Focus on Cantonese

OSU’s Cantonese Program grows to include language, area studies courses

With support from the East Asian Studies Center, the Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures (DEALL) offered its first Cantonese language course in Autumn Semester 2013, “Conversational Cantonese for Mandarin Speakers” (pictured above). A group studies course that will be replaced by a regular language course in future offerings, it is designed for American learners of Mandarin Chinese as well as native Mandarin speakers who would like to learn to speak another variety of Chinese. Under the supervision of Professor Marjorie Chan, this first offering of a Cantonese course was taught by a small but dedicated team of two graduate students, Yutian Tan (DEALL) and Tsz-Him Tsui (Linguistics), who were, in turn, assisted on course material development by fellow graduate student Litong Chen. The course will be offered again in Spring Semester 2015. We hope that additional funding in the future will enable us to extend the course offering to intermediate and advanced levels, together with other courses pertaining to Cantonese language and culture.

Over the years, undergraduate and graduate students at Ohio State have expressed a strong interest to learn Cantonese. With over 100 million speakers around the world, Cantonese is spoken in Hong Kong, Macao, Hainan Island, Guangdong Province, as well as parts of Guangxi in China, in addition to every continent on the globe. Cantonese had been almost the sole spoken variety of Chinese in North America until recent decades of immigration from all over greater China. Cantonese is an important language to do business in Hong Kong and southern China, as well as more generally to communicate with Cantonese speakers in Asia and the overseas Cantonese-speaking communities. In addition, Cantonese is quite unique among the numerous dialects of Chinese in having a well-established and unbroken literary tradition that spans well over three centuries.

The Ohio State University has a rare distinction in North America of being able to develop a Cantonese Program that offers Cantonese language courses in conjunction with other course offerings that contain Cantonese content, in both undergraduate and graduate courses. This is because Ohio State has a strong cluster of Cantonese scholars. Among the DEALL China faculty, Professor Chan has worked most extensively with Cantonese, beginning with graduate course work and then research on the phonology of her native Zhongshan Cantonese for her MA thesis (University of British Columbia). Professor Chan has presented and published broadly over the years on numerous aspects of Cantonese, from acoustic phonetic properties to written Cantonese with its use of unique vernacular characters. Her linguistics articles on Cantonese deal with both synchronic and diachronic issues, while lighter aspects of her research include gender-linked phenomena, as well as humor in Cantopop songs and Cantonese opera. Professor Chan’s courses often include elements of Cantonese. For example, her Chinese Dialect course (Chinese 7385) contains readings on Cantonese, and her Chinese Opera course (Chinese 5474) includes discussions and examples from Cantonese opera. This is in part because Cantonese opera is widely performed all over the world and in part because a few years ago, in 2009, Cantonese opera received UNESCO’s prestigious designation as one of the “Masterpieces of Human Oral Cultural Heritage.”

Professor Chan’s research interest in Cantonese linguistics has attracted students with similar interest. She has directed and co-directed several MA theses and Ph.D. dissertations on Cantonese linguistics and served as external committee member on several MA and Ph.D. dissertations on Cantonese linguistics at institutions in Hong Kong. Her interest in Cantonese linguistics has also led her to organize, with the help of three of her graduate students with similar interests, the first Workshop on Innovations in Cantonese Linguistics (WICL) in March 2012. As the first linguistic event in North America to be devoted solely to Cantonese linguistics, the workshop was a resounding success with scholars coming from as far as Hong Kong. Today, it is well on its way to become a biennial event, with WICL2 having just been held in March at University of Chicago, and WICL3 to be hosted in 2016 at OSU again. Potential future hosts for WICL include Purdue University, University of Minnesota, and others.
Among DEALL’s literature faculty, Professor Patricia Sieber is presently completing a book on eighteenth and nineteenth-century Cantonese book culture and its impact on the development of Chinese Studies in Europe. She has also presented and published on the topic of Cantonese book culture, as well as written on Hong Kong women writers. Incorporating her research into the teaching of Chinese literature, Professor Sieber assigned a long Cantonese love ballad (Huajian Ji) as part of the readings in one of her graduate seminars. In fact, one of her advisees, a student in that seminar, is completing her MA thesis that makes use of that long love ballad, the earliest extant edition being from the early eighteenth century.

DEALL language pedagogy faculty members have also published on Cantonese. Professor Xiaobin Jian authored and co-authored the five-volume Kaleidoscope series, a textbook series for Intermediate and Advanced Cantonese. That Cantonese language series (with DEALL colleague, Professor Galal Walker, as series editor) was funded by the Center for the Advancement of Language Learning and has been used by the Foreign Service Institute and other institutions. In addition, Professor Jian is an international expert consultant for the National Research and Development Base for Chinese Language Instructional Materials at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou (earlier known as Canton City), the capital and largest city in Guangdong Province. He also manages the Critical Language Scholarship China Institute at Yat-sen University. Professor Jian himself is from Guangzhou and is a native speaker of Guangzhou Cantonese, which one of the two standards for Cantonese, the other being Hong Kong Cantonese.

Ties with Guangzhou (Canton) also extend to Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). One was negotiated between Institute for Chinese Studies at The Ohio State University and the Institute of Chinese Dialects at Jinan University in Guangzhou. This MOU will just be the first of many in coming years, as that opens up possibilities for scholarly exchanges that will benefit students and faculty conducting research at both institutions.

As the above has amply demonstrated, the elements are fully in place for exciting developments in The Ohio State University’s Cantonese Program for new course offerings on learning the Cantonese language in conjunction with undergraduate and graduate courses that have Cantonese content, and opportunities to study or research in a Cantonese-speaking city such as Guangzhou or Hong Kong.

Focus on teacher training

K-16 educator workshop explores Japanese kamishibai storytelling

Presented by Dr. Tara McGowan, storyteller, visual artist, teacher and writer, “Kamishibai Storytelling: Engaging Visual and Oral Literacies in the Classroom / Connecting to the Common Core Literacy Standards,” a workshop for K-16 educators, was hosted by the Institute for Japanese Studies on Saturday, February 8, 2014 on The Ohio State University campus. Kamishibai is a dynamic and interactive storytelling form from Japan that allows students to develop mastery of multiple literacies, while also learning to combine these literacies effectively. This hands-on workshop was based on McGowan’s book, The Kamishibai Classroom: Engaging Multiple Literacies through the Art of “Paper Theater” (2010), and her experiences of more than a decade teaching kamishibai in public school classrooms and other venues in the United States. The workshop covered a broad range of techniques used by kamishibai practitioners in Japan, past and present, and made connections to early traditions of picture-storytelling in Japan and to present-day manga and animé. It also explored how teaching through kamishibai performance can be aligned to the new core curriculum standards.

This workshop was sponsored by IJS, EASC, Japan Foundation Center for Global Partnership, and a US Department of Education Title VI Grant. For more information on the event, contact Janet Stucky at stucky.7@osu.edu.