

Adjusting and Restructuring of Chinese Language Schools in Europe: A Micro Perspective

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Abstract:

Chinese language schools (CLSs) in Europe have witnessed its evolution and expansion in the past decades, but how to survive the impact of Covid-19 pandemic is a guideline for decision making of CLS Principles. This paper is aimed at an investigation of current situation of CLSs in Europe in recent years, especially since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic after an overview of the history. From a micro perspective, it provides a qualitative analysis by interviews of 17 Principles of 15 CLSs from eleven European nations. It is revealed that a new adjustment and restructuring stage, no matter in the number of CLSs or of students, is on-going in recent years after its booming growth since the 21st century. Few new CLSs were established and small CLSs were merged or have been perishing with the expansion of larger ones, and some CLSs cut off or swing higher grades to deal with challenges of competition and impact of Covid-19 pandemic in recent years. Positive factors for the adjusting stage include the urge from positive attitude towards Chinese language learning, structural change of jobs among overseas Chinese communities, being motivated after more affordable travels to China and an easier access to top universities in China for overseas Chinese children. But the weakening language environment of overseas Chinese families and communities in Europe, property of extracurricular activities, geographical closeness between Europe and North America, and some prevalent negative opinions on higher education depress the expansion of CLSs. The findings have important implications for future heritage language education and adjustment and development of CLSs in Europe.

Keywords: Chinese language schools in Europe, history, adjusting, restructuring, micro perspective

I. INTRODUCTION OF HISTORY OF CLSS IN EUROPE

Chinese heritage language teaching is targeted for a special group of transnational migrants—overseas Chinese children, which is often taught in Chinese language schools (CLSs) all around the world. CLSs provide a variety of extra classes including Chinese language. For those students, they consider heritage language as a cultural marks and ethnic identity element.[1] Offspring of Chinese diasporas go to nearby Chinese language schools (CLSs) to keep up the literacy of Chinese heritage language, which is known as Overseas Chinese Language Education (OCLE).[2]

The evolution of OCLE in the world in the past centuries can be divided into five stages: formation, prosperity, unbalanced development, revival and upsurge stage, and analysed the characteristics of each stage respectively. He also pointed out that OCLE in Southeast Asia are fully developed and mature enough compared to the rest of the world.[3] Another theory is that the evolution of CLSs can be divided into six stages, including germination, starting-up, development, peak, trough and renaissance stages, and gave some suggestions on how to improve OLCE.[4] The last stages of both researches mentioned indicated that CLSs were in a stable but slightly growing stage before Covid-19 pandemic.

In Europe, OCLE started relatively late compared with that in Southeast Asia and the US, mainly because of the relatively late immigration of Chinese diaspora in Europe and the downturn of immigration after the World War II. The Netherlands (it was called Holland at that time) established the first Chinese class for overseas Chinese children in Europe because there were a number of immigrants poured in at the end of 19th century and the beginning of 20th century. At that time, a group of overseas Chinese emigrated from Indonesia (affiliated to the Netherlands then) to the Netherlands and they founded an association called Overseas Chinese Guild of the Netherlands in 1912 which started offering Chinese language teaching in a small scale in 1919 in Leiden, which was in the form of Chinese language centres (CLCs) because of its small size in student number. With the increasing number of immigrants in the Netherlands, two other Chinese language centres were founded in Rotterdam and then in Amsterdam in the mid-1930s. With the outbreak of the WWII, these CLCs were brought to a halt. Until 1948, another association called Overseas Chinese Association of the Netherlands became the successor who ran those CLCs. But with limited number of students of schooling age in the 1950s and 1960s (most immigrants were adults for the purpose of earning money at that time) and limited funds, the centres didn't manage to survive. In the 1960s, the same case happened to some CLCs in France and the Great Britain. After the Reform and Open-up Policy in China in 1978, number of Chinese diasporas in the Netherlands expands from several thousand to a dozen thousand. Many overseas Chinese children immigrated to the Netherlands with their parents. Then Overseas Chinese Association of the Netherlands, again, founded the first CLS in 1979 (it was called CLS until then because the number of students were greatly increased). Then the association expanded the number of CLSs to 17 schools in 1981 with a total number of over 1,800 students. Those CLSs rented classrooms in local public schools and Chinese language teaching was usually given from 1:00pm to 3:00pm on Saturdays. Some schools even provided extra classes like martial arts and Chinese folk dance. All funds of the CLSs were sponsored by fundraise from the association and all teachers were volunteers of overseas Chinese (most information is edited according to Albums of 50 Anniversary of Overseas Chinese Association of the Netherlands (1947-1997), unpublished).

In the 1970s, with the influx of Chinese immigrants into Europe, the number of overseas Chinese in other European countries increased, so was the case with the number of CLSs in Europe. From 1980 to 1986, about 20 Chinese schools were established in large and medium-sized cities of Britain, France, Belgium and the Federal Republic of Germany. A study pointed out that the total number of overseas Chinese in Europe was about 2.5 million, and there were about 340 CLSs and more than 55,000 students in 2011.[5] There are about 400 CLSs in Europe, about more than 50,000 students in European CLSs and 55

CLSs are entitled Model School of OCLE in 2021.[6] The title Model School is granted by Chinese government to honour some excellent CLSs. But there are some requirements to meet with and the total number of Model Schools of OCLE is limited to 55 in Europe up till now. Many CLSs compete for the title because it's an acknowledgement of the quality of education of the school). Previous researches in Chinese language proficiency of students in CLSs are usually limited in one specific country.[7-13] There are several studies focusing on Chinese language learning in Europe, but these researches are based on Chinese Confucius Institutes, which are targeted on learners of non-Chinese speakers who take Chinese as a second language instead of a heritage language. [14]

However, previous studies, including five-stage theory and six-stage theory of OCLE, revealed the prosperity of CLSs among Chinese communities before Covid-19 pandemic, and gave the conclusion based on the change of numbers of CLSs. One of the limitations with those theories is that they didn't explain the mechanism of the change, namely, how 340 CLSs from 2011 was changed into about 400 CLSs in 2019 in Europe. Besides, current situation of CLSs is very likely to suffer the challenges in recent years, especially after Covid-19 pandemic.[15] How CLSs are impacted and how they deal with the impact need a close examining.

This paper provides an insight into practices of adjustment and restructuring of CLSs in Europe in response to previous theoretical researches. It provides a discussion of how decision makers combine their strategies of their schools with the external environment factors in the context of covid-19. Introduction of this paper has given a brief overview of the history of CLSs in Europe, and then it proceeds with a micro perspective on current development and situation of CLSs in Europe by plenty of first-hand interviews in order to discuss new dilemmas of CLSs after the outbreak Covid-19 pandemic to see if there is a new stage as well as reasons for the new stage (if any) and how the number of CLSs is changing in recent years in overseas Chinese communities in Europe.

II. METHODS

The primary research method adopted in the paper is semi-structured interview. Respondents of interviews were Principals of CLSs in some European countries and the samples were collected through snowball sampling: some random interviewees were selected and interviews were made. All principles were also teachers who taught Chinese language in their schools. They were also encouraged to introduce other interviewees of the same type. Subsequent analysis was carried on according to the information the interviewees provided. Snowball sampling is often used in surveys of groups with limited numbers. In-depth interviews with 17 Principles (including two Vice Principals and two ex-Principals) were made in 15 CLSs in eleven different European countries. 16 Principles are overseas Chinese who are permanent residents in European countries and one ex-Principle are living and working in China.

The interviews were implemented in the following two ways. The first way was online WeChat (a social media) interviews. 13 interviewees were living in Europe during the interview. A few days before

the interview, outline of the interview was forwarded to the interviewees via WeChat, and then time for the interviews was arranged. Taking the time difference into account between Europe and China (six or seven hours), interview time was set after 10:00am in Europe (after 4:00pm or 5:00pm in China). Moreover, consent of recording the interviews was obtained in advance. The second way was face-to-face interviews. Four out of 17 interviewees were interviewed this way (except the Principle who works in China, the rest three Principles have business investment in China and were back in China for business trip when the interviews were made). After the interviews, the author converted the audio interview recordings into scripts and marked unclear parts and sent the scripts back to the interviewee in the form of scripts and invited the interviewees to check before the scripts were finalized. Collected data are shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Information of the interviewees and their Chinese language schools

No.	Inter-Viewee	Names of CLS ²	Country	Year of Starting CLS	Number of Students before and after	Grades Provided in CLS ³	Venue of CLS ^a	Entity Registered under ^b	Time of Interview
1	ZXL ^c	School A	France	2002	250/150	1-4	A	A	1/27/2021
2	XC	School B ^d	France	2003	900/550	k-6	C	A	2/10/2021
3	CSC	School C	Italy	2010	120/70	1-4	C	B	2/15/2021
4	PSL	School D [*]	Italy	2001	1000/550	1-4 ;	B	A	3/3/2021
5	XQ (Vice)					7-8 ; 10-11			
6	CSF	School E [*]	Spain	2008	1500/1100	k-8	B	A	3/7/2021
7	PLL	School F [*]	Spain	2010	550/600	1-9	B/C	A	3/10/2021
8	XGX (Ex.)	School G	the Netherlands	2004	400/250	1-6	B	B	3/11/2021
9	LF	School H [*]	Greece	2004	500/400	1-8	C	B	3/12/2021
10	SWY	School I	Hungary	2016	300/250	1-6	C	B	3/12/2021
11	CLL (Vice)								
12	ZQB	School J	Hungary	1998	1000/500	k-9	C	B	3/5-9/202
13	CB	School K	Romania	2017	150/150	1-3	A	C	3/15/2021
14	ZJ	School L [*]	Austria	1995	500/400	1-5	B	A	4/26/2021
15	HJP	School M	Germany	2015	250/200	1-6	A	A	4/26/2021
16	LYB	School N [*]	Denmark	1992	300/280	1-6	A	A	4/28/2021
17	TF (Ex.)	School O	Great Britain	2011	150/0	N/A ¹⁴	A	A	5/10/2021

Source: based on author's fieldwork from January 27 to May 10, 2021.

a. Venue of CLS refers to the place(s) where CLS is located. Three main ways to solve venues of CLSs are:

- A. Renting offices or buildings of overseas Chinese association the school is affiliated to;
- B. Renting teaching buildings in local public or private schools;
- C. Renting local commercial offices or buildings.

b. Entity under which the CLS is registered can be divided into three categories:

- A. Overseas Chinese association the school is affiliated to;

B. Private owned;

C. Local charity organization, such as a church.

c. Considering ethical issues, all the names of the interviewees and CLSs in this paper are aliased.

d. A “*” is marked if the school is a Model School of OCLE in Europe. Number of students of the school needs to be 300 minimally according to the policy.

Grades in most CLSs in Europe are in accordance with those in China because most CLSs use Chinese language textbooks published in China. Children under 6 years old go to kindergarten; children from 7 to 12 years old go to primary school, corresponding to Grade 1-6 of primary school in China; the next is 13 to 15 years old, corresponding to Grade 7-9 of middle school students in China; the last group is 15 to 18 years old, corresponding to the Grade 10-12 of high school students in China. Cases are different in different schools. There were very few students in Grade 5 and 6 in School A, so it cut those two grades in 2008. School B has two campuses running with another temporarily closed. There were very few students in Grade 5 and 6 in School C, so it cut those two grades in 2017. School D has three semester every school year instead of two semesters, so it condenses six years of learning into four years in primary school, three years of middle school into two years and three years of high school into two years. School F has two campuses running now. There were very few students in Grade 9 in School E, so it cut Grade 9 in 2015. The school had three campuses. School F has three campuses now. School H started in 2004, and it expanded its grades gradually with the growth of immigrants and Principle LF said there is a growing demand of Grade 9 which will be started in fall semester in September, 2021. Only three grades are available because of the limited recourses in School K so that students of higher grades are encouraged to teach themselves or in family. School L doesn't completely cut the 6th grade before the pandemic and it combined Grade 5 and 6 temporarily for now. School O is in the process of closing down, and students are dispatched and encouraged to take online classes of other CLSs.

III. RESULTS

As is shown in Table 1, 17 interviewees come from eleven different European countries, including three interviewees from Italy, three from Hungary, two from France, two from Spain, one from the Netherlands, Greece, Romania, Austria, Germany, Denmark and Great Britain respectively.

15 CLSs were started in different time: three started before 2000; nine started between 2000 and 2010; three after 2010, which shows that a large percentage of CSLs started at the beginning of this century.

Numbers of students in the CLSs after the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic are sharply different, ranging from under 100 to over 1,000. Three schools have less than 200 students; ten schools have 200 to 600 students; one school has more than 1,000 students; and one school has no student now.

Grades offered by CLSs are quite different in different schools. Nine schools only offer grades within primary school; five schools offer grades of middle school, and only one school offers grades in high school. One school is not offering class of any grade now.

CLSs have different ways to deal with venues of classroom. Five schools rent the building of overseas Chinese association that the school is affiliated to (four uses the classrooms for free, and the other has to pay for the rental). Three schools rent classrooms in local public or private schools. Six schools rent classrooms in local commercial buildings. School F has three campuses and it has a combination of renting classrooms in local schools and in commercial buildings.

As for the entities the CLSs are registered under (some CLSs don't register officially but they are under the operation of an entity, and that's the reason why there is no official exact number of CLSs in Europe), nine schools are registered under overseas Chinese associations the CLSs are affiliated to; five schools are private-owned; one is registered under a local church.

IV. DISCUSSION

From the data analysis, there are major changes about the number of students, numbers of running campuses, offered grades, entity to which they are registered under, all of which are considered as the external factors in the post-Covid pandemic era. CLSs has been in short of teachers and funds ever since. With limited resources, it's clearly seen that Principles of CLSs are adopting different strategies to combine their adjustment and restructuring of schools with those factors to maintain teaching effect and quality as before Covid-19 pandemic, which results in a new adjusting stage after both the five-stage theory and six-stage theory.

4.1 Comparison before and after Covid-19 pandemic

It can be found that number of students in School I, K and M established in recent years are not affected much before and after the outbreak of Covid-19, but they are relatively small or medium-sized. School A, B, C, D, G and J are suffering a great loss of students. School F merged another small school and started a new campus, but there is no obvious increase in number of students. Schools with bigger number of students are more likely to suffer a greater impact of the pandemic. Number of students in School N almost remains unchanged before and after the pandemic. School O has lost all its students now.

Entities under which CLSs are registered are different from what was like before 1995. Association-operated schools are more likely to treat OCLE as a charity, and private-owned schools are more profit driven. It's argued that most CLSs in Europe were operated by overseas Chinese associations, including all 50 (estimated) CLSs in France, all 33 (estimated) CLSs in the Netherlands, 11 CLSs in Germany, two (two and only) in Spain before 1995.[16] But now, School C, G, H, I, and J are private- owned.

School B, D, E, and F have more than one campus. That is the result of merging some nearby small CLSs before or after Covid-19. School G was merged by another CLS in 2013, but it didn't expand the number of campuses because the school rented a teaching building in a public school on Saturdays so that students in the two original schools can study on the same campus.

Grades which the CLSs are offering show that more and more CLSs are providing grades within primary school level, which indicates that overseas Chinese children are becoming less and less highly-proficient in Chinese language now. Although there was an increase of number of CLSs, but the grades providing are on the declining. Most overseas Chinese children will be able to learn some basic Chinese vocabulary. Only School D offers grades in high school.

Most CLSs in the interviews started between 2000 and 2018, which is from the beginning of 21st century to before the pandemic, which coincides with the five-stage theory, and the six-stage. But clearly CLSs are experiencing plenty of changes in recent years, especially after the pandemic, no matter in the number of students or the number of CLSs. A new stage—adjusting stage is shaping by several ways of restructuring.

4.2. Adjusting stage of CLSs in Europe

In response to those changes and to maintain the teaching effect and quality, the adjustment of CLSs is usually presented in four forms of restructuring: newly starting-up, merging, perishing, cutting or swinging higher grades.

4.2.1 Newly Start-ups

There are a handful of newly started up CLSs in recent years. But a slowed-down increase in number of CLSs is obvious with only three schools established after 2010, compared to the number of eight new schools from 2000 to 2010.

“My school started in 2017 because of the increase of schooling age children in Romania. The school is operated by a church for free and it's the only CLS in Romania, so students who want to learn Chinese will have to come here so the number of students is not impacted by Covid-19 pandemic. Number of students pretty much remains the same as that before the pandemic, with roughly 150 students.” (Interviewee CB)

“School M is a medium-sized CLS in Germany operated by a local cultural exchange association establishes in 2015. Local overseas Chinese children within 100 kilometres come over to study here. We are here not to gain any economic profits, so we charge very small amount money for some basic expenditures and most funds are raised by members of the association. Because of that, most students continue to take our online classes after the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. There is a slight change of number because some parents don't have

available time for supervising the children while the children are taking online classes.”
(Interviewee HJP)

4.2.2 Mergence

Some CLSs are incorporated into a bigger one, or small ones are merged into bigger CLSs. The mergence happens out of various reasons. First, after they are merged into large ones, they are more capable to cope with the fierce competition of other CLSs. Second, the incorporated school wants to win the title of Model School of OCLE, because once the school is entitled, there will be some subsidized funds from Chinese government and this title is the best advertisement for the enrolling of students. But to win the title, the school requires meeting certain requirements. The most important requirement is the number of students. As is shown in Table 1, nearly all Model Schools of OCLE had more than 500 students before the pandemic. Therefore, some small CLSs will have to compromise and be merged, which is beneficial to the original schools before merging.

“There used to be about 40 CLSs in the Netherlands in the 2010s and now the number is updated to about 20 to 30. I am a living proof of the merging. My CLS started in 2004. The school was merged with another one in Rotterdam in 2013. After the merging, there were 23 teaching classes all together, with nearly 400 students and more than 40 teachers then and I was elected as the Principle of the new school. Since 2004, the Dutch government has stopped subsidizing local CLSs. In addition, financial crisis in 2008 seriously affected the school and public school were charging higher rental fees, which put extra burden on CLSs in Holland. The merging of the two schools can greatly alleviate the lack of financial funds, make better use of faculty and staff for both schools, and share the resources. The new school now has about 250 students.” (Interviewee XGX)

4.2.3 Perishing

There were some CLSs perished during the pandemic. They suffered from a gradual loss of students and ceased to exist in the end. Those usually happen to small-sized CLSs with relatively poor quality of education. Some students who didn't want to drive long distance to better CLSs used to settle for a local CLS, and now they can take better online classes and save all the time and trouble on the road.

“There used to be CLSs everywhere in Paris. You can find one CLS here and another one just several blocks away. Small CLSs are gradually disappearing because of the fierce competition. Sometimes, several small CLSs are merged into a bigger one. Sometimes, small CLSs can't survive the competition and go out of business. This is a common phenomenon in Paris. There used to be over 50 CLSs in France, and now the number is shrinking. A WeChat chatting group of Principles of CLSs in France shows that there are roughly 40 CLSs here now.”
(Interviewee ZXL)

“Only those schools which are excellent enough can survive and be outstanding among the CLSs because the online education gives an opportunity for students to compare one school with another since the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic. That’s why we have a staff training every week in our school to improve our competency of how to better present the teaching content online. My school just merged another small school last October. But some students quit learning in the school, too. So there is just a slight growth in the number of students from 550 to 600.” (Interviewee PLL)

“We don’t have official data about the number of CLSs in Italy. But I was told it was 50 to 60 in total. I think the number should be under some change now because one of my friends who used to run the school before the pandemic closed his school last year. He is not alone because the online teaching nowadays is breaking the barriers of geographical constraints. Students in France can also take Chinese lessons in schools in Italy. Therefore, some CLSs which can’t provide good teaching will gradually disappear.” (Interviewee PSL)

“There were over 130 CLSs in the Great Britain with 25,000 students when I started my school in 2011. My school was located in Manchester and was supported by a local overseas Chinese women association. I was doing my PHD program those years and was so passionate in the early years. So the school went well in those years. Peak number of students was about 300 in 2016 in my school. After several years of working experience in Manchester, I came back China in 2018 and handed the school over to a 50-year-old lady in the women association. The school didn’t go well in these two years and there were just about half number of students as that in 2016. I was told that the school was closed for now and they were re-directing students to other nearby CLSs this year since the number kept shrinking after the outbreak of pandemic.” (Interviewee TF)

4.2.4 Cutting or swinging higher grades

Another solution for the loss of students is to cut off grades permanently or temporarily, especially higher grades. Cutting off grades permanently happened to School A, C and E. School L doesn’t offer Grade 6 for now under the influence of the pandemic, but it will resume the grade after the pandemic is over, which means it offers a swinging higher grade. For those CLSs which don’t cut grades, they are facing a great loss of students in each grade during pandemic.

“There used to be seven or eight students in Grade 5 and 6 several years ago. But that number dropped to one or two in 2017. So, I stopped Grade 5 and 6. With 4 years of learning in my school, most students will have a vocabulary of 2000 Chinese words, which is enough for their daily life.” (Interviewee CSC)

“My School used to be the biggest CLS in Hungary before the pandemic with a student number of about 1,000, and almost all nearby overseas Chinese children came to study in my school. But I suffered great loss of students during the past year. Hungary government didn’t close the public schools all along, sometimes close and sometimes open. My school started

online teaching two weeks ago. Now I lost almost half of my students with about 550 students now.” (Interviewee ZQB)

“My school doesn’t suffer a great loss because most students are here to take the dancing class while taking Chinese language class. One can’t learn dancing well online, so they have to come here. But students of younger age can’t do the self-monitoring and they need the supervision of parents. Some parents are busy with their work, so they have to quit leaning Chinese for now in some other schools.” (Interviewee CLL)

4.3 Other reasons for the adjusting and restructuring

In addition to the strategies of CLSs, there are some reasons resulting to all the adjusting and affecting the current status of CLSs in Europe because of some external factors. Reasons can be seen both positively, which leads to the increase of student number, and negatively, which discourages overseas Chinese children from learning Chinese heritage language.

4.3.1 Positive reasons

First, more positive attitude toward Chinese heritage language learning from overseas Chinese parents urges innovation of CLSs. Running a CLS in Europe used to be easy. All they needed to do was to rent a place, set up tables, put up a blackboard and then begin to recruit students. Hiring teachers was not mandatory because CLSs Principals themselves could play the role of teachers if students were not in a large scale. Now more and more parents associate their children’s career planning with Chinese language learning because of the economic boost in China in recent years.[17] CLSs used to be considered as a day-care centre and parents were haggling over tuition fees, but now they are aware of “quality over quantity”.

“Parents used to bargain with me over the 35-euro tuition fee every month in my school. They wanted a better price, such as 30 euros. If we raise the tuition fee by five euros, they will send kids to some cheaper ones. But now, nobody do that anymore.” (Interviewee CSF)

“Most recently started schools are with better facilities in Spain. Some are adopting the “AP” (Advanced Placement) teaching mode from the US; some are adopting “A Level” (the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level). My school, together with two other partner schools, is using the IB (International Baccalaureate Diploma Program) mode.” (Interviewee PLL)

“My school is the first CLS in Denmark and now is the only model school of OCLE with the fewest students in Europe. It’s mandatory for CLSs to have more than 300 students when applying for the title of Model School for most European countries. But Chinese government made an exception for us even though we are insufficient in students. The most important reason is that there are relatively few Chinese immigrants here in Denmark. Due to the title and the long history of 20 years of my school, all nearby children come to learn Chinese here, and still now. And my school just has three classrooms, so the vacancies are relatively limited. Even in the

time of Covid-19 pandemic, students here are still taking the online classes here because they are fearful that once they drop.” (Interviewee LYB)

Second, structural changes of jobs in Chinese diaspora communities in Europe are important factors. Chinese diaspora in Europe traditionally worked in restaurants, barbershops or bag and clothing factories at the early stage of immigration.[18] Now more and more overseas Chinese businessmen are engaged in international trade with domestic market in China, and especially the booming of e-commerce requires them to do the real-time online conversation with Chinese suppliers or clients. Likewise, multilingual people in European countries have better opportunities of employment as more travellers and industries from China are pouring into Europe, resulting a demand of people who know Chinese language well.

“My son was born in Hungary and graduated with a doctoral degree in Singapore. He is able to speak Chinese, English and Hungarian. With his degree and advantages in language, he is a top engineer in an international corporation. He is a role model to encourage my students to learn Chinese well.” (Interviewee SYW)

“Parents here in Romania are mostly businessmen especially those immigrants in the late 1990s who were dispatched by big Chinese corporations here. Now they have expanded their family business and are dominating most part of international trade in clothing and accessory business. Their children are very proficient in Chinese, or else they can’t survive the competition.” (Interviewee CB)

Third, financially bettering-off allows many Chinese children to visit China because travel expenditures are relatively affordable than before. Chinese children who experienced the inconvenience of not knowing any Chinese word or inability to read road signs when they visit China have a better motivation to learn Chinese well. Some summer camps for overseas Chinese children all over the world organized by Chinese government provide those children with the opportunity to travel back to China.

“I used to lead a group of students in my school to travel back to China. Some of my students are born and raised in the Netherlands and they get limited information about their motherland merely through media or by books. The camps provide opportunities to get a close contact with their heritage culture, which will encourage them to study the language harder.” (Interviewee XGX)

“About 30 to 40 students in my school attend camps organized by Chinese government every year before the pandemic. Because of the limited number among about 1,000 students, there is a fierce competition because they want to get the opportunity. I usually make use of this occasion to encourage students to study Chinese better. After those students get back, they will usually boast of this experience to their classmates” (Interviewee XQ)

Fourth, some universities in China are providing far easier admission access for overseas Chinese students than Chinese mainland students, but they have to pass the Chinese proficiency test (known as

HSK), which motivates those children to study Chinese well so that they can be admitted to top universities.

“My school offers grades though k-9. But for those students who want to study in Qinghua University or Beijing University (two universities rank 17th and 18th in QS Ranking of 2021), my school offers one-on-one tutoring service so as to help them pass the HSK test. In the past three year, seven students in our school were admitted to these two universities.” (Interviewee ZQB)

4.3.2 Negative reasons

First, Weakening heritage language environment both in families and communities are restructuring with the transgeneration in Europe. In general, as Chinese migrants in some European countries have reproduced to multi-generations, for those who want to reinforce their language, they can only resort to CLSs where they can be immersed to a heritage language environment with their peers instead of familial environment. Some children are forced to learn Chinese by their parents instead of voluntary willingness of children, which means difficulty in maintaining their continuity of learning Chinese.

“France is a country with a long migration history compared with most European countries. Some families have been here for about a century. French is a most frequently used languages in those families. At least 60 per cent of students in my school use French as the language in their daily life.” (Interviewee XC)

“If one kid studies Chinese in my school, his cousins will come to study here, too. Parents send them here just because they don’t want the kids to have the feeling of being left-out. But the kid is probably not interest or sometimes has no idea why he is sent to my school.” (Interviewee CSC)

Second, the property of extracurricular of Chinese language learning means that some overseas Chinese children themselves are not motivated enough. They have to attend classes in public school and some kids consider Chinese language learning as an extra burden. Many European K-12 schools teach native languages and English as a second language and Chinese comes as a third or even fourth language for children. Learning Chinese is not easy and it’s totally different from European languages, which will discourage some Chinese kids from retaining the interest. If some children are determined that they will not go back to China for career in the future, they are most likely to give it up, or mastery of several hundred Chinese words can meet their basic needs.

“For kids in Hungary, a literacy of 400 Chinese words is good enough for daily communication. With 1,600 words (Criterion for 2th graders in China), he can read most Chinese newspapers. Therefore, most children stop schooling after primary schools.” (Interviewee ZQB)

Third, geographically speaking, European countries are close between each other and North America. Due to the geographical advantage, they give priority to English language learning. Some of them prefer to further their study in European and American countries because they consider colleges and universities there offer better higher education. Especially in some developed European countries, English is the language used in classroom teaching in colleges and universities. In order to study in European and American universities, Chinese children have to learn English well and they do not put enough efforts in Chinese learning.

“Most students in France go to colleges and universities in Europe or America; others go to Australia or Canada, where English or French are used as official languages. High housing prices and pressure of competing with 1.4 billion people in China scare them away from going back to China.” (Interviewee XC)

“Students in Greece prefer universities in Europe. That’s an advantage they want to take because Greece is a member of the European Union.” (Interviewee LF)

Finally, there are some prevalent negative opinions on higher education. Some Chinese family with better financial status, especially successful parents in overseas Chinese associations, send children to colleges and universities in Britain, the United States or Australia, etc. After graduation from universities, those children do not go to the job market elsewhere; instead, they inherit family businesses. Those family businesses are irrelevant to children’s college diplomas, which convinces other Chinese children of the uselessness of higher education and question the need of going to school, let alone studying Chinese language.

“At least 80 per cent of immigrants from China here in Romania are businessmen. The main reason for affluent families to send kids to universities is to polish their résumé or win family honour, instead of job hunting.” (Interviewee CB)

4.4 Implications

These findings may help us to understand how number of CLSs changed from 340 to about 400 in the past decades. The prosperity of CLSs among Chinese communities after Covid-19 pandemic doesn’t exist anymore. Number of CLSs is suffering changes in the forms of newly start-ups, merging, perishing, cutting or swinging higher grades. This indicates that a new adjustment stage of CLSs both in the total number and student’s number are shaping.

There are several suggestions dealing with current problems of CLSs to be put forward according to the research, for example, improving the quality of the school, staff training, and taking effective measures to have a hybrid mode of both offline and online teaching to avoid the loss of students.

V. CONCLUSION

When CLSs principals implement adjusting and restructuring decisions in the context of Covid-19 Pandemic, some external factors need to be taken into consideration. External environment factors including changes of number of students, number of running campuses, offered grades, and entity to which it is registered under lead to the survival strategies of CLSs by newly starting-up, merging, perishing, cutting or swinging higher grades. A new adjusting stage in different forms, no matter in the number of schools or the number of students is on-going. That explain how number of CLSs changed from 340 to about 400 over the past decades. Reasons of the adjustment, aside from the CLSs themselves, including the positive and negative social factors, were discussed.

The generalizability of these results is subject to certain limitations. For instance, it fails to have interviews with Principles in other European countries except the eleven European nations, which could possibly put more insight into negative and positive affecting reasons. The adjustment of CLSs will still be continuing, especially with an expansion of large ones and the impact of Covid-19 pandemic. The findings of this study have a number of important implications for future social service and heritage language education for CLSs and overseas Chinese communities in European, especially when a large percent of children quit learning Chinese, which could arouse a transgenerational language gap.

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