



Chinese Language Teachers Association, USA

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The CLTA Statement in Support of Chinese Language Programs (Approved by the Steering Committee on March 11, 2022)

At the Chinese Language Teachers Association, USA (CLTA), we are heartened and energized by the apparent and rapid growth of American students' interest in learning Chinese over the past few decades. Chinese is now being offered in many American postsecondary institutions and K-12 schools. The CLTA is committed to protecting and sustaining the growth of Chinese language programs at every American institution of education, and our statement here intends to reiterate the fundamental importance of Chinese language learning in America.

Globally, the Chinese language plays an increasingly central role in business, economics and politics in the 21st century. It is the official language of mainland China, the second largest economy in the world, and one of the six official languages of the United Nations. It is an official language in two other major Asian economies – Taiwan and Singapore. As a transnational language, Chinese is also widely used in many parts of the world where Chinese diaspora communities live, with particularly large numbers of Chinese speakers in Southeast Asia, Australia, Europe, and Americas. Indeed, all of the United States federal agencies involved in international work have identified [Chinese as a critically needed language](#).

Within the U.S., Chinese learning and teaching is also an important means of practicing diversity and inclusion. Chinese is America's second-largest minority language, after Spanish, and the population of Chinese-speaking immigrants here continues to grow. Asian immigrants have now overtaken Hispanics as the largest source of immigration in the U.S.; [China was the top country of origin for new immigrants coming into the U.S. in 2018](#). Students from China are [the largest source of international students on American college campuses](#), and they help fuel economic growth in many American cities and towns hosting universities and colleges while also contributing to the linguistic and cultural diversity of American higher education. Teaching and learning Chinese enables our students to dismantle stereotypes by connecting with these new immigrants and international students. It is thus integral to the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion in America today.

In addition to the language's economic, political and cultural significance in America's international and domestic contexts, **learning Chinese also offers cognitive benefits to American students.** Chinese is quite different from English or any of the commonly taught European languages. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that learning Chinese for English speakers [promotes cognitive development](#) because it utilizes different sets of cognitive skills from using English. Not surprisingly, a Stanford University study has shown that [children in Chinese immersion programs outperform their counterparts even in English reading](#).

However, we have noticed concerning reports of closures of some Chinese language programs in the United States. Although these closures may result from complex and very

unfortunate factors, we urge the decision-makers to resist the cutbacks and recognize the importance of learning languages – and learning Chinese in particular– in today’s world. As Chinese language teachers ourselves, we at the CLTA know that building a language program takes a tremendous amount of time and work, and that language enrollments fluctuate naturally. Premature terminations not only erase what has already been invested into these oftentimes young programs, they can also create other consequences for the institution’s future development in many regards, such as recruitment of students with global aspirations, diversity and inclusion, and securing relevant federal funding for designated “critical languages” such as Chinese, to name just a few.

Many prestigious academic institutions have pointed out an urgent need for America to invest *more*, not less, in language education. For example, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences released its report entitled [*America’s Languages: Investing in Language Education in the 21st Century*](#), a project commissioned by the U.S. Congress with bipartisan support. CLTA’s partner organization, American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, has also outlined the importance of language learning, including in its [*Lead with Mandarin Chinese*](#) project. We at the CLTA endorse these advocacy statements, and we stand with our Chinese language teachers to help ensure American students’ access to Chinese language learning.

Our world today is volatile, and the challenges we face together range from regional and global peace to environmental sustainability, and to public health. Major global powers, such as the U.S. and China, must cooperate cross-culturally and cross-linguistically to ensure our collective wellbeing and secure our futures as the human race. We at the CLTA know that learning the language is key to discovering the dynamic discourses within a culture, and we believe in the role of language in bringing peoples and societies closer. We are working to create multicultural and multilingual understanding, and we appreciate all your support. Together, let us continue to make sure students in our communities have the opportunity to learn Chinese.