

Exploring the Development and Research Landscape of International Chinese Education

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Abstract— The study employed a thematic review to explore the development and research landscape of international Chinese education from overseas and domestic perspectives. The findings reveal China's strong commitment to promoting the Chinese language globally, with domestic research noted for its high professionalism and depth, particularly in areas such as Chinese teaching and professional development driven by prominent institutions. In contrast, while still developing, international research shows steady growth and an increasing global interest, particularly in learner diversity and specific challenges faced in the field. These complementary strengths highlight the importance of fostering global collaboration, strengthening research networks, and leveraging the expertise of both domestic and international scholars to advance the discipline. Furthermore, addressing key challenges, such as improving Chinese researchers' academic English writing skills and expanding research into cultural dimensions, innovative technologies, and integrated teacher-learner development, will be critical for fostering future collaboration and innovation in international Chinese education.

Keywords— International Chinese education: overseas and domestic development: overseas and domestic research trends: scholarly collaboration.

I. INTRODUCTION

The study reviewed international Chinese education and aimed to offer valuable insights into the development and research landscape of international Chinese education, incorporating perspectives from outside China and within China. As classified in the 2021 International Chinese Language Education Report, international Chinese education encompasses overseas international Chinese teaching, overseas Chinese teaching, and domestic Chinese as a second language teaching. Overseas international Chinese teaching refers to teaching Chinese outside the target language environment. Overseas Chinese teaching focuses on teaching Chinese to overseas Chinese descendants. Domestic Chinese teaching means teaching Chinese to international students in the target language environment [1].

This review holds significant value by offering a comprehensive perspective on international Chinese education's development and research landscape, integrating insights from both within and outside China. It focuses on Chinese as a second language, emphasizing its role in fostering language proficiency among diverse learners across different linguistic and cultural contexts. By examining the

interconnected domains of overseas and domestic international Chinese education, this study sheds light on the unique strategies and challenges inherent to each. The findings provide valuable guidance for researchers and educators in improving the quality and accessibility of international Chinese education. Additionally, the review contributes to academic discourse by identifying key trends, challenges, and gaps, thereby offering a foundation for future research.

II. HISTORICAL AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE EDUCATION

Chinese as a second language teaching in China commenced in 1950 and has a history spanning over 70 years. In 1987, the International Promotion of Chinese Language, known as Hanban, was established as a service organization to provide resources and services for Chinese language and culture teaching worldwide, catering to the needs of overseas Chinese learners. In 2005, the State Council of China designated the international promotion of the Chinese language as a new national cultural development strategy, highlighting China's strong support for the proliferation of the Chinese language worldwide.

The development of international Chinese education has been shaped by a combination of internal and external strategies aimed at enhancing its global influence and effectiveness. Internally, efforts focus on discipline construction, curriculum enhancement, cultivating proficient teaching teams, developing international Chinese education standard system. Externally, institutions such as the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) and the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF) play pivotal roles. The former, facilitates global Chinese language learning, and the later focuses on advancing the quality and standards of international Chinese teaching. Together, CLEC and CIEF collaborate to enhance the reach, quality, and sustainability of international Chinese education worldwide.

III. OVERSEAS INTERNATIONAL CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

This section reviewed the development and research of overseas international Chinese language education. Overseas international Chinese language education is achieved through Confucius Institutes and overseas Chinese teaching. Confucius Institutes are established for people worldwide to learn

Chinese, promoting cultural exchanges between China and other countries. Overseas Chinese teaching is a school-based program that provides Chinese language instruction to descendants of Chinese immigrants. Overseas research on Chinese as a second language focused on the number of publications in international journals and cross-regional collaboration for overseas Chinese teaching and research.

A. Confucius Institutes and Overseas Chinese Teaching

International Chinese language education has seen remarkable advancements. It has played a crucial role in supporting national diplomatic strategies, fostering new international relationships, and contributing to the global community's shared future. Recent studies revealed that a rising demand for Chinese language learning contributes to globalization. For instance, Zhang and Hou noted that as of December 2022, more than 80,000 schools and training centers in 180 countries and regions provide Chinese language courses, and over 30 million individuals actively participate in learning the language [2]. Moreover, Ma highlighted that Chinese has been integrated into the national education systems of 85 countries [3]. Bilingualism provides a competitive edge in job markets and opens doors to diverse opportunities. The allure of the Chinese language and culture, characterized by its rich history and traditions, attracts learners worldwide. This growing interest lays a solid foundation for the ongoing development of international Chinese language education, offering promising prospects for global linguistic and cultural exchange.

Overseas international Chinese education has developed rigorously with robust backing from the Chinese government and the One Belt, One Road initiative. Since 2004, China has paved the way for Chinese as a second/foreign language education, gaining insights from language promotion efforts in English, French, German, and Spanish. This endeavor has led to the establishment of non-profit educational institutions known as Confucius Institutes worldwide. The first Confucius Institute was established in South Korea in 2004, followed by the International Chinese Teacher Volunteer Program and the Chinese Bridge Project. The former program dispatches Chinese educators to foreign nations, and the latter is designed for students participating in Chinese competitions and talent shows. Over the last 17 years, the expansion of Confucius Institutes has advanced quickly. These institutions act as educational centers for people worldwide to learn Chinese, promoting cultural exchanges between China and other countries. They also function as connectors to strengthen relationships and collaboration between the Chinese people and international communities. Hui and Liang (2020) noted in their *Report on International Chinese Education* that there are currently 541 Confucius Institutes and 1,170 Confucius Classrooms worldwide [4]. The extensive network of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms abroad underscores China's commitment and significant efforts to promote international Chinese education.

Besides, the promotion of overseas international Chinese education is complemented by another form, overseas Chinese teaching. This form of education is designed for the

descendants of Chinese immigrants in other countries to learn the Chinese language. Managed by the Overseas Chinese Affairs Office of the State Council, overseas Chinese teaching is a school-based program that provides Chinese language instruction to overseas Chinese learners. Overseas Chinese teaching initially took place in private schools abroad. One of the earliest documented Chinese schools is the Ming Cheng Academy, established in Indonesia in 1690 and operational for over 200 years. Another historically significant institution is the Yokohama Yamate Chinese School, which was founded over a century ago [5]. The number of overseas Chinese schools is significant and continues to increase, fostering an environment conducive to the promotion of overseas international Chinese language education. In essence, these two forms of education collectively contribute to the development of international Chinese language education.

B. Overseas Research on Chinese as a Second Language

Chinese has risen as an international language, which plays an important role in expanding the world's lingua franca and sharing the education market worldwide [6]. International journals like *Computer Assisted Language Learning*, *The Modern Language Journal*, *The Asia-Pacific Education Researcher*, *System* and *Teaching and Teacher Education* are open to Chinese as a second language teaching and learning research [7]. However, the proportion of articles published in international journals concerning Chinese as a second language teaching and learning is relatively low, indicating that this area of research is not widely specialized outside of China. Despite the smaller number of publications in international journals, there has been a noticeable increase in the number of English-language articles since 2010, showing a relatively steady growth trajectory [7]. This finding suggests that international publications have made significant strides in meeting the growing demand for Chinese language education globally. Furthermore, Gong et al. categorized CSL research into five clusters: the Confucius Institute cluster, the Chinese language learning in Singapore cluster, a learning content cluster, a learning strategy and performance cluster, and a student variations cluster [7]. The five thematic clusters exhibit strong interconnectedness. The findings of Gong et al. show that researchers outside mainland China display significant interest in student learning outcomes and are actively seeking methods to enhance students' language proficiency and communicative competence within intercultural contexts. Furthermore, they explore specific issues such as Pinyin learning, student attitudes toward learning Chinese, and CSL/CFL education in higher education settings. Notably, researchers from Singapore demonstrate high productivity and activity levels in the field of CSL/CFL research, while Western researchers show limited involvement in Chinese language education research. In total, CSL-related publications constitute approximately 26% of all international journal publications, indicating a relatively small proportion of research focused on CSL [7].

The field of overseas Chinese teaching has witnessed significant growth in research and development. Collaborations between experts from China and other

countries, including Singapore, Malaysia, Japan, Thailand, have been pivotal in advancing this area of education. An example of this collaboration is seen in the 4th International Seminar on Overseas Chinese Teaching hosted by Huaqiao University (Xiamen Campus) in 2019, where researchers from Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, and Vietnam convened. During this event, Professor Zhou Qinghai from the National University of Singapore emphasized the significance of cooperation, particularly in curriculum development and cross-regional collaboration for overseas Chinese teaching and research. Additionally, Mr. Mok Tai Hee, former CEO of the Malaysian Chinese School Principals Association, discussed emerging trends in Chinese education within Malaysia's educational landscape. The 2019 seminar addressed a range of topics, including overseas Chinese education, Chinese teaching methodologies, language acquisition theories, and training programs for overseas Chinese individuals [8]. In 2020, a global online seminar brought together directors of Chinese educational institutions, principals of overseas Chinese schools, and experts and scholars from over ten countries, attracting nearly 500 participants. This seminar focused on the challenges faced by Chinese language teaching during the global pandemic, emerging trends in overseas Chinese education, and experiences with online teaching platforms [9]. The recent seminars have emphasized the importance of advancing Chinese education in overseas contexts, highlighted the valuable contributions of research in teaching Chinese as a second language, and shed light on the challenges encountered in teaching Chinese to overseas communities.

The above review indicates that the professionalization of overseas international Chinese language education is still in its developmental stages. This observation is supported by Gong et al., who noted a scarcity of publications on CSL research in international journals. Although the publication is scarce, there has been a steady increase in papers published in international journals, signaling a growing interest from scholars worldwide since 2010 [7]. Moreover, Singapore has demonstrated notable productivity in CSL research, and researchers in overseas Chinese teaching actively seek collaboration opportunities. These findings indicate a promising future for the research of overseas Chinese education and highlight an urgent need for collaboration between regions and countries to establish a robust research network. Additionally, the research focus of international researchers on specific learning issues is noteworthy and offers valuable insights for future studies in the field.

IV. DOMESTIC INTERNATIONAL CHINESE LANGUAGE EDUCATION

This section reviewed the development and research landscape of international Chinese language education in China. It encompassed the history of Chinese as a second language teaching and learning, the operational mode of international Chinese language education, and research on international Chinese language education.

A. History of Chinese as a Second Language Teaching and Learning

The earliest period of teaching and learning Chinese as a second language can be traced back to the Han Dynasty, a period marked by China's extensive interactions with other nations and Chinese minority groups. During this era, international students and minority groups were sent to Chang'an, the capital of the Han Dynasty, to study the Chinese language and Han culture [10]. In the Ming and Qing Dynasties, two Catholic missionaries, Luo Mingjian, and Matteo Ricci, arrived in China and mastered the Chinese language proficiently. Their successful language-learning experiences demonstrated the effectiveness of teaching Chinese to foreigners in ancient China. Furthermore, Matteo Ricci's creation of Chinese Latin phoneticization using Roman letters significantly contributed to the development of the Chinese language [11]. However, knowledge about the history of teaching Chinese as a second language in ancient China is limited, highlighting an important area that requires further exploration and strengthening.

The development of Chinese as a second language as a formal discipline began in 1950, one year after the founding of the People's Republic of China. That same year, Tsinghua University offered Chinese courses to international students from Eastern Europe, marking the beginning of teaching Chinese to foreign students in modern times. Liu (2010) noted that between 1951 and 1961, China accepted 3,315 international students from over 60 countries [10]. This initial ten-year period of teaching established a solid foundation for the development of Chinese as a second language. In 1962, the State Council of China approved establishing the Higher Preparatory School for Foreign Students at Beijing Foreign Studies School. The school was renamed Beijing Language Institute in 1964. This institute has been the first higher educational institution dedicated to teaching Chinese to international students, representing a significant milestone in developing Chinese as a second language. By 1965, the number of institutions offering Chinese language instruction had expanded to 23 nationwide, alongside the launch of the first journal focused on Chinese teaching for international students. Between 1962 and 1965, the field experienced rapid growth, with the number of students in 1965 being more than seven times greater than that of 1961. Over these four years, 3,944 international students were enrolled, surpassing the total from the previous 11 years combined [10]. However, the teaching and learning of Chinese as a second language was stopped in 1966 due to the upheavals of the Cultural Revolution. The 1970s brought new developments in the international landscape. In 1972, Northern Jiaotong University accepted 200 students from Tanzania and Zambia. Following this, the Beijing Language Institute began accepting foreign students in 1973. By 1977, a total of 2,266 students had enrolled [10]. While this number had not yet returned to previous levels, it signaled a promising new beginning for Chinese as a second language teaching. Presently, four universities in Beijing (Peking University, Beijing Language and Cultural University, Minzu University of China, Renmin University of China) have played a pivotal role in Chinese as a

second language teaching and research. Following them are four other universities in Guangzhou (Sun Yat-sen University), Wuhan (Central China Normal University), Shanghai (East China Normal University), and Xiamen (Xiamen University) [7].

B. Operational Mode of International Chinese Language Education

The promotion of international Chinese education in China is manifested through internal and external strategies. Internal strategies include discipline construction, curriculum enhancement, and training proficient teaching teams. Moreover, the strategies also include developing an international Chinese education standard system, incorporating *The Chinese Proficiency Grading Standards for International Chinese Language Education Chinese (The Grade Standard)* to foster comprehensive language communication competence, including proficiency in Chinese listening, speaking, reading, writing, and translation. Moreover, two guidelines emerged through the system: *The Reference Framework for Teaching Chinese Culture and National Conditions in International Chinese Education* and *The International Professional Competence Standards for Chinese Teachers*. The former, published in January 2022, is a valuable resource for cultural curriculum design, culture instruction, preparation of teaching materials, and evaluation of learners' cultural competence. The latter, released in August 2022, sets the benchmark for training, evaluating, and recognizing the abilities of proficient Chinese teachers [2].

External strategies refer to the Centre for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC) and the Chinese International Education Foundation (CIEF). CLEC, formerly known as Hanban, was renamed in 2019 and serves as a professional public welfare education institution committed to promoting international Chinese education. Broadly, CLEC aims to facilitate Chinese language learning globally, foster collaborative platforms for language exchanges and cooperation, and promote mutual learning across diverse cultures worldwide. Specifically, CLEC oversees the construction of the international Chinese education resource system, including formulating standards, Chinese proficiency assessments, and selecting proficient Chinese teachers. It also supports academic research on teachers, teaching materials, disciplines, and CSL learners. Furthermore, it organizes programs such as the Chinese Bridge Program, New China Studies, scholarships, and other related activities to facilitate language exchanges and cooperation. On the other hand, CIEF plays a significant role in advancing Confucius Institutes and overseas international Chinese teaching. It formulates standards for Confucius Institutes and assesses the quality of Confucius Institutes and Confucius Classrooms [2]. CLEC and CIEF jointly manage and operate International Chinese Education, synergizing their efforts to foster a more robust future for international Chinese education.

C. Research on Chinese as a Second Language in China

Chinese as a second language discipline has been extensively explored by researchers. Lu Jianming (2019) noted that international Chinese education is interdisciplinary

that encompasses linguistics, applied linguistics, theoretical linguistics, pedagogy, psychology, literature, and cross-cultural communication (J. Lu, 2019). Wu (2019) supported this view and pointed out that the core disciplines of international Chinese education are Chinese Language and Literature, and Pedagogy. Besides, it integrates knowledge from fields such as communication, foreign languages and literature, philosophy, and history [13]. Based on the above views, the China Language Policy Research Report (2020) recommended that international Chinese education encompass ten essential areas of knowledge: linguistic knowledge, educational theory, Chinese literature, communication knowledge, Chinese cultural insights, Chinese history and geography, social dynamics of China, global cultural awareness, intelligent technology literacy, and general encyclopedic knowledge [14].

The interdisciplinary nature of international Chinese education presents opportunities and challenges for research in this field. For instance, Wu (2019) emphasized the importance of building academic confidence as a foundation for developing a world-class theoretical system in international Chinese education. He also underscored the need to focus on academic originality and conduct comprehensive research on Chinese international education across various regions and countries. Moreover, Wu argued that researchers should involve innovative solutions to practical challenges, producing high-quality academic results that contribute to a unique theoretical framework [13]. Similarly, Cao (2019) stressed that combining theoretical innovation with practical language teaching can foster academic originality. She called for adopting modern technological strategies to improve research capabilities and encouraged collaboration between Chinese and international scholars to overcome academic isolation [13]. In addition, Lu (2019) noted that current research findings from frontline teaching are inadequate. He recommends that academic research on Chinese international education should be based on frontline teaching and provide ample empirical evidence to improve international Chinese education [13]. Researchers have outlined four key objectives for advancing the discipline of international Chinese education: (1) Macro research on developing international Chinese education policies and strategies. (2) Research on teaching methodologies, including developing teaching materials, curriculum, language assessments, and instructional approaches. (3) Research on the theory and construction of Chinese international education discipline. (4) Research on the construction and management of Confucius Institutes [14]. These four research objectives outline a clear path for advancing international Chinese education, focusing on policy development, theoretical frameworks, teaching methodologies, and the management of the Confucius Institutes.

Gong et al. emphasized Beijing's central role in Chinese as a second language research, attributing this to the city's numerous universities dedicated to advancing the discipline of international Chinese education. Among these institutions, Beijing Language and Culture University is particularly notable, standing at the forefront of Chinese as a second language teaching and research. Moreover, it plays a pivotal

role in promoting Chinese language and culture globally. Universities in Beijing have produced a wealth of research in academic journals dedicated to the field [7]. The top 10 Chinese journals specializing in CSL research include *Chinese Teaching in the World* (世界汉语教学), *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies* (语言教学与研究), *TCSOL Studies* (华文教学与研究), *Applied Linguistics* (语言文字应用) and *International Chinese Teaching* (国际汉语教学与研究). These journals serve as the most important platforms for teachers, researchers and policymakers to undertake scholarly dialogues. Gong et al. noted that from 2004 to 2016, the top 10 universities in China accounted for nearly 40% of all publications, with an average of over 100 articles published annually in Chinese journals. Compared to the number of articles published in international journals, the number of articles in Chinese journals surpasses that of international ones. This finding indicates the specialization of international Chinese education and highlights research efforts in Chinese as a second language in China.

Besides, Gong et al. found that researchers in China predominantly center on enhancing the professional skills and competency of CSL teachers, attributing this to the Chinese education system, where teachers are esteemed as the authorities on knowledge [7]. This finding aligns with the four objectives outlined in the *2020 International Chinese Education Report*. Moreover, Gong et al. identified three thematic clusters: Chinese as a second language teaching and learning cluster, Chinese language corpus cluster, and Confucius Institute cluster. Among these three clusters, CSL teaching and learning represent the largest and central focus of the entire network. Within CSL teaching and learning, teaching has garnered the most attention, marking a contrast with researchers outside China who predominantly emphasize student learning achievement [7].

The preceding reviews show that more papers related to CSL research have been published in Chinese core journals. The availability of journals for CSL research in China is higher than that of international journals, indicating the vigor and productivity of CSL research in China. Beijing takes the central role in CSL research, followed by Guangzhou, Xiamen, Wuhan, and Shanghai, with numerous universities dedicated to CSL studies like Beijing Language and Culture University, Sun Yat-sen University, Xiamen University, Central China Normal University, and East China Normal University. Publications from these top universities contribute to 40% of all CSL research publications, underscoring the richness of CSL research outcomes they produce. These reviews highlight China's prominent role in producing research on Chinese as a second language teaching and learning, solidifying its status as a recognized field of professional and academic specialization.

V. DIFFERENCES IN OVERSEAS AND DOMESTIC INTERNATIONAL CHINESE EDUCATION

The development of overseas and domestic international Chinese education is advancing rapidly, driven by China's robust support for promoting the Chinese language globally. This progress is marked by establishing Confucius Institutes

and Classrooms, implementing international Chinese language education standards, and enhancing teacher training programs. Domestically, leading universities play a pivotal role in advancing research and pedagogy, while growing interest among global scholars is a promising future internationally. These efforts reflect China's commitment to fostering cultural exchange and meeting the increasing global demand for Chinese language education.

The comparison between domestic and overseas research on international Chinese education reveals notable similarities and differences. Domestic research significantly surpasses overseas research in terms of publication volume and institutional engagement, underscoring its professionalism and depth. Prominent universities in China, such as Beijing Language and Culture University, are crucial in advancing Chinese as a second language research, focusing on institutional development, curriculum design, and pedagogical strategies. In contrast, while international research is still in its developmental stages, it demonstrates a steady growth trend, reflecting a rising global interest. Moreover, while domestic researchers concentrate on teaching and professional development, international researchers focus on specific learning challenges and learner diversity. This distinction highlights the distinct research interests among researchers on both sides.

VI. CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN INTERNATIONAL CHINESE EDUCATION

The review identified several challenges and opportunities in international Chinese education, particularly in Chinese as second language research. One significant challenge is the language barrier faced by Chinese researchers, who often struggle to produce high-quality academic articles in English, placing them at a disadvantage compared to their international counterparts [7]. Additionally, there are notable differences in research focus: domestic researchers predominantly emphasize teacher education, teaching practices, and teacher development, whereas international researchers focus more on learners and strategies to enhance their problem-solving abilities. These complementary focuses highlight the importance of fostering global collaboration, strengthening research networks, and leveraging the expertise of both sides. Prominent institutions like Beijing Language and Culture University in China and Nanyang Technological University in Singapore are pivotal in advancing CSL research, but cross-border collaboration remains limited. Bridging this gap is crucial for fostering global partnerships that can further enhance the growth of international Chinese education. Encouragingly, progress has been made through events such as the 2019 International Chinese Language Education Conference and the 2021 International Chinese Language Education Report, which underscore the increasing importance of collaborative efforts. However, sustained initiatives are needed to strengthen partnerships and expand research into innovative areas to drive long-term advancements. By addressing these challenges and seizing these opportunities, international Chinese education can continue to thrive and

meet the evolving global demand.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF INTERNATIONAL CHINESE EDUCATION

Based on this comprehensive review, the study proposes several recommendations. First, efforts should focus on enhancing Chinese researchers' academic English writing skills through targeted support programs to improve their global academic competitiveness. Second, bridging the gap between teacher-focused and learner-centric research is essential, with future studies exploring the interconnected impacts of these areas. Third, cross-border collaboration should be fostered through joint projects, conferences, and comparative studies, alongside building robust international research networks to encourage knowledge exchange and global partnerships. Fourth, leveraging the strengths of key institutions, such as Beijing Language and Culture University and Nanyang Technological University, can further promote international cooperation and collaborative initiatives. Last, expanding research areas to cultural aspects, innovative teaching technologies, and integrated teacher-learner development will contribute to the field's growth and diversification. These recommendations address existing challenges while fostering innovation and global collaboration in international Chinese education.

VIII. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the rapid advancement of international Chinese education underscores China's commitment to promoting the Chinese language globally. Domestic research exhibits high professionalism and depth, with leading universities at the forefront of pedagogical advancements and institutional development. Conversely, while overseas research is still in its developing stages, it demonstrates steady growth and increasing interest on a global scale. The differing focus areas—teacher education and institutional strategies within China compared to learner diversity and specific challenges encountered abroad—highlight complementary strengths. This comparison emphasizes the importance of fostering global collaboration to bridge gaps, enhance research networks, and advance the field of international Chinese education.

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