

Jeffrey King

This summer, with the support of funding from the Class of 1995 and the Taaluma Institute of East Africa, I taught Chinese to Tanzanian woodcarvers. Because most of the woodcarvers' customers are Chinese and unable to speak Swahili or English, Chinese gives the woodcarvers a means to better communicate with their Chinese customers, and as a result, sell more of their woodcarvings. Prior to leaving for Tanzania, I worked with my Teacher's Prep advisor, John Webb, to create a Chinese textbook for Swahili users. I then printed 40 copies at Princeton, which I eventually handed out to each of my students.

The students were excited to receive the textbooks. I think a large part of it was that they felt that they could take their Chinese learning more seriously. Many told me how they could now review the material after I had left the country. From a teaching perspective, the textbooks were crucial to my teaching in a more effective manner. When I taught Chinese the year before, many students would take a long time to copy sentences I had written on the board. With many sentences now already written in the books, I was able to spend more time going over key phrases and sentence construction rather than wait for students to copy down sentences.

I taught my students for one to two hours a day depending on whether they had English class as well. On average, I taught for 8 hours every week. Throughout the seven weeks that I was there, I taught over fifty students, though only about twenty five students came on an everyday basis. Nonetheless, I was very impressed as to how much these students learned in such a period. By the last class, students were able to communicate with Chinese customers the price and size of a woodcarving, argue about the quality of the woodcarving, and greet customers fairly fluently. In addition, students were able to prepare a number of skits which they presented in front of members of the Chinese Embassy.

Outside of class and class preparation time, I worked with the Chinese Embassy in Tanzania to try to find ways for the woodcarvers to continue their Chinese' learning after I left the country. My hope was that the embassy would be able to find another teacher who could continue teaching after I had left the country. I also requested that the embassy to make ten copies of the Chinese Swahili textbooks that I had brought over from America, organize a party for the woodcarvers in which we would invite members of the media, and donate any classroom materials such as benches, chalkboards, chalk, and notebooks.

In the end, the embassy only accomplished the copying of my textbooks. A week after making these requests, Ms. Wang, a representative from the cultural department of the Chinese Embassy notified me that it would be difficult to find another teacher who would teach Chinese without pay. Rather than despair, I decided to look for a teacher by myself. I planted myself in the woodcarvers' market Saturday and Sunday mornings, the times which the most Chinese people came to buy carvings, and explained to every Chinese person the work that I was doing. To my surprise, many Chinese expressed interest and I exchange quite a few emails and phone numbers. Eventually, I did find a teacher who was willing to teach every Saturday. While this was far from ideal, it was not a bad start. This way, at least the students would be able to retain the Chinese that they had learned. Unfortunately, one week prior to my departure, this teacher canceled on me, citing that her company had just received a number of new programs and as a result she would be too busy to come teach.

One of my other goals was to invite the embassy members to come take a look at an actual class. I felt that if they would just take a look at the classroom, they would come away very impressed and be very willing to help out. Despite that they expressed great interest in coming to watch a class, whenever I asked them to pick a day, they only responded that they

were very busy. Finally, I decided to set a date in which I would invite both members of the Chinese Embassy and members of the media to attend a few skits that the students would present. Once the date was set, the embassy finally came to take a look, and even a national newspaper writer showed up to write a report on the classroom. Though the embassy members coming to the class was certainly a success of sorts, the embassy did not promise me any further action after I left the country. This has lead me to believe that the embassy will not continue supporting the woodcarvers in their pursuit of the Chinese language. Nonetheless, I believe that I have established an important contact that may be able to be of help if I were to return to Tanzania to work on the same project.

After returning to Princeton, I am planning to do my best to help the woodcarvers continue their Chinese learning. For example, each week, I am sending back my own recorded sound clips through the internet so that students there may be able to download them and listen to them. Because these sound clips are essentially my reading of the textbook that they already have, it makes it much easier for them to understand what I am saying. In addition, I am planning to work with departments at Princeton to create an internship which would continue sending other students to Tanzania to do the work that I have done this year. The only requirements for these students would be that they have sufficient fluency in the Chinese language and have an interest in learning Swahili. Through this method, even if the woodcarvers cannot have a full time teacher, they can be sure that there will at least be one every summer. Finally, it had become clear to me that it would be best if the woodcarvers themselves were able to make some money for the sake of the school. One possible way would be to create the reverse textbook, a Swahili textbook for Chinese users. Students have told me that upon seeing their textbooks, some Chinese were interested in buying them. If I could create these textbooks for the woodcarvers to

sell and then use the money for the sake of hiring another Chinese teacher, it may become a sustainable way to continue the woodcarvers' Chinese education. Alternatively, it may be possible to start a Chinese class at the local university, and use the money received from the more well off students to start a school for the woodcarvers.



