

Is Chinese Impossible to Learn? -- An Initiation into Chinese

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Abstract

This paper reports on a tentative study based on four sessions of Chinese administered to a group of Portuguese students enrolled in the Master's Program of Teaching Languages at the Department of Didactics and Educational Technology, University of Aveiro, Portugal. It aims at addressing the motivation and attitudes of Portuguese natives in Portugal towards learning Chinese, an issue that has received little academic attention so far. Before the sessions, a questionnaire was conducted to figure out the participants' knowledge about Chinese and motivation/attitudes towards learning it. Results show that a majority of participants, having little experience with Chinese, gain their sketchy knowledge from scanty sources among which Chinese restaurants, movies and television programs are predominant. A considerable percentage of participants expressed the view that Chinese must be difficult to learn. Four sessions of instruction of Chinese were then administered where they got an opportunity to learn the basic mechanisms of Chinese like *pin yin*, the structure of Chinese characters and some daily expressions intertwined with a glimpse of Chinese culture. Efforts were made to ease the learners' anxiety and dispel their preconceptions about Chinese. After instruction, they were asked to describe their impression of this brief encounter with Chinese. It is evident that integrative motivation towards the Chinese language and culture soared after the initiation into Chinese in spite of its short period. Interest in learning more about the Chinese language and culture is universally aroused. In terms of problem areas, *pin yin* and the

writing system, in particular, are recognised to pose difficulties. Suggestions for further study are called for.

1. Introduction

In Portugal, teaching Chinese is a relatively new endeavour. Mission of Macao in Lisbon is the first institution that provides Portuguese the opportunity to learn the exotic language. Over recent years, as the exchange between Portugal and China, in terms of politics, commerce, culture, science and technology, has been widening by leaps and bounds, teaching Chinese in Portugal has flourished and attracted more Portuguese. Until now, several courses have been set up in various parts of Portugal like Mission of Macao, Lisbon; University of Braga, Braga; Students' Association of Letters Faculty, University of Porto, Porto and Department of Languages and Cultures and Centre of Asian Studies, University of Aveiro, Aveiro and so on. In an effort to ascertain Portuguese natives' motivation/attitudes towards learning Chinese in Portugal, a small-scale study was done with a group of students doing Master's Program of Teaching Languages at Department of Didactics and Educational Technology in University of Aveiro. They took four Chinese two-hour classes, one per week, during October 2000.

2. Review of Literature

In the field of second and foreign language teaching and learning, the importance of learners' motivation/attitudes has long been recognized, the research on which, over the past years, has been dominated by the social-psychological approach of Gardner and his associates. In 1959, it was Gardner and Lambert who made the seminal remarks about the significance of motivation/attitudes in language learning. They conducted a research program with English-speaking Canadians learning French for more than ten years. Besides aptitude for language, motivation to learn a language was found to be another factor that explains why it takes longer for some to learn a foreign language than others (Gardner & Lambert, 1959). The study pushed forward the frontier in second and foreign language research. Up till then, attention had been on ascribing cognitive factors such as aptitude and intelligence to individual differences in second and foreign language learning (Carroll, 1963; Henmon, 1929). According to Gardner (1985) a specific language motivation exists and can be expressed as a type of equation: "Motivation = Effort + Desire to achieve + Attitudes." Motivation is further divided into two components: instrumental and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation is characterised by "a desire to gain social recognition or economic advantages through knowledge of a foreign language". People with instrumental motivation try to acquire a language for the sake of attaining instrumental goals: passing exams, improving job prospects, doing business with foreigners, and so on. An integrative attitude to a language is defined as "a desire to be like representative members of the other language community" (Gardner & Lambert, 1972: 14). Learners with integrative motivation

aim at getting to know the foreign country, identifying themselves within the culture of the foreign language group and ultimately becoming part of the society. Gardner et al. claimed that learners with integrative motivation are more likely to succeed than those who are motivated by utilitarian interests.

Gardner and his associates' proposition of the integrative-instrumental duality has not gone without criticism. Gillette (1987) showed that instrumental motivation is also associated with good language learning. Other researchers contended that integrative motivation is more diversified than instrumental motivation. Clément and Kruidenier (1983) indicated that what has been considered integrative motivation might consist of socio-cultural knowledge, friendship and travel orientations. Dörnyei (1990) found similar orientations: interest in foreign languages, cultures and people; desire to broaden one's view and to avoid provincialism and isolation; desire for new stimuli and challenges; desire to be integrated into the other community with the help of the target language.

High motivation and favourable attitude enhance language learning. On the contrary, low motivation and unfavourable attitude are among the affective factors which contribute to the high filter, "one that prevents input from reaching the LAD (Language Acquisition Device)" according to Krashen's Input Hypothesis theory (Krashen, 1989: 10). It stands to reason that to uplift learners' motivation, enhance favourable attitude and change unfavourable attitude are of importance both from theoretical and pedagogical standpoints, to which end, getting to know motivation and attitudes of learners is the first step. As Lewis reasons, "Any policy for languages, especially in the system of education, has to take account of the attitude of those likely to be affected ... In any case knowledge about attitudes is fundamental to the formulation of a policy as well as to success in its implementation" (Lewis, 1975: 103-21,262).

Many researchers have done extensive investigation on the roles motivation and attitudes play in foreign language learning. Motivation and attitudes to learning a specific language have drawn a lot of attention --- learning French (e.g. Burstall et al., 1974; Gardner & Lambert, 1972; see Gardner, 1985 for a review of research), learning English (e.g. Sharp et al., 1973), learning Norwegian (Svanes, 1987), and so on, have been reported.

Studies on motivation and attitudes of Portuguese in Portugal towards learning Chinese are lacking. To my knowledge, there is only one study done by Urbana Pereira Bendiha and its results were presented at the Tenth Meeting of Association of Universities of Portuguese Language, in April 2000, Portugal. An anonymous survey was delivered to three groups of learners of Chinese enrolled in three Chinese courses respectively: the free course of Chinese, during the academic year 1999-2000; the free course of Chinese, during the academic year 2000-2001; and the Master's Program of Chinese Studies of the University of Aveiro. All together 30 learners responded. Three results are noteworthy. On being questioned about their motivation for taking the Chinese courses, 21 out of 30 respondents ascribed it

to interest in Chinese culture. Their previous knowledge of Chinese civilisation and culture mainly covers three areas: Chinese food, Chinese politics and Chinese architecture with Chinese food accounting for the largest percentage. When they were asked to describe their representation of the Chinese language, 13 answers emerged (interesting, different, difficult, beautiful, complex, historic, pleasant, most spoken, easy, dominated by memory, visual, artistic and musical) three of which receive most of the votes: difficult, interesting and different (Bendiha, 2000). It is obvious that participants show a high degree of integrative motivation towards learning Chinese although the scope of getting to know Chinese and its culture is rather narrow. However, no follow-up study has been done to indicate their impression of Chinese after a period of instruction. What do they think of Chinese after the course? Is there a change of their attitudes towards Chinese? Is their motivation on the wax or on the wane? What are the difficult areas for Portuguese natives? What would they like to know more about the Chinese language and culture? Questions like these are left unanswered, which will be addressed in the present work.

The study aims at finding out which kind of motivation (instrumental or integrative motivation) is overriding among the subjects, how the Chinese classes will influence the subjects' pre-conception of Chinese and what could be the problem areas for Portuguese learners of Chinese.

3. Methodology

3.1 Subjects

The present study was administered in October, during the first semester of the academic year 2000-2001. Subjects were 22 students enrolled in the Master's Program of Teaching Languages at the Department of Didactics and Educational Technology, University of Aveiro, Portugal. The Chinese language sessions served as a complement to a course --"Acquisition of Foreign Languages --- Theory and Practice". In order to put into practice what they had learnt about theories of language acquisition, they themselves tried to learn a foreign language --- Chinese in this case.

3.2 Procedures

3.2.1 Before the Sessions

Before the classes, an anonymous questionnaire to explore the motivation and attitudes towards learning Chinese was distributed. The questionnaire was composed of three parts. In the first part, demographic data about the participants were asked for: sex, age, academic degree and profession. Next, subjects were supposed to decide whether 10 statements concerning basic facts about Chinese were true or false. Finally, they were asked to answer 12 multiple-choice questions.

Of all the 22 participants, 5 of them were male and the rest female. Their average age was 35. Holding at least Bachelor's Degrees, all of them were engaged

in language teaching professionally either as language teachers or as language assistants of Portuguese, English, French, German etc.

With regards to the 10 true or false statements, of all the answers provided (5 missing answers), there were 113 correct answers and 81 incorrect answers. What deserves our attention is that there is widespread misunderstanding about Chinese on some respects. The 3rd statement (Chinese is not one of the official languages used in the United Nations.) gets only 3 right answers. Only 6 participants were correct when they judged item No. 5 (Chinese is written from left to right, not from top to bottom.) as right and No. 6 (All Chinese characters are based on pictures of the objects or ideas they represent.) as wrong. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the participants have some knowledge about Chinese although certain misconceptions do exist.

Next, participants answered 12 multiple-choice questions because “multiple items rather than a single item usually enhance internal reliability” (Baker, 1992: 17). To begin with, 6 adjectives (difficult, strange, mysterious, popular, different, interesting) were provided, against which participants put numbers (1-7) in order to indicate the order of adjectives that came up in their minds when they thought of Chinese. Table 1 shows that 12 out of 21 participants (one missing answer) chose ‘difficult’ as the first adjective that appeared in their minds, which came as no surprise. In Portuguese, there is a proverb -- *Isso para mim é chinês* [That is Chinese for me], a Portuguese counterpart of the English proverb -- *It is Greek tome*, meaning something is difficult to understand. A picture of mysteriousness conjured up first in the minds of 6 participants. Besides, ‘different’ and ‘strange’ receive a considerable number of votes (8 of 21 participants numbered ‘different’ as number 2 while ‘strange’ was marked as number 2 by 5 participants). Two participants also added ‘beautiful’ and ‘little known’ to the list. We arrive at the conclusion that for a majority of the participants, difficulty, mysteriousness, difference and strangeness stand out as the most salient characteristics of Chinese, which corresponds well with the result of the study conducted by Bendiha (Bendiha, 2000).

adjectives	number of participants						
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
difficult	12	3	3	3	0	0	0
strange	1	5	6	2	3	2	0
mysterious	6	2	6	4	5	0	0
popular	0	0	0	2	2	12	1
different	0	8	3	4	4	0	0
interesting	2	2	2	3	7	3	0
little known	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
beautiful	0	1	0	0	0	0	0

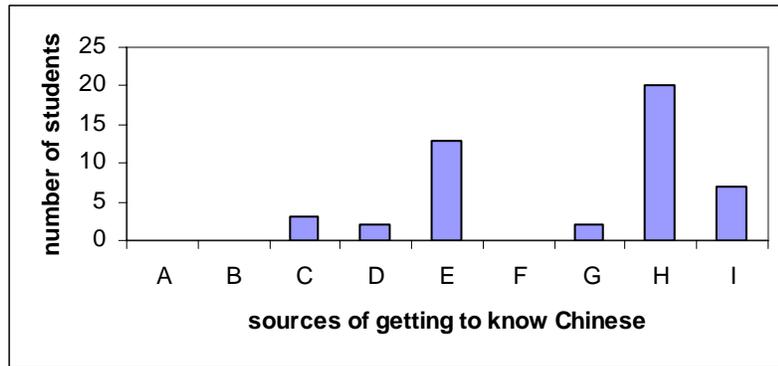
Table 1. In general, what do you think of Chinese? Please put 1 against the first adjective that comes up in your mind, 2 against the next one and so on.

Note:

1. missing answer(s): 1
2. I, II, III, IV, V, VI, VII refer to the order of adjectives that appear in the minds of the participants.

When they were asked to describe their experience with Chinese, only 2 participants responded to have had some experience with Chinese, while the rest of them ticked 'none'. Subsequently, 9 sources were listed for participants to choose from as the means from which they get to know Chinese: Chinese courses, family members, books/magazines, journeys, movies/television, Internet, friends, Chinese restaurants, and labels/instructions of commodities. Figure 1 shows that most noticeably, 20 participants make contact with Chinese through Chinese restaurants while movies/television programs provide a way to make contact with Chinese for 13 out of them. Nobody chose Chinese courses, family members and the Internet. It suggests that the prior knowledge of Chinese of the majority of respondents is rather meagre. This result is corroborated by the study by Bendiha as gastronomic knowledge overrides all the others in the makeup of subjects' previous knowledge of Chinese (Bendiha, 2000).

Figure 1. How do you get to know Chinese?



A= Chinese courses B=family members C=books/magazines
 D=journeys E=movies/televisions F=Internet
 G=friends H=Chinese restaurants I=labels/instructions of products

In an answer to the question “Have you ever thought of learning Chinese? Why?”, 8 out of 20 participants (there are 2 missing answers) responded that they had considered learning Chinese, which can be ascribed to both instrumental and integrative motivation. Nevertheless, there is only one participant who demonstrated interest in learning Chinese to meet career demands. “As I teach Portuguese for foreigners I think it would be useful to know a little of each language. Chinese is one of the languages.” In contrast, integrative motivation is the driving force for all the others who manifested various types of orientations. Five participants showed interest in learning Chinese as a way to expand their socio-cultural knowledge. As one participant reasoned “porque é a língua mais falada no mundo. Gostaria de conhecer mais coisas sobre a língua e a cultura [because Chinese is the most spoken language in the world. I would like to know more about its language and culture.]” There is another whose interest in learning Chinese is kindled by the influence of his (her) friend, a teacher of Chinese in Minho University, Portugal, who “makes a lot for him (her) to go to her classes.” In the case of still another respondent, the idea of learning Chinese occurred to her due to her travelling experience in China as “when I visited Hong Kong, Macau and China, I was curious and interested to learn the language (Cantonese) because I could not understand a word/sound.” The above-mentioned three cases match well with the three types of integrative motivation: socio-cultural knowledge, friendship and travel orientations proposed by Clément and Kruidenier cited earlier (Clément & Kruidenier, 1983).

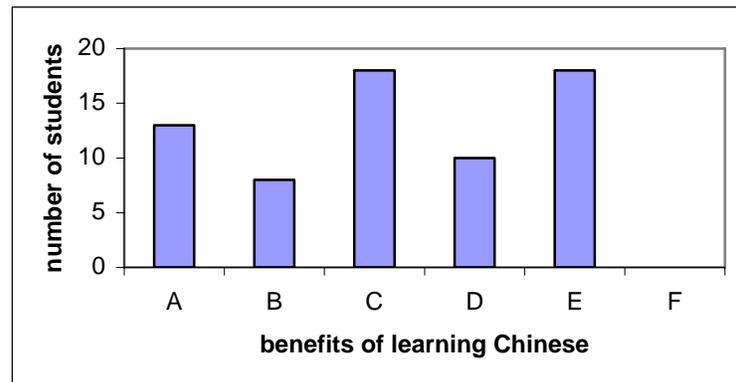
For those who never thought of learning Chinese, there are mainly four reasons: lack of time, difficulty of learning it, no use and little similarity with Portuguese, among which, no use of learning Chinese predominates as 8 out of 12 participants expressed the idea that there is no need to use it and consequently no need to learn it. The considerable lack of interest is understandable when viewed in the light that “A language that has no place in daily business, administration and transactions, is likely to be linked with attitude decline” (Baker, 1992: 110). It is interesting to note that Chinese is intimidatingly difficult for 4 participants, “parece muito difícil por isso é assustador [It looks difficult and it frightens me away.]”

In 1973, the Defence Language Institute in Monterey, California, classified languages from the easiest to the most difficult, measured by the number of hours of instruction needed to reach a certain level of proficiency. Chinese is among the most difficult language in the list (Baxter, 1997), which is born out by the ETS Oral Proficiency Testing Manual according to which, under ideal conditions, it takes American students 720 hours of instruction to reach Level 3 in oral skills in French or Spanish, while the same students have to spend 2,400 to 2,760 hours to achieve the same level of oral proficiency in Japanese or Chinese (Liskin – Gasparro, 1982). In question No. 8, participants were asked to respond to the statement “Someone said that Chinese is the most difficult language in the world, do you agree?” For purposes of numerical analysis, checkmarks are converted to a one-to-five scale where 1 is associated with ‘strongly agree’, 2 with ‘agree’, 3 with ‘neither agree nor

disagree' and so on. On average, the mean is 1.9 inclining towards the left extreme. The result suggests strongly that the participants are of the opinion that Chinese is a difficult language.

The participants were then asked to tick the possible benefits of learning Chinese among 6 options (business opportunity, job prospects, understanding Chinese culture, communication, widening horizons and no benefit). Figure 2 shows that understanding Chinese culture and widening horizons are most chosen; next comes the business opportunity. Therefore, it is evident that in the opinion of participants, learning Chinese can have both instrumental and integrative benefits, the latter of which is more predominant.

Figure 2. In your opinion, what are the possible benefits of learning Chinese for Portuguese natives?



A= business opportunity B= job prospect C= understanding Chinese culture
D= communication E= widening horizon F= no benefit

Next, so as to find out their attitudes towards Chinese culture, 'semantic differential scaling' (Williams, 1973: 114) was employed with which participants evaluated Chinese culture by rating it on one-to-seven scales comprised of adjectival opposites: difficult vs easy to understand, rich vs poor, important vs unimportant to learn, popular vs unpopular, totally different from Western culture vs in some way similar to Western culture, interesting vs uninteresting. Table 2 illustrates that for all pairs except popular vs unpopular, consensus leaned towards the left polar.

pairs	difficult vs. easy	rich vs. poor	important vs unimportant	popular vs. unpopular	different vs. similar	interesting vs. uninteresting
means	3.05	1.76	3.18	4.05	2.05	1.91

Table 2. How do you characterise Chinese culture?

3.2.2 Chinese Sessions

Participants received instruction on Chinese for four sessions spread over one month, each of which lasted for two hours. Four sessions centred on three topics: general introduction to Chinese, phonetic system of Chinese and Chinese writing system. Intertwining with an introduction to the basic facts of Chinese, some cultural aspects like the Chinese 12 animal signs, Chinese calligraphy were introduced as well with the aid of transparencies. Moreover, participants got the chance to learn how to say some day-to-day Chinese such as ‘hello’, ‘thank you’, ‘good-bye’ and numbers 0-10. Ample opportunities were provided for participants to make practice in pairs or groups like marking the tones, identifying the initial and final sounds of *pin yin*, putting Chinese characters into categories according to structures, writing Chinese characters in the correct order, looking up characters in the dictionary, asking each other’s telephone number and birthday in Chinese and so on.

Taking into consideration that the majority of participants had only a scanty idea of Chinese, emphasis was placed on introducing them to the fundamental mechanisms of Chinese. Common misconceptions about Chinese like “Chinese is written from top to bottom”; “Chinese writing is alphabetic”; “Chinese characters are based on pictures of the objects or ideas they represent” and “Chinese, Japanese and Korean share the same writing system” were highlighted. Another idea that ran in our heads throughout the four sessions was how to expel the widespread assumption among the participants that Chinese is a very difficult language. In order to lower the inhibition of participants and present them an objective picture of Chinese, facts about what makes Chinese difficult and easy for speakers of Indo-European languages were presented. “The negative attitudes can be changed, often by exposure to reality and by encounters with actual persons from other cultures. Negative attitudes usually emerge either from false stereotyping or from undue ethnocentrism” (Brown, 1981: 126). Games, problem-solving activities, comic strips and Chinese music help to create an anxiety-free learning environment. One participant admitted, “I found the lesson very informal, which means that we were not afraid of making mistakes.” As materials about learning Chinese are hard to get by in Portugal, several informative websites where it is possible to learn Chinese on one’s own and get an in-depth look at Chinese culture were let known to the participants, which was welcomed by them. One participant reflected later, “Gostaria de saber e conhecer muito mais acerca da vossa cultura. Por isso, o website que nos

facultou ser-me-á muito útil. [I would like to know a lot more about your culture. Therefore, the websites supplied will be very useful for me.]”

3.2.3 After the Sessions

After four sessions, participants were asked to write down their impression of the 4 Chinese classes in English or Portuguese. “Underlying attitudes can be indicated by observation of behaviour or, more efficiently, by self-reports” (Baker, 1992: 16).

Overall, motivation and attitudes towards learning Chinese show a positive turn. Many of them find the glimpse into Chinese a brand-new experience. As one put it, “Toda a informação dada nas aulas era para mim desconhecida. [All the information given in the classes was not known to me.]”, a response which is echoed by many others e.g. “It was interesting because everything was 100% new for me i.e., language, characters, sounds”, “Não sabíamos praticamente nada sobre a estrutura e o funcionamento da língua chinesa. [Practically, we did not know anything about the structure or the functioning of the Chinese language.]”, “There are many cultural aspects I didn’t know about China”, “Não fazia ideia de como funcionava a língua chinesa. [I did not have any idea of how the Chinese language worked.]” and so on. On the other hand, some of the participants were aware of some features of Chinese but these sessions introduced them to some new facts about Chinese such as the lack of verb tenses, the lack of number, gender and so on.

The Chinese classes, in some way, dismissed preconceptions of some participants about Chinese. “It is an implicit or explicit assumption of much language policy and provision that attitudes can or should change” (Baker, 1992: 97). Above all, Chinese turns out to be less difficult and complicated than expected by some. One participant remarked, “I think I had the idea that Chinese was impossible to learn. Now, I think it is very difficult but not impossible.” Certainly he (she) was not alone. Several others experienced the same change: “Chinese was at first a completely difficult language, but it turned out to be simpler than I thought it might be”, “A ideia que tinha do chinês era algo de errado. Tinha muito preconceitos ... Não fazia ideia da existência do *pin yin* e que do facto facilita aprendizagem. [My idea of Chinese was a little wrong. I had a lot of misconceptions about Chinese ... I had no idea of the existence of *pin yin*, which in fact facilitates learning.]”, “Eu tinha a ideia de que a língua chinesa era muito complicada mas não é. É difícil aprender a escrever os caracteres, mas a organização é simples. [I had the idea that Chinese was very complicated but it is not! It is difficult to learn how to write the characters, but the organization is simple.]” “My attitude towards Chinese changed. I’m more curious about it and there is no longer the cultural distance I felt before.”

The sessions ignited the interest of knowing more about Chinese for a large percentage of them. Of the 17 participants who answered, 12 of them wish to know more about the Chinese language and culture. Some examples of responses are as

follows: “I found the lesson on the different types of Chinese writing very interesting and the characters beautiful – and this, I think, has stimulated my interest in Chinese as a language and particularly the culture – for example, history, lifestyles”, “I would be interested in learning more about the culture associated with the language, e.g. history of the language”, “Acho que esta ‘iniciação’ me despertou a curiosidade para aprender, a sério, mais coisas sobre este idioma. [I think this initiation woke up my curiosity to learn seriously more about the language.]”. One participant even plans to learn Chinese seriously. “Quando terminar o Mestrado, vou matricular-me num Curso Livre de Mandarim. [After finishing my Master’s program, I am going to enrol in a free course of Mandarin.]” It is evident that integrative interest prevails. However, for one participant, learning Chinese can serve her instrumental needs as she teaches Portuguese to foreigners, among whom there are two Chinese students who “do not speak neither English or French.” Therefore, these lessons were very important for me.”

In terms of the difficulties encountered, the writing system and *pin yin* pose great difficulty to many of the participants as several expressed the opinion that “The most difficult aspect was the Chinese writing”, “A maior dificuldade que senti foi na identificação correcta dos ‘tones’, a nível oral mas sobretudo na parte escrita [The greater difficulty that I felt was the identification of tones in terms of speaking, but the most difficult was the writing part].” “My greatest difficulties were in understanding writing and the characters.” “The difficulties encountered are mainly the characters”, “Para mim, a escrita dos caracteres tornou-se mais difícil do que a oralidade propriamente dita. [For me, how to write the characters is more difficult than how to speak properly].” The difficulty of Chinese writing for Portuguese is hardly surprising as “unfamiliarity with the orthographic systems in Japanese and/or Chinese, for example, often appears to create major affective as well as cognitive barriers for the learners to overcome” (Samimy & Tabuse, 1992: 384).

Some of them lamented over the fact that the sessions were too short, voicing their desire to learn how to speak Chinese. “Gostaria de ter aprendido frequentes diálogos, foi pena o curso não durar mais. [I would like to learn day-to-day dialogues. It is a pity that the class did not last longer.]”, “It was a pity we didn’t get the chance to learn how to say easy things like ‘My name is, I live in, etc ...’ This was the only negative point.”, “I liked the classes, in which we got a chance to actually speak, but the lack of more oral work is precisely what I liked the least (due to the lack of time).”

4. Limitations, Conclusions and Suggestions

Several limitations of the study should be noted. To begin with, the shortness of the sessions inevitably becomes a major drawback. Had we had more Chinese classes, it would have been possible to explore issues with other variables taken into consideration, e.g. the relationship between motivation and attitudes towards learning Chinese and gender, age; the role mass media plays in forming attitudes

towards Chinese, the relationship between motivation/attitudes and achievement and so on. Besides, as learning Chinese is by no means the top priority of the participants at the moment as they are taking a Master's program on teaching languages, obviously their instrumental motivation would be hard to detect. Further researcher might well benefit from investigating more fully the longitudinal motivation for learning Chinese. An in-depth analysis carried out in a variety of contexts, and among different groups and different types of students, might well lead to a better understanding.

5. Conclusions

Given the small number of subjects and the limited time of instruction, any generalisation will be hard to draw. However, some conclusions emerge. Participants are more motivated by integrative interests than by instrumental interests to learn Chinese. A considerable amount of misconceptions towards Chinese exist among the participants. After initial instruction, more participants are motivated to know more about the Chinese language and culture. *Pin yin* and Chinese characters are universally believed to be difficult, which necessitates special attention.

A final note: we met a participant who is a teacher of Portuguese in a secondary school a few days after the sessions. She told us that when she was teaching her students a story about Macau written by a Portuguese, she introduced some elements learnt in the Chinese classes like greeting the students with 'hello' in Chinese and *pin yin*. Guess the reaction of the students: they were amazed!

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Appendix

Questionnaire: How do You Perceive Chinese as a Language?

(2000/10/06)

This is a personal piece of research. Your reply will be read only by us and treated in confidence in any reporting of the work. Please put a tick after the option(s). Sometimes you are asked to write the answer (in English or Portuguese) in the space provided. Please answer all the questions honestly! Thank you very much for your co-operation!

Note: *Chinese* in the questionnaire refers to Chinese as a language, not Chinese people.

Age: _____

Sex: _____

Academic Degree: _____

(Please specify your major.)

Profession: _____

(If you are a language teacher, please specify the languages.)

True or false

1. Chinese belongs to the Indo-European language family.
2. As a mother tongue, Chinese is the most spoken language in the world.
3. Chinese is not one of the official languages used in the United Nations.
4. Chinese is spoken as an official language only in China.
5. Chinese is written from left to right, not from top to bottom.
6. All Chinese characters are based on pictures of the objects or ideas they represent.
7. The writing system of Chinese is not alphabetic.
8. Each Chinese character represents a word.
9. Chinese, Japanese and Korean share the same writing system.
10. Like Portuguese, Chinese has few dialects.

Questions:**Q1.** In general, what do you think of Chinese?

Please put 1 against the first adjective that comes up in your mind; 2 against the next one and so on.

difficult	strange	mysterious
popular	different	interesting
others		

Q2. How do you describe your experience with Chinese? Please tick.

1. a lot 2. some 3. a little 4. little 5. none

Q3. How do you get to know Chinese? Please tick.

From:

Chinese courses

family members

books/magazines

- | | | | | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2. rich | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | poor |
| 3. important to learn | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | unimportant to learn |
| 4. popular | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | unpopular |
| 5. totally different from
the Western culture | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | in some way similar
to Western culture |
| 6. interesting | — | — | — | — | — | — | — | uninteresting |

Q 12. How do you envision the future of Chinese? Please tick.

1. Chinese will become more important in international affairs.
2. Chinese will become less important in international affairs.
3. I do not know.

Note:

1. Baxter, W. (1997). *How Hard is Chinese?* [WWW document]. URL:<http://www-personal.unic.edu/~waxter/howhard.html>.