



European Benchmark Framework for Chinese

Final Report

Public Part

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Executive Summary

With China having become Europe's primary trading partner, a growing number of people are seeking to learn more about China and the Chinese language. Increasingly, schools and universities across Europe are offering courses and degrees in Mandarin, and a number of European countries have already introduced teaching and assessment standards for the language. Other European countries have introduced Chinese as a third language option in their national curricula. However, the question of how to measure Chinese language competence formally and establish a general and consistent set of teaching and assessment standards remains unresolved.

Since the Council of Europe's Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) was introduced in November 2001, it has been widely accepted by and in European countries as an effective tool to both evaluate a user's language proficiency and as a guide for teaching and assessment. Can Chinese, which is vastly different from European languages both in linguistic terms and in terms of its sociocultural context, be incorporated within the CEFR? If so, how can this be achieved? What specific characteristics does Chinese language possess and how should these be dealt with? These questions have perplexed policymakers, education providers and teachers. Aimed at tackling these concerns, the European Benchmarking Chinese Language (EBCL) project was launched in 2010 under the EU's Lifelong Learning Programme.

The above analysis of the situation led the EBCL project team to believe that the target users are primarily teachers of Chinese language at both tertiary and secondary levels and examination bodies, and to a lesser degree, publishers of teaching materials.

In order to ensure better coverage of the Chinese language teaching community in Europe, key countries and institutions were selected to form a core group to carry out the project.

The project has four university partners across Europe: the Université Rennes 2 in France, Freie Universität Berlin in Germany, "Sapienza" Università di Roma in Italy and the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) in the UK. Each university has a wealth of experience in teaching Chinese in its own country and beyond, and also serves as a local hub of activity for the learning and teaching of Chinese, including those in schools, which is reflected in the four associated school partners that work closely with these universities. In addition to their respective local professional organisations (e.g. Chinese language teaching/teachers' associations), all four partners also have links with Confucius Institutes.

Given that most learners of Chinese in Europe are at Basic User level of CEFR (i.e. Level A), the teams focused their work on CEFR A1 and A2. After extensive analysis of CEFR descriptors which also involved consulting with participants in a series of project seminars, the teams believe that, as a universal framework, the CEFR is, to a great extent, applicable to the Chinese language in terms of undertaking and performing communicative (i.e. action-based) language activities.

However, the project members were fully aware that the unique linguistic features of the Chinese language, particularly Chinese characters, differentiate it from European languages. These differences must be acknowledged and suitable adjustments made to language teaching and assessment. In addition to adapting the CEFR descriptions of Can-do statements for Reception, Production and Interaction Spoken/Written activities, one of the outcomes of this project has been the detailed description of graphemic control which highlights the uniqueness of Chinese language. It is hoped that these major project outputs mentioned above, available on the project website will be used, developed and tested by stakeholders.

The EBCL project website, which can be found at <http://ebcl.eu.com/>, contains a brief introduction to the project, the news about its seminars, preliminary survey reports, and a proposed framework of competence descriptors for A1 and A2, etc. There is also an open register where any European university that offers Chinese, or with an interest in the project, can register with the network that has an interest in the Chinese language teaching and in the progress of the project, the outcome of which can be of practical use for them. A forum is also available for people to raise questions, make comments and hold discussions. It is hoped that the website will remain open for some time after the current project has officially closed and that a follow-up or related project or projects may make use of it.

In addition to retaining the website, the team has also discussed further opportunities for development. Here is a brief summary.

- Continue work on agreed tasks by a team of core members
- Continue work on higher level descriptors (e.g. B1 and B2)
- Develop a portfolio of Chinese language materials to supplement descriptors at various levels and make them available to the Chinese language teaching community
- Hold regular seminars that focus on a specific area (e.g. selection of lexical items, innovative teaching approaches, etc.)

The project should not be viewed or judged as a research project. It is a development project. Although the members in various ways have used their own research findings (e.g. in the development of graphemic control and character lists) and consulted existing research findings of other scholars and projects, project members mainly worked collectively and in consultation with partner schools and seminars participants.

The general conclusion of the EBCL project is that CEFR is largely applicable to the Chinese language with some amendments. The writing of Chinese, a non phonetic script, needs special attention when taught and assessed. With regards to this issue, a special section on graphemic control in this project provides constructive suggestions

In summary, the teams agreed that the original objectives have been largely met. All team members feel proud of their achievements and feedback from various sources has been very positive. The EBCL project has had a very good start to what is sure to be an ongoing development in Chinese language teaching, learning and assessment in Europe.

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1. Project Objectives

The main aim of the European Benchmarking Chinese Language (EBCL) project is to create a benchmark framework for Chinese, based upon CEFR, for Europeans learning the Chinese language in universities and schools, privately, or for professionals to use as a common framework of standards. The project covers both areas as stipulated by the Language Key Activities – awareness raising and development and dissemination.

Given that most learners of Chinese in Europe are at CEFR Basic User level, the team has focused their work on CEFR A1 and A2. After extensive analysis and discussion on CEFR descriptors by team members and through consulting participants in a series of project seminars, team members believe that, as a universal framework, the CEFR is, to a great extent, applicable to the Chinese language in terms of undertaking and performing communicative (i.e. action-based) language activities. However, we are fully aware that the unique linguistic features of Chinese, particularly Chinese characters, differentiate it from European languages. These differences, which have led to concerns, and even objections to CEFR, must be formally acknowledged and suitable adjustments made in Chinese language teaching and assessment. In addition to adapting the CEFR descriptions of Can-do statements for Reception, Production and Interaction Spoken/Written activities, one of the outcomes of this project has been the detailed description of graphemic control which highlights the uniqueness of Chinese language and its connection with communicative activities. We hope that major project outcomes, such as descriptors and their associated samples, accompanied with detailed graphemic control and the lists of characters and lexical items, will be used, enriched and tested by stakeholders.

The project has engaged members from both higher and secondary education in various countries through extensive surveys, a series of seminars and a final symposium in Brussels. The surveys were conducted in the four countries where the project teams are based, namely, France, Germany, Italy and the UK. These surveys greatly raised the profile of the EBCL project and helped create awareness that the Chinese language is no longer an outsider as far as CEFR is concerned.

The four planned seminars have served two purposes: consultation and dissemination. The participation of Chinese language teachers from universities and secondary schools (the main target group for the project) benefited them and the project. The concerns that they expressed and comments made both at the seminars and elsewhere have helped the project team, among other things, to fine-tune the descriptors, which has been the main objective of the project.

The team members made presentations at seminars and conferences in Europe and in China, which have further ‘spread the news’ of the EBCL project.

As shown in the earlier seminars, while Chinese language teachers – the main target group – are more interested in the direct application of EBCL descriptors, they also increasingly realise the value of EBCL, and CEFR in general, being not just as a

ready-made teaching guide. This is another very positive development that has resulted from the dissemination of the project to its potential end users.

This has also led to new awareness of the need for new approaches to teaching Chinese as a foreign language in Europe. The teams feel that a follow-up seminar or conference on this topic could be most beneficial to the sustainability of the EBCL project in terms of its impact on the teaching, learning and assessment of Chinese in Europe.

Among the participants of the seminars and the symposium were representatives from publishers and examination boards, who both expressed clear interest in the publication of EBCL-related materials.

Although we are unable to gauge how much the project has impacted on policy making with regard to the provision of Chinese language teaching in Europe, it is hoped and anticipated that the outcomes of the project will be referred to and used by teachers and institutions in both higher and secondary education, which in turn may be taken into consideration by the education authorities in various European countries.

Through seminars, the final symposium and related publicity, the project has reached many European countries. This will no doubt continue to attract the attention and ultimately the participation of more institutions in Europe. Suggestions on how to strengthen the Europe-wide Chinese language teaching community network and the impact of the EBCL project in general, will be made in Section 5 of this report.

In addition to the attention and participation in this project by teachers and institutions in Europe, the project has also attracted attention from institutions in China. Both the Office of Chinese Language Council International (widely known as Hanban) and scholars in language development and examination in China have expressed their interest in establishing direct exchanges with the project teams. Such exchanges are not only within the project's objective of establishing a wider teaching community, but more importantly, will also enhance the development of Chinese language provision in Europe.

To sum up, the project teams believe that the objectives as set in the project proposal have largely been met. However, further work is needed to consolidate what has been achieved.

2. Project Approach

Overall development

In this two-year period, various approaches and methodologies were employed to address the issues that emerged in relation to the objectives set out by the project proposal.

The project went through two stages. The first stage (which lasted six months) was a mapping survey that aimed to build an overall picture of Chinese language teaching in higher education sectors across Europe. In addition to providing general information on the provision of Chinese courses, one of the focuses was to examine how Chinese language courses claimed to be related to CEFR.

The methodology consisted of online questionnaires supplemented by phone calls and web-based research.

One of the results of this exercise was the raising of awareness of EBCL and CEFR for institutions that were unfamiliar with CEFR.

Another outcome of this exercise was the establishment of a database of European universities that teach Chinese that can be used for the purpose of dissemination and networking.

In the second phase of the project, the teams closely examined the CEFR descriptors to ascertain their suitability for the Chinese language and produced a comprehensive set of descriptors for the Chinese language at A1 and A2 levels with suggested themes, topics and examples, i.e. the main product of the project.

Consultation of Advisory Board

The Project has had an advisory board since its launch. Its job is to provide opinions and guidance when consulted. The board consists of three members:

Prof. Wolfgang Mackiewicz is President of the Conseil européen pour les langues / European Language Council (CEL/ELC) and chair of the European Commission's Business Platform for Multilingualism.

Prof. Joël Bellassen is the Chief Inspector of the French National Ministry of Education for Chinese Language Teaching and directeur de recherche (research team PLIDAM, INALCO).

Prof. De Mauro, from "Sapienza" Università di Roma, was originally appointed a member of the advisory board, but he was unable to be directly involved in the project due to other commitments. Instead, he asked Prof. Federico Masini, who is Professor of Chinese Language and Literature at the Italian Institute of Oriental Studies of "Sapienza" Università di Roma and Director of the Confucius Institute of the same university, to occasionally represent him.

The advisors have been kept informed of all the discussions and developments. They attended, whenever possible, the seminars and special meetings.

They were copied into most of e-mail correspondences and minutes of all the meetings and sent progress reports every three months.

Division of work and collaboration

The agreed division of work, mainly in Phase 2 of the project, is as follows:

The Italian team (Dr Federica Casalin & Dr Luisa Paternico)

- Reception Spoken and Production Spoken descriptors and examples
- Lists of themes and functions

The French team (Dr Bernard Allanic & Dr Changying Shu)

- Interaction Written and Production Written descriptors and examples,
- Lists of lexical items and characters
- Lists of themes and functions

The German team (Dr Andreas Guder & Hue San Do till June 2012)

- Reception Written and Graphemic Control descriptors and examples

The British team (Dr George Zhang (year 1), Dr Lianyi Song (year 2), Ms Lik Suen (year 2) & Dr Liang Wang)

- Coordinated collaboration between teams
- Overall planning,
- Production Spoken, Interaction Spoken and Communication Strategies descriptors and examples,
- Initiated lists of themes/topics and language functions,
- Proposed Intercultural Competence dimension
- Developed grammar dimensions in relation to A1 and A2 levels

The four partner schools provided support with case reports, seminar/symposium participation and feedback to the framework.

This division of work proved fruitful as it ensured manageable independence. Major correspondences between project members were conducted through e-mail, Skype communication, and, most importantly, regular online meetings through the Elluminate platform.

Each of these online meetings, known to members as Elluminate meetings, was audio recorded and minutes kept and circulated.

Utilisation of sources and resources

It should be pointed out that the EBCL project is not a research project, but rather a development project. However, all team members adopted research methods to consult existing research findings as well as other comparable works and documents.

For the descriptors, other works and documents have been carefully referenced. The following is a summary of the bank of CEFR related descriptors that the project referred to:

http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/elp/elp-reg/cefr_scale_EN.asp

- CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference) descriptors
- ELP (European Language Portfolio) self assessment descriptors, developed by the Swiss project *LINGUALEVEL* and including the outcomes of the Bergen *CAN DO* project.
- EAQUALS (European Association for Quality Language Services) bank of descriptors. This has provided descriptors for “plus levels” and filled the gaps on the original EAQUALS/ALTE ELP checklists. It has also provided systematic coverage of a specific number of categories, and has developed further the descriptors for strategies.
- Japanese Foundation ‘Can do’ statements:
Japanese Standard for Japanese Language education based on CEFR
http://jfstandard.jp/pdf/jfs2010_all_en.pdf;
http://jfstandard.jp/pdf/JF_Cando_Category_list.pdf

Progress and development

While the team members worked independently and collaboratively most of the time, they also sought the opinions and views of the wider teaching community.

As planned, four seminars were held.

	Venue (city and institution)	Date
Seminar 1	London, SOAS	8-9 November 2010
Seminar 2	Rome, “Sapienza” Università di Roma	20-21 May 2011
Seminar 3	Paris, INALCO	14-15 October 2011
Seminar 2	Berlin, Freie Universität Berlin	27-29 April 2012

Partner schools, teachers and stakeholders from various fields (organisations, publishers, examination boards, etc.) were invited to each seminar. From Seminar 2 onwards, the materials developed by the teams were presented at each seminar for comments and critical review. These seminars helped develop the project’s products and also raised the profile of the project and CEFR in general to a wider audience.

In addition to the planned events, the project held two more additional seminars.

The first additional seminar was held at SOAS in London on 19-20 July 2012. The main purpose of the seminar was to summarise the teams’ work and plan the presentations at the Brussels Symposium in late October 2012. The seminar was

very effective in that many issues were discussed and important agreements reached so that the final presentations could be objective and balanced.

The second additional seminar was also held at SOAS in London, on 20 September 2012. Fifteen teachers from different universities attended it. The two major items on the agenda were 1) to test once again our claim that CEFR was largely applicable to the Chinese language, and 2) to examine closely our unique contribution of graphemic control.

Both aims were achieved. The conclusion from the participants was that CEFR is largely applicable to Chinese language and EBCL work was a very important contribution to the teaching of Chinese in the UK and in Europe.

The two additional seminars, held toward the end of the project life, greatly boosted confidence in our work and final outcomes.

Dissemination

Team members have made great efforts to attend relevant events to promote the EBCL profile and present the outcomes to a wider audience. For information on the events (conferences and seminars) that members have attended and their presentations, please visit the following web link:
<http://ebcl.eu.com/research/conferencesworkshops/>

Throughout participation in these events, project members managed to raise the profile of the project and attract academic and public interest in EBCL project and potential follow-up projects.

Summary

The project members used a variety of methods in benchmarking the Chinese language against CEFR descriptors, i.e. individual research, consultation of existing research findings, both internal (amongst project members and partner schools) and external discussion (e.g. planned seminars and participation of regional and international conferences), etc.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

3.0 Overview

The EBCL project is in many ways a breakthrough. As the teaching of Chinese has shifted from a minor community language to one of the major foreign languages taught in European institutions, it has become necessary for Chinese practitioners (teachers and textbook writers, etc.) and policy makers to embrace it with a constructive approach. The EBCL project aimed at bringing all stakeholders together to form a common front.

As described in the Objectives section, the project consisted of two major stages. The first was to conduct a broad survey in the four partner countries of the provision of Chinese language teaching in these countries.

The survey was not merely a data collection exercise. It was also an effort to understand the level of awareness and practice in the participating institutions with regard to CEFR.

The second phase of the project examined the application of the CEFR descriptors within the context of teaching, learning and assessing Chinese language in Europe. As this is a broad range of products, this will be dealt with in sub-sections.

3.1 Development of the descriptors

The main challenge for this project was to benchmark the Chinese language against the CEFR descriptors. The first difficulty was how to interpret the levels of CEFR with regard to Chinese. Broadly speaking, two approaches were considered. One was to maintain current CEFR levels, sub-levels and corresponding descriptors with only minimal adjustments. The other was to maintain the same six levels, but reset the criteria of each CEFR level according to what is believed to be relevant to Chinese language teaching. The second approach would appeal to teachers of Chinese. Some Chinese language teachers dismiss CEFR as irrelevant because the Chinese language is, particularly in terms of its writing system, fundamentally different from other European languages, which are generally phonetic.

However, after lengthy debate and discussion, the approach of establishing a separate set of criterion levels for the Chinese language, while retaining the original six overall competence levels, was rejected. The introduction to a level below A1 was suggested and tried as an alternative to accommodate some of the features of the Chinese language (knowledge of stroke order, etc.) but in the end it was decided to use a coding system most close to CEFR. At the same time, various features of the Chinese language are incorporated at different criterion levels. This has been accepted very well by people who have looked at the outcomes of the project.

3.2 Development of graphemic competence

One major difference between the Chinese language and European languages is the writing system which does not, like in any other language (excluding Japanese), consist of less than 100 graphemes that have basically phonographic function, but on thousands of characters that use semantographic AND phonographic as well as arbitrary elements in its units of writing. In CEFR, one of the aspects of linguistic control is that of “orthographic control”. As the familiarity with an alphabet can be achieved in a comparative short amount of time, “orthographic control” within the CEFR deals mainly with appropriateness of spelling. We believe that for Chinese the term “graphemic control” would better capture the commonly recognised feature of the complexity of the Chinese script. We also agreed on the fact that this “graphemic control” is the most complex prerequisite for any stage of Chinese reading and writing competence.

Hence, one of the major contributions to the EBCL project is the development of descriptors for graphemic competence. The descriptors were mainly proposed based on the original research by Dr Andreas Guder from Freie University Berlin and revised through ongoing discussions with project members and colleagues outside the project.

Concerning “graphemic control”, a number of related issues were raised, discussed and debated. The discussion centred on two main areas: “Sinographemic competence” on the one hand and “*Hanyu pinyin* reading and writing competence” on the other.

In Sinographemic competence, one of the points raised and debated was whether knowledge of some basic graphemic features should be included in the competence descriptors or should it – as a prerequisite – be presented independent from competence levels. In the end, it was decided that the graphemic knowledge and competence (“graphemic control”) should be presented separately, and not as part of the competence descriptors.

In addition to it being extensively discussed amongst project members, the graphemic control document in its entirety was discussed in details at a seminar held in September 2012 in London where a group of 15 teachers (excluding three project members) attended. Apart from a few suggestions for minor changes, the general conclusion then was that it was indeed a fine piece of academic work and an essential component of the EBCL project and a valuable contribution to the application of CEFR to the Chinese language. This contribution would be truly helpful as guidance to the Chinese language teaching, learning and assessment in general.

Another major aspect of graphemic control, – *Hanyu pinyin* reading – was much more controversial. The central issue was whether the ability to read in *pinyin* should be considered part of a Chinese learner’s reading competence. Various arguments for and against this were debated. Although there was no unanimous consensus, it was agreed that the issue should be considered separately for teaching and learning on the one hand, and assessment on the other.

Our general view is that although not every Chinese speaker is familiar with *Hanyu pinyin*, it is by far the most widely used transcription system for the Chinese language. It also promotes familiarity with the pronunciation of standard Chinese as

well as for writing texts with digital devices. For these reasons, we strongly recommended integrating reading and writing competence in *Hanyu pinyin* into the EBCL framework.

This unique aspect of Chinese language is not found in other European languages. As a result, discussion over the inclusion of the treatment of *pinyin* reading and writing is another distinctive contribution to the application of CEFR to Chinese language.

3.3 Development of lexical items lists

We would like to stress that CEFR does not require specific word lists to match the levels of competence. The EBCL project was not required to produce any lexical item lists. The main task of the project was to define the suitability of the CEFR for Chinese and propose adjustments if required. In order to achieve this goal, we had necessarily to produce practical examples in order to evaluate the feasibility of each descriptor. In the process of doing so, we gradually built lists of characters and words. These lists all have sound scientific bases and are well grounded on scientific research and teaching experience.

The development of lexical items covers two separate but related components or tasks: selection of characters and selection of words relevant to the CEFR levels. This is yet another distinctive aspect of the project with special reference to the Chinese language. Unlike other European languages, where a vocabulary list would simply be a word list, for the Chinese language, it is quite possible that vocabulary can be learned and taught in two different but related ways: the learning of characters and the learning of words. They don't necessarily go hand in hand.

The lists of characters and words are by products of the project. However, the project members feel that these lists are very helpful for users of EBCL descriptors. The lists are open rather than closed. Separate lists have been suggested for receptive and productive skills.

3.4 Other aspects (themes and topics, functions, grammar items, intercultural dimension, etc.)

The project aimed to develop a comprehensive table of descriptors with an indication of the wider context in which they can be applied. In order to examine and verify whether the descriptors make sense in performing communicative activities in Chinese language, the lists of language themes and language functions, with their respective sample sentences or texts, were provided with reference to real-life resources and experiences. With this in mind, the teams, especially the Italian and the UK teams, examined a few lists of themes and functions and came up with a list of themes which are organized according to the four domains (Personal-Public-Educational-Occupational) and include 25 main themes which are sub-divided into sub-themes or topics.

As most traditional textbooks follow a similar division and progression of grammar items, it is not surprising that one of the key areas that teachers of Chinese are keen to establish is whether the EBCL project can help them sequence the grammar items in accordance with CEFR levels. This would allow teachers to simply “cut and paste” relevant points into their syllabus. The EBCL teams have considered this carefully. Some Chinese grammar items were sent to members to decide whether they should be incorporated into A1, A2, B1, or B2 levels. This team’s work in this regard was presented at the Berlin seminar (April 2012) and the Brussels Symposium (October 2012). Further Work on grammar items may be continued in potential follow-up projects.

The CEFR itself, while introducing the concepts of intercultural competence, or mediation, has not adequately specified the levels and descriptors for intercultural components as has done for communicative activities. Therefore, the project also looked into the issue of developing the intercultural dimension as a way to respond to one of its original objectives that addressed the socio-cultural differences of teaching and learning Chinese language in Europe and China respectively. A preliminary framework that intends to bridge the gap between intercultural dimension and linguistic elements was proposed. Such a proposal, although not fully developed, has been presented and discussed on academic occasions, including the Brussels Symposium, and has been confirmed valid in terms of approach and method. This intercultural dimension, too, has been recommended for a follow-up project.

3.5 Challenges

The EBCL project encountered two challenges that affected the final outcome: (1) sudden departure of the principal coordinator half way through the project and (2) an overambitious target set in the original

- (1) The principal coordinator and initiator of the project left the project unexpectedly in November 2011. The project team together with the advisory board worked on finding a suitable replacement for the coordinator. Although this was achieved with the new coordinator Dr Lianyi Song (assisted by Ms Lik Suen) of the China and Inner Asia Department at SOAS starting in late January 2012, this did lead to some delays as both had to familiarize themselves with all aspects of the project.
- (2) The initial assessment of the work to be done in order to produce the framework and detailed descriptors (as described in the grant application) was unfortunately overambitious. The complexity of the task and the volume of work that needed to be undertaken for each level had been underestimated significantly leaving the team with a difficult dilemma -finish all levels but without sufficient details to be of assistance to the teaching and learning community or to complete the most crucial levels [A1 and A2 and some work on B1] in a way that would be of assistance to the teaching and learning community. The team in consultation with the advisory board of the project decided to opt for the latter. **However, as mentioned in several sections the team continues to work, without grant support, to finalise the other levels.**

3.6 Summary

To summarise, the project has subscribed to the following guidelines:

- Never removing CEFR descriptors
- Keeping CEFR descriptors whenever possible
- Never moving to a higher or lower level a CEFR descriptor
- Splitting a descriptor into two sublevels if needed
- Drawing descriptors from the bank of CEFR related descriptors whenever needed (e.g. for a sublevel or to better contextualize/specify a CEFR descriptor)
- Making descriptors more suitable to a European learner of Chinese language
- Creating new descriptors for graphemic competences, for characters reading and writing, for language activities performed with *pinyin*.
- Linking the language activities of the descriptors with the list of language functions and the list of themes

The outcomes and results of the project have received very positive feedback. However, the project has also raised the expectation of further development in this field.

4. Partnerships

The project has four university partners:

Université Rennes 2 from France,
Freie Universität Berlin from Germany,
“Sapienza” Università di Roma, from Italy, and
The School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London from the UK.

The project also has four associated school partners each of which works closely with a university partner in its own country:

Collège-Lycée Emile Zola de Rennes in France,
Geschwister Scholl Gesamtschule in Germany,
The Convitto Nazionale di Roma "Vittorio Emanuele II" in Italy, and
Kingsford Community School in UK.

The main work of the project has been carried out by members from the partner universities. These universities are all key universities in Chinese language teaching in their respective countries. In addition, the team members are all active in the Chinese language teaching or teachers associations or organisations in their own country or regions.

The cooperation amongst the partner institutions has generated a number of positive results.

Firstly, the survey conducted in phase 1 of the project covered the secondary schools well in these key countries where Chinese language teaching is strong. This greatly helped to raise the profile of the project.

Secondly, the seminars were held in each of the four major cities which enabled teachers and other stakeholders in these respective countries to participate more easily.

Thirdly, the seminars and conferences that members attended in Europe and the publicity generated by these events also greatly enhanced the profile of the project. As a result, more and more Chinese teachers in Europe are now aware that their common concern of how CEFR is applicable to the Chinese language has been addressed formally.

We believe that the EBCL Project has laid a good foundation for further development in this field.

5. Plans for the Future

Various proposals regarding what to do in the future have been put forward and considered by project members. Some of the proposed actions were presented to a wider audience at the Brussels Symposiums (19-20 October 2012). Formal and informal feedback and suggestions from non-project members with regard to what could and should be done after the current project finishes have been considered too. On the basis of the above-mentioned sources, we present the following plans for the future.

1. For continued revision and dissemination of the outcomes of the EBCL project, it would be most constructive if a small group of academics could form a team which keeps in touch in the next few years. These key members will continue to attend and make presentations in seminars and conferences promoting the EBCL work.
2. To organise a series of seminars and/or conferences to further raise the awareness of the EBCL work and help update the existing EBCL documents, like the English Profile project has been doing.
3. Future projects could finish the benchmarking for B1, B2 and possibly C1. It is generally felt that C2 descriptors are not essential.
4. Produce a Chinese language portfolio of materials and resources of a variety of types, suitable for adults and children in separate versions. In this way, the EBCL work could live on in a new environment and be continuously enriched.
5. The intercultural communication (IC) is a complicated area. The EBCL project has addressed this issue in relation to the development of descriptors. Further work in this dimension may be carried out in a separate project in the future.
6. With the rapid development of technology and its application in education in general and language learning and teaching in particular, its impact on writing of Chinese script has been enormous. This was extensively discussed and debated both within the project and in the wider Chinese language teaching community. The EBCL project was aware of the Dutch Pilot project being carried since 2010 where the effect on handwriting of Chinese characters and typing with electronic devices has been examined. This is certainly a very important area for further research.

6. Contribution to EU policies

It was against the background of the promotion of multilingualism in Europe that the EBCL project was conceived and proposed. It has become increasingly clear that learning and teaching of non-EU languages such as Chinese in the EU countries are as vital as EU languages for the sake of social cohesion and integration within EU and for the sake of economic development and corporation with countries beyond the EU.

The growing economic influence of China over the past two decades has resulted in a steady growth in the learning and teaching of Chinese in Europe. It is therefore important to ensure that Chinese language teaching can be carried out in line with other European languages in the European context. This requires both top down and bottom up approaches. The EBCL project has acted as a bridge to bring policy making and general teaching practice together.

A concrete example can be cited here to illustrate the point. In 2012, the UK government (Department for Education) expressed its intention to make language teaching in primary schools (from age seven) compulsory. This policy is designed to reverse the dramatic decline in the take-up of foreign languages in secondary schools. Chinese was one of the few languages proposed and promoted. This will no doubt have an impact on the teaching of Mandarin in secondary schools and universities, and, consequently, assessment standards at various levels as compared with other European languages.

The survey conducted by EBCL also indicates that there is lack of consistency in labelling of course outcomes in universities with regard to levels with reference to CEFR. It is therefore very helpful to have some benchmarking criteria stated with regard to the Chinese language and with reference to CEFR. EBCL was proposed precisely to fulfil the task.

It is also an objective of the EBCL project that its proposed CEFR based framework of competence descriptors will help promote the mobility and portability of learning and teaching of Chinese in Europe (e.g. Bologna), contribute to growth and jobs via the potential economic value of the project (e.g. Lisbon) and provide an accessible and meaningful platform for discussion on modernising Chinese language teaching (e.g. Bergen), for exchange and collaboration with institutions and individuals concerned beyond Europe.

