I have now built friendships with fellow students from Korea, Japan and the United States, and that our sole language of communication is Mandarin,`` Jacqueline Elfick, another student at the center from the Netherlands, said.

Since its establishment in 1963, more than 8,000 foreign students from over 50 countries and regions have studied at the CLC. It also saw a remarkable increase in the number of students enrolled in its programs. In the first decade of operation, a total of 1,017 students were enrolled at the center. The number jumped to 3,512 during the 1993-2002 period.

Korean students during the cited period accounted for 13.13 percent of the total number of international students, while those from Japan and the U.S. made up 37.69 percent and 20.43 percent, respectively.

sarahlim@koreatimes.co.kr

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