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## Foreign Languages Fade in Class — Except Chinese

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Brendan Hoffman for The New York Times

The Yu Ying charter school has recruited five native Chinese speakers living in the United States to teach their classes.

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By **SAM DILLON**

Published: January 20, 2010

WASHINGTON — Thousands of public schools stopped teaching foreign languages in the last decade, according to a government-financed survey — dismal news for a nation that needs more linguists to conduct its global business and diplomacy.

But another contrary trend has educators and policy makers abuzz: a rush by schools in all parts of America to offer instruction in Chinese.

Some schools are paying for Chinese classes on their own, but hundreds are getting some help. The Chinese government is sending teachers from [China](#) to schools all over the world — and paying part of their salaries.

At a time of tight budgets, many American schools are finding that offer too good to refuse.

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Growth in Chinese Language Courses

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A second-grade class at the Yu Ying charter school in Washington, where instruction in all subjects alternates daily between English and Chinese. [More Photos](#) »

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Brendan Hoffman for The New York Times

Experts attribute the surge in Chinese language classes to parents' belief that fluency can open opportunities down the road. [More Photos](#) >

In Massillon, Ohio, south of Cleveland, Jackson High School started its Chinese program in the fall of 2007 with 20 students and now has 80, said Parthena Draggett, who directs Jackson's world languages department.

"We were able to get a free Chinese teacher," she said. "I'd like to start a Spanish program for elementary children, but we can't get a free Spanish teacher."

(Jackson's Chinese teacher is not free; the Chinese government pays part of his compensation, with the district paying the rest.)

No one keeps an exact count, but rough calculations based on the government's survey suggest that perhaps 1,600 American public and private schools are teaching Chinese, up from 300 or so a decade ago. And the numbers are growing exponentially.

Among America's approximately 27,500 middle and high schools offering at least one foreign language, the proportion offering Chinese rose to 4 percent, from 1 percent, from 1997 to 2008, according to the [survey](#), which was done by the [Center for Applied Linguistics](#), a research group in Washington, and paid for by the federal [Education Department](#).

"It's really changing the language education landscape of this country," said Nancy C. Rhodes, a director at the center and co-author of the survey.

Other indicators point to the same trend. The number of students taking the [Advanced Placement test](#) in Chinese, introduced in 2007, has grown so fast that it is likely to pass German this year as the third most-tested A.P.

language, after Spanish and French, said Trevor Packer, a vice president at the [College Board](#).

"We've all been surprised that in such a short time Chinese would grow to surpass A.P. German," Mr. Packer said.

A decade ago, most of the schools with Chinese programs were on the East and West Coasts. But in recent years, many schools have started Chinese programs in heartland states, including Ohio and Illinois in the Midwest, Texas and Georgia in the South, and Colorado and Utah in the Rocky Mountain West.

"The [mushrooming of interest](#) we're seeing now is not in the heritage communities, but in places that don't have significant Chinese populations," said Chris Livaccari, an associate director at the [Asia Society](#).

America has had the study of a foreign language grow before, only to see the bubble burst. Many schools began teaching Japanese in the 1980s, after Japan emerged as an economic rival. But thousands have dropped the language, the survey found.

Japanese is not the only language that has declined. Thousands of schools that offered French, German or Russian have stopped teaching those languages, too, the survey

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found.

To prepare the survey, the Center for Applied Linguistics sent a questionnaire to 5,000 American schools, and followed up with phone calls to 3,200 schools, getting a 76 percent response rate.

The results, released last year, confirmed that Spanish was taught almost universally. The survey found that 88 percent of elementary schools and 93 percent of middle and high schools with language programs offered Spanish in 2008.

The overall decline in language instruction was mostly due to its abrupt decline in public elementary and middle schools; the number of private schools and public high schools offering at least one language remained stable from 1997 to 2008.

The survey said that a third of schools reported that the federal [No Child Left Behind](#) law, which since 2001 has required public schools to test students in math and English, had drawn resources from foreign languages.

Experts said several factors were fueling the surge in Chinese. Parents, students and educators recognize China's emergence as an important country and believe that fluency in its language can open opportunities.

Also stoking the interest has been a joint program by the College Board and [Hanban](#), a language council affiliated with the Chinese Education Ministry, that since 2006 has sent hundreds of American school superintendents and other educators to visit schools in China, with travel costs subsidized by Hanban. Many have started Chinese programs upon their return.

Since 2006, Hanban and the College Board have also sent more than 325 volunteer Chinese "guest teachers" to work in American schools with fledgling programs and paying \$13,000 to subsidize each teacher's salary for a year. Teachers can then renew for up to three more years.

The State Department has paid for a smaller program — the Teachers of Critical Languages Program — to bring Chinese teachers to schools here, with each staying for a year.

In the first two years of its Chinese program, the Jackson District in Ohio said it had provided its guest teacher housing, a car and gasoline, health insurance and other support worth about \$26,000. This year, the district is paying a more experienced Chinese guest teacher \$49,910 in salary and other support, in addition to the \$13,000 in travel expenses he receives from Hanban, bringing his compensation into rough parity with Ohio teachers.

Ms. Draggett visited China recently with a Hanban-financed delegation of 400 American educators from 39 states, and she came back energized about Jackson's Chinese program, she said.

"Chinese is really taking root," she said. Starting this fall, Jackson High will begin phasing out its German program, she said.

Founders of the [Yu Ying charter school](#) in Washington, where all classes for 200 students in prekindergarten through second grade are taught in Chinese and English on alternate days, did not start with a guest teacher when it opened in the fall of 2008.

"That's great for many schools, but we want our teachers to stay," said Mary Shaffner,

the school's executive director.

Instead, Yu Ying recruited five native Chinese speakers living in the United States by advertising on the Internet. One is Wang Jue, who immigrated to the United States in 2001 and graduated from the [University of Maryland](#).

After just four months, her prekindergarten students can already say phrases like "I want lunch" and "I'm angry" in Chinese, Ms. Wang said.

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A version of this article appeared in print on January 21, 2010, on page A18 of the New York edition.

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# Chinese instruction thrives in U.S.

**Foreign language |**  
Emerging China sends teachers to schools around the world

By **SAM DILLON**

NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Thousands of public schools stopped teaching foreign languages in the past decade, according to a government-financed survey — dismal news for a nation that needs more linguists to conduct its global business and diplomacy.

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BRENDAN HOFFMAN/NEW YORK TIMES NEWS SERVICE

**A student concentrates in a prekindergarten class last month at the Yu Ying charter school in Washington, D.C., where instruction in all subjects alternates daily between English and Chinese.**

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AP language, after Spanish and French, said Trevor Packer, a vice president at the College Board.

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America has seen the study of a foreign language grow before, only to see the bubble burst. Many schools began teaching Japanese in the 1980s, after Japan emerged as an economic rival. But thousands have dropped the language, the survey found.

Thousands of schools that offered French, German or Russian have stopped teaching those languages, too, the survey found. Experts said parents, students and educators recognize China's emergence as an important country and believe that fluency in its language can open opportunities.

## In Oregon

In Oregon, 10 high schools offer classes in Mandarin Chinese, including Cleveland High in Portland, which serves as the capstone in a kindergarten-through-senior-year Mandarin immersion program that begins at Woodstock Elementary. Demand to enter the program has grown so much that, beginning with today's third-graders, 60 students a year are admitted to the program as kindergartners.

The oldest students in Portland's Mandarin immersion program are juniors and sophomores in high school, and many of them have reached advanced or near-advanced status on a national proficiency scale, meaning they can speak connected paragraphs in Mandarin and can talk about academic subjects in the language.

The other high schools are Lake Oswego, Tualatin, Southridge in Beaverton, The International High of Beaverton, Franklin in Portland, Summit in Bend, Estacada and The Dalles. Students can take the class online through Clackamas Web Academy. The private Northwest Chinese Academy also offers Mandarin instruction to students in preschool through grade six.

Portland's efforts to produce students who are near-fluent in Mandarin, rather than merely prepared to converse informally with native Chinese speakers, won it a grant from the National Security Education Program. The grant, won in a partnership with the University of Oregon, allows students to study Mandarin from kindergarten through four years of college.

— Betsy Hammond