Introduction

After the pioneer Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) arrived in China in 1583, the study of China and its civilizations gradually evolved into an academic field in Europe, referred to as Sinology. This term refers to Western studies of China, especially its history and people, as well as Chinese language. France was the first among Western countries to establish Chinese studies in academia, implementing courses in 1814 at Collège de France. Germany established its Chinese program at Berlin University in 1833 (Zhang 2009). In these early nineteenth-century European posts of academia, language instruction was not the focus. Most sinologists did not know how to speak Chinese nor had they ever set foot in China. Students in these programs also rarely had the opportunity to go to China. Chinese languages and dialects were viewed in the same way lay people see classical Greek or Latin—as obscure, dead languages without much real-world applicability other than scholarship.

In the late nineteenth century, two significant endeavors to promote Chinese language studies were undertaken at higher education institutions in the United States. In 1877, Samuel Wells Williams (1812–1884), a sinologist, was appointed the first professor of Chinese at Yale (Chao 2007). This was the first professorship of Chinese in the US. Meanwhile, Harvard College’s 1879 ‘Chinese Educational Scheme’ devised by Francis P. Knight (1831–1880) hired a native Chinese speaker, Ko K’un-hua (1838–1882), to teach Chinese language. While there is not yet a complete account of Williams’s appointment, Ko’s appointment has been studied by many researchers (Cui 1994; Fan 2002; Hanan and Adolphson 2003; Lum 2008; Xu 2014; Zhang H. 2000; Zhang X. 2002, among others). Furthermore, even though these two appointments took place around the same time, there has been very little scholarship comparing them from the pedagogical perspective. The goal of this chapter is to fill that gap. The first part will provide a historical account of these two appointments based on archival research; the second part will discuss pedagogical issues that spring from these two significant events in light of their impact on...
and insights into the field of teaching Chinese today. The conclusion reached from this historical analysis will offer implications for the teaching and promotion of Chinese language and culture in the twenty-first century.

**Williams’ Appointment at Yale**

Samuel Wells Williams, one of the first known Americans to study the Chinese language, went to China in 1832 for the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions in Canton (now Guangzhou). Williams first served as co-editor with Elijah Coleman Bridgman (1801–1861) of the journal *The Chinese Repository*, and from 1848 to 1852 he was the sole editor. In this capacity he contributed over one hundred articles on an array of topics, ranging from China to China’s people, to Chinese language. Williams also acquired proficiency in Japanese and from 1853 to 1854 he served as the Japanese and Chinese interpreter on the United States expedition to Japan led by Matthew C. Perry (1794–1858). In 1855 Williams was appointed Secretary and Chinese Interpreter of the Legation of the United States in China, where he worked as a diplomat for 21 years. Throughout his life, he devoted his time to writing and publishing books, including dictionaries to facilitate the study of Chinese language and culture for English speakers and was, as a result, recognized as a leading sinologist. This section provides a chronological account of Williams’s appointment for the Chinese professorship.

During his 43 years in China, Williams returned to the US three times, in 1844, 1860, and 1875. While in the States, Williams gave lectures about China to American audiences. The lectures Williams delivered during his first visit to the States were published in 1848 by Wiley & Putnam entitled *The Middle Kingdom*. For many decades this book was the most comprehensive and authoritative introduction to China for English readers. As China opened up, interest grew in this ancient and foreign land. Americans in academia and in religious groups contemplated the idea of adding Chinese Studies to their curricula. In 1867, Mrs E. T. Throop Martin (1818–1899), a friend of Williams and a philanthropist, initiated the plan to establish a chair for Chinese Language and Literature at Yale and recommended Williams for this position.

Williams received an offer in 1873 from President Daniel Coit Gilman (1831–1908) of the University of California at Berkeley. President Gilman wrote to Williams on April 30, 1873 that the university received ‘the endowment of a professorship of Chinese [and] Japanese . . . with the intent to help young scholars in their acquisition of those tongues . . . so that a better understanding should be established between the Eastern-Asiatic nations [and] this country’. At that time however, Williams was not ready to return to the US permanently; the proofreading, typesetting, and printing work of his ambitious project, *Syllabic Dictionary*, was not yet completed and required him to stay in China.

After the *Syllabic Dictionary* was published in 1874, in an 1875 correspondence, Williams consulted friends about the progress of the professorship at Yale. The major obstacle was lack of funding for the position. On September 5, 1875, James Dwight Dana (1813–1895), a Yale professor of geology and a friend of Williams’s since childhood, wrote to Williams, ‘I wish much we had a salary to add to a professorship for you so as to make your residence here certain’. Williams’ 1876 and 1877 letters again indicate the uncertainty of the situation. In one such letter dated Feb 29, 1876 from Utica, Williams wrote to Dana:

> I have no knowledge what has been done in regard to the establishment of the professorship of Chinese at Yale; and I suppose nothing can be done until there is a prospect of some fund to maintain it. However, as our excellent friend Mrs Martin asked me whether I would take the position if it were offered to me, I told her that I would do so. She said
that something to endow the chair had been promised, and if I was willing to take it, that perhaps more might be obtained to place it in a good footing. The object is certainly one that is worthy of Yale College, and creditable will it be for her to have made the effort to begin, even if the immediate results are not great.5

On March 15, 1876, Williams informed Dana that he had decided to end his work in China and inquired about the professorship: ‘It is indeed an unpropitious time for the foundation of a new professorship as little pressing as that of Chinese, but . . . I hope the enterprise will not fail altogether’, and he urged Dana to seek assistance from Mrs Martin –‘if anybody can turn up stones, to forward it, Mrs Martin is the one’.6 After many months of no further updates, Williams decided to return to the States. In October 1876, Williams left China and returned to the States permanently, settling in New Haven.7

Meanwhile, the idea of bringing Chinese language education to the US was also stirring at Harvard. On May 7, 1877, Williams wrote to his friend Henry Blodget,8 reporting Harvard’s success in securing funds for a Chinese professor while there was no such progress at Yale: ‘No prospect of the professorship at present, and no scholars are propounded [at Yale]. Mr Knight is moving his friends to get funds in Boston to support a Chinese siensang [teacher] in Harvard for 5 years, paying him $1800 a year for teaching all who come. The interest here would not raise 10 cents for such an end. He has obtained over $600 a year already’.9

That same year, the official appointment finally came through at Yale, but Williams, contrary to his expectations, was not offered a salary. On June 30, 1877, Yale College Secretary Franklin B. Dexter wrote to Williams: ‘It is my official duty to inform you of the action of the President and Fellows of Yale College, at their annual meeting held this week, in establishing the chair of Chinese Language and Literature, in connection with the graduate section of the Department of Philosophy and the Arts, and in unanimously electing you its first incumbent’.10 However, Secretary Dexter wrote, ‘The Corporation are heartily sorry that at present no endowment is in their hands from which a salary can be provided’.11 Williams nonetheless wrote his acceptance, ‘at least provisionally’, on July 13, 1877, while making it clear that he would like the position to come with a salary.12 It was not until June 29, 1880, three years after Williams was officially appointed, that the college finally informed Williams that he would be paid starting October 1880 on a regular salary, with a fund bequeathed by William Allen Macy (1825–1859), a missionary to China and a friend of Williams. In the acceptance letter Williams noted that his ‘intimate acquaintance with W Macy in China as an associate in the same mission . . . adds peculiar interest to this action’.13 Macy had been a student at Yale and went to China in 1825 on a mission with Williams. The endowment was especially meaningful to Williams as the professorship was supported by a colleague who shared his love of China.

Over the few years that he held the position—with no students enrolling in the course—Williams participated in faculty activities and gave lectures. During the last few years of his life, despite his poor eyesight and gradually ailing health, he worked on the final revision of The Middle Kingdom, which was published in 1883.14 He died in 1884 and was commemorated by the Yale president as the first professor of Chinese in the United States.

**Francis P. Knight’s Chinese Educational Scheme**

Unlike the appointment at Yale that hired a non-Chinese sinologist, Knight’s Chinese Educational Scheme was an experiment to hire a native Chinese teacher to teach the court language (Beijing dialect or Mandarin) to Harvard students to better prepare them linguistically to launch their professional lives in China. The following section will first provide a sketch of Knight and
recount this Scheme, at times using the words of Charles Eliot (1834–1926), Harvard president at the time, from his presidential annual reports.

In 1844 the US established diplomatic relations with China after signing the Treaty of Wangxia. Thereafter the State Department appointed as US consul merchants who lived in treaty ports and for many years allowed them to run their businesses at the same time (Kennedy 2015; Pletcher 2001). Francis P. Knight, who would go on to create Harvard’s Chinese Educational Scheme, came from a Bostonian family in business and first went to China as a merchant in 1860. He was appointed American Consul at the newly established treaty port, Newchwang (today’s Ying Kou, a port in Liaoning province), in 1862 where he ran Knight & Co. In 1864, Knight was also hired as consul for the consulates of France, Sweden, and Norway. In 1867, he further assumed the position of consul for the Netherlands and deputy consul for Germany and Japan.

Like many American merchants who went to China, Knight did not speak Chinese, which made his work difficult, particularly as a diplomat. He confessed to W. H. Seward (1801–1872), Secretary of State, that because there were no missionaries who could translate, he was obliged to have all his papers read by the British minister who could read Chinese. The lack of Chinese language skills of diplomats and consular staff members was a common problem. Hosea Bal-lou Morse (1855–1934), a Harvard graduate and Chinese Customs commissioner, reported that American consuls were being deceived by their own Chinese interpreters who would give fake permissions using the consulate stamp to permit smuggling or other illegal endeavors, and these actions were detrimental to American diplomats’ reputations (Fairbank et al. 1995). In short, not having Chinese language skills put Americans at a great disadvantage when it came to employment or doing business in and with China.

The primary motivation for Knight to create the Chinese Educational Scheme, then, was to better serve America’s national interests in China. Knight saw job opportunities in diplomacy and in commercial enterprises for American college graduates with Chinese language skills. The Chinese government’s massive plan to build its national infrastructure using Western technologies and systems and the Imperial Maritime Customs Services, which hired foreigners, among which were several Harvard graduates, would both prove as lucrative job opportunities for Americans in China.

In February 1877, Knight wrote to Harvard’s President Eliot, describing his proposal (Index to House Documents 1880). A month later he received enthusiastic support from Eliot. In the President’s annual report of 1879, Eliot recounts the establishment of this appointment:

In 1877, Mr Francis P. Knight of Boston, who had been many years a resident of China, being for some months in this country, raised a subscription of $8750 (mostly payable by annual instalments), for the purpose of maintaining at Cambridge, for a term of five years, a native teacher of Mandarin Chinese. Returning to China in 1878, Mr Knight endeavored to find some educated Chinese gentleman willing to go to Cambridge on this service. After having been long unsuccessful in this search, he finally, in June, 1879, engaged the services of Mr Ko Kun-hua of Ningpo, for three years from Sept. 1, 1879. Mr Ko reached Cam-bridge with his family punctually at that date, and has already justified in every respect the selection made by Mr Knight on behalf of the President and Fellows.

The president then acknowledged two Harvard graduates, Edwards Bangs Drew (1843–1924) and Hosea Ballou Morse, and a British diplomat Walter C. Hillier (1849–1927), for their assistance in providing study guides for students:

Mr Knight and the Corporation have been greatly assisted in this exceptional undertaking by Mr E.B. Drew and Mr H. Ballou Morse, graduates of the College, who have been
employed for several years in the customs service of China, and by Mr Walter C. Hillier, interpreter at H. B. M. Consulate at Pekin [sic]. Each of these gentlemen supplied elaborate instructions for students concerning the best way of learning Mandarin; and Mr Drew, who is stationed at Ningpo, was much relied on by Mr Knight in selecting Mr Ko.\footnote{In his concluding words, the president thanked the subscribers for their donation to fund this experiment: ‘The University is under obligations to all these gentlemen for their disinterested labors, and also to the subscribers who responded to Mr Knight’s appeal in 1877. But for their enterprising liberality the experiment could not have been tried’.\footnote{The second document regarding this experiment appeared five years later in the President’s annual report of 1882. The report informed readers of the end of the appointment due to the sudden death of Ko. We learn that Knight did not have a chance to see the end of the project:}

Mr Ko Kun-hua, Instructor in Chinese, died of pneumonia on the 14th of February, 1882, after a brief sickness, leaving a wife and six young children in a peculiarly helpless and desolate condition. He had been in the employ of the University since September 1, 1879, under a three years’ contract made with him in China by the late Francis P. Knight, on behalf of the President and Fellows; so that his term of service had nearly expired, and he was looking forward to a return within a few months to his native land.\footnote{In the same report, President Eliot writes, ‘Mr Ko’s two oldest sons are more likely to profit by the experiment than any other persons; for they learned some English, and imbibed some Western ideas’.\footnote{Here, the president again reveals his cultural bias, this time about the value of Ko’s sons becoming Westernized as a positive result of the experiment. In that same report he also mentioned that ‘[o]ne student whose attainments in Chinese were remarkable went to China, but has returned out of health’. There is little more written about this mysterious student.}}

The president described Ko’s character and the aftermath of his death:

He was a refined, scholarly, and conscientious man, punctilious in every observance and diligent in every duty,—a heathen gentleman who could have taught many a Christian how to live worthily and suffer patiently. His family were sent back to Shanghai by the University, and a private subscription was raised in Cambridge and Boston sufficient in amount to secure them against want until the children should be grown up and educated.\footnote{According to the university record, even though Ko arrived in Cambridge on time, he did not start teaching until the winter of 1880. Since Ko had to learn how to conduct himself in an American academic environment, he was fortunate that his first student was George Martin Lane (1823–1897), Pope Professor of the Latin Language and Literature at Harvard. Professor Lane became Ko’s English teacher.\footnote{It is likely that Lane in many ways served as Ko’s personal advisor and taught him how to navigate the strange culture of the West and the perhaps stranger one of American academia. Learning English from a capable language professor was also likely beneficial to Ko in making himself a better language teacher. In the second year, he had five students, five times as many as the first!}}

Drew expressed his expectations of Ko as a faculty member at Harvard in his letter to President Eliot: ‘If Mr Ko, while in the U.S. writes Chinese books for the benefit of his countrymen this will be another gain out of the teachership’.\footnote{Ko compiled a collection of his poetry entitled \textit{Chinese Poetry and Prose} in 1881 with the goal of introducing Chinese poetry and to help...}
Westerners learn Chinese. Ko was very conscious of his role in representing China and wore his official rank garb in class, requiring his students to pay respect to teachers in the Chinese way (Xu 2014). As Xu (2014) argues, Ko was a Chinese culture messenger to the United States. Ko led an active social life in Cambridge. The annual Chinese New Year party at Ko’s residence was an event eagerly awaited by the locals. The following excerpt provided by Almira L. Hayward from her article, ‘A Chinese Professor’, describes the last few events Ko attended.

[T]wo weeks before his death Professor Ko spent a pleasant social evening with some of his Cambridge friends. He bore his part in the conversation with ease, and was able to tell much about his country and subjects connected therewith . . . During the evening, after music from others present, Professor Ko was persuaded to sing a Chinese song. The Chinese idea of music is so different from ours that the company could hardly enjoy it, but was none the less grateful to him for giving what cost a visible effort. The following Sunday he spent with Yung Wing and Dr. Williams in Hartford, discussing with them the future of the Chinese in America, little thinking how soon his part of the work would be done. His last public appearance was at a lecture in Boston, given before the Lowell Institute by his friend, Mr Drew, for whom he read several Chinese poems in the original. On his way home he took a severe cold, which resulted in pneumonia, and he died February 14th, 1882.

It is evident that in less than three years, Ko had established himself as a professor and something of a local celebrity. To this day Ko’s portrait hangs on the wall of Harvard-Yenching Library in memory of this first native Chinese teacher at Harvard and the first in the history of Chinese language instruction in the US. In brief, these two appointments marked the beginning of an emerging model where private donors who had personal connections with China and appreciated the benefits of learning its language would provide funding for the promotion of Chinese language and culture in American higher education.

After Ko’s death, it was not until 40 years later, in the spring of 1922, that Yuen Ren Chao (1892–1982) offered Chinese language again at Harvard. Meanwhile, at Yale, Williams’s son Frederic Wells Williams (1857–1928) became assistant professor of Oriental history in 1893. He offered Chinese history courses to Yale students and helped found the Yale-China Association. The Chinese language was not officially offered at Yale until the philologist and Chinese language pedagogue, George Kennedy (1901–1960), joined the Yale faculty in 1937 (Ropp 2018). The first appointments at Yale and Harvard set the stage for the next wave of Chinese language study, which came from the need to train military officers during World War II. Ling (2018) documented the development of language teaching through retrospectives of American and Chinese scholars who participated in building the field of Chinese studies in the US in the twentieth century. Indeed, after the War’s end, a significant number of Chinese language programs were established in American higher education institutions in the 1950s. This time such establishment was a joint effort by both American and Chinese scholars. Together, they built the foundation for today’s Chinese language programs in the US (Ruan, Zhang, and Leung 2016; Yao and Zhang 2010).

**Pedagogical Issues Raised in Williams’ and Ko’s Appointments**

The enrollments generated by the two early professorships in Chinese were minimal. Williams had no students at Yale and Ko had five at Harvard. Due to the low enrollments one might suggest that these two appointments were pedagogically insignificant. However, they are path-breaking from a historical perspective. Their significance lies in the unprecedented concept that Chinese can be learned outside of China as well as in the difference in how the teachers
themselves learned Chinese: One was a non-Chinese while the other a native Chinese. As a result, new programmatic and pedagogical questions arose, such as curriculum, instruction, and teacher qualifications. The following section will discuss these topics and highlight the insights offered by these two appointments that apply to today’s Chinese language teaching.

**Instruction Tailored to Learners’ Needs**

Curriculum is the roadmap which guides students towards mastery of the target language in their given learning environment. The two appointments were made to accomplish different educational goals with different curricular designs. The Yale course was offered in a graduate program, so it was for future scholars and sinologists. The Harvard course was an undergraduate elective for both Harvard and non-Harvard students. One of the instructional questions for various student populations is how teachers help learners overcome learning difficulties by devising more effective teaching methods (Jorden and Walton 1987).

Many pioneer Western scholars who went through their own tremendous difficulties in acquiring Chinese compiled language learning materials and tools to facilitate the study of Chinese for future students. Williams authored several language textbooks and dictionaries. If he had had the chance to run the course at Yale, he might have used some of the publications he wrote as well as the other materials available at the time. Because the main goal of the course at Harvard was to teach beginners, Knight wanted students to use the textbook *A Progressive Course Designed to Assist the Student of Colloquial Chinese, or Yu-yen Tzu-eh Chi* in Chinese (thereafter *Colloquial Chinese*) written by Thomas Wade (1818–1895). As early as January 1879, before Ko was even recruited, Knight had begun to seek recommendations from Western sinologists in China on teaching methodologies for the Educational Scheme. The first person he consulted was Walter Hillier.

Walter Hillier was, according to Drew, one of the most fluent Mandarin Chinese speakers in China at the time. He was also a long-time language study supervisor for British consul staff. Hillier, upon Knight’s request, wrote to Knight about his view of the best methods of teaching Chinese as well as advice on learning Chinese. His plan was for three years of study at Harvard, based on his ‘eleven years of . . . superintending the studies of others [using Wade’s book]’. Hillier first suggested that students should acquire the proper tones and pronunciation by modeling the teacher. Hillier suggested that ‘Students should avoid sounding the characters without first hearing the teacher pronounce them’. In Hillier’s view, ‘It is most essential to the formation of a good accent that the teacher’s pronunciation of each word should be heard as often as possible’. Inherent in his suggestions are two notions that have found support in contemporary empirical second language acquisition research: perception precedes production and frequency-based learning is essential (Zhang and Ke 2018).

To learn characters, Hillier advised students to acquire a small dose a day, writing them with the proper stroke order and reviewing them regularly, an act still essential to the learning of written Chinese, as rote as it may be. He described in detail how to use ‘tickets’ (flashcards) to study, self-assess, and review characters. He also suggested that students build their language skills step by step: ‘First the single character, then two together, then three together, and so on until the whole sentence is read [aloud] by teacher and then by the student’. Hillier also emphasized: ‘This process cannot be repeated too often. As the student advances he should try and form new sentences out of the characters he knows and write them down for the teacher’s correction’. Hillier described the laborious process of gaining proficiency thus: ‘There is no royal road to Chinese, and from first to last the study is a hard one. In the earlier stages of the study the secret of success . . . lies in repetition and a rigid adherence to a hard and fast line’. Finding joy, not just the devil, in the details is still paramount to the study of Mandarin.
In addition to Hillier, Drew submitted to President Eliot his ‘Memorandum on the Study of Chinese Colloquial under Mr Ko, at Harvard University’. In this ‘Memorandum’, he urged both teacher and students to read carefully the introduction in the Wade textbook on how to acquire characters, tones, and grammar (Wade and Hillier 1886). Drew’s instructions also corresponded to Hillier’s plan to include daily instruction with the class on the ‘peculiarities’ in Chinese, that is, tones, radical characters, and conversation, as well as two hours of daily study without the teacher. Drew also stressed that ‘for the first six months the student should have the teacher studying aloud with him all he can’. He estimated that a Harvard student needed to study from the second half of junior year to the end of senior year to complete Wade’s Colloquial Chinese. H.B. Morse, another Harvard alum, prepared ‘Hints to the Student of Chinese’ for the course. In his piece, he stated that the most important step was to learn from the native Chinese teacher *viva voce*, to ask the teacher to correct any errors of intonation and to acquire radicals and other character components.

Similar suggestions also appeared in *The Harvard Register*, a monthly periodical edited and published by Moses King (1853–1909), who was a Harvard student at the time (King 1880). This piece written in 1880 supported the foundation of Chinese in the US:

The student before proceeding to a practical acquaintance with the language should first understand its *peculiarities* [emphasis mine]. For this purpose he must learn thoroughly the radicals,—by no means a difficult task,—for they constitute the key to the formation of the written characters. He must then learn to distinguish the few ‘tones,’ on which depend the sounds of the whole spoken language. These ‘tones’ aid the ear to detect the differences of sound, and to accustom itself to the intonations of spoken words generally; and it is by their aid that one can get at the spirit of this peculiar language. He should also memorize a number of words and phrases. So much of this must be worked out by one’s self that it can be done as well, if not better, at home.

A striking pedagogical observation from reading these suggestions written by pioneers in the nineteenth century is that they all focus on helping beginners acquiring the ‘peculiarities’ of Chinese that do not exist in English. The excerpt below shows that this method worked:

The pupil in Chinese, who was under Professor Ko at Harvard only from November to May, acquired during that time, although he had but one recitation a week, a knowledge of the radicals, the ‘tones,’ read his lessons in Chinese, and could understand considerable in conversation. With this foundation, he has left for China to engage in business.

Note that the learning of ‘peculiarities’ were identified to be the ‘foundation’ to achieve functional proficiency, a goal set for this course, before students would go to work and do further language study in China. The preliminary success of this pilot course signaled that American students could learn Chinese outside of China as a foreign language under the instruction of at least a native Chinese teacher in an American university setting.

Perry Link (2005), a Harvard graduate who studied Chinese in the 1960s and became a professor of modern Chinese literature and language, expressed his concerns about the lack of attention in the field to those ‘peculiarities’, especially in the teaching of tones:

One fashionable theory in applied linguistics in recent years has held that pronunciation naturally ‘converges’ on a native-speaker model once a second-language learner enters a native-speaker environment. This theory . . . is grounded in European-language experience and does not apply well to [adult] second-language learning of Chinese.
Link, nearly one hundred years later, named what the sinologists of the nineteenth century seemed to already know: that the special features of Chinese cannot be learned simply through intuition or exposure; they require meticulous and explicit instruction and conscientious and laborious learning on the parts of both teachers and students at the beginning level.

Link further propounded his view of explicit tonal instruction by refuting the assumption of natural tonal development in adult learners:

I suspect that this difference between European-language learning and Chinese-language learning comes from the fact that tones in Chinese are phonemic distinctions. The human brain needs to conceive tones as phonemes before any natural ‘drift’ in their direction becomes possible as a result of immersion in a native-speaker environment. And since Western languages do not use intonation for phonemic purpose, this is precisely why we Chinese teachers need to labor so hard to implant the concept in our students’ minds. But whether or not my hypothesis about the cause of the problem is true, the empirical fact itself is beyond doubt: the native speaker environment does not ‘automatically’ make tone-less Chinese ‘drift’ in the direction of correct tones. The supposition that it does, in my view, is one of the most serious and widespread errors in Chinese language teaching today.

Reflecting on the challenges in teaching Chinese as a foreign language, Bisong Lü (1935–2017), a leading figure in Chinese pedagogy, similarly pointed out that the reason teaching Chinese had not had substantial breakthroughs is because for decades the field relied on foreign-language teaching methods that were developed for teaching and learning European languages, especially English. However, the field overlooked the fact that Chinese has specific linguistic characteristics that are different from European languages; therefore, these methods are not effective in teaching Chinese. Lü therefore called for developing a Chinese pedagogy framework that addresses the special characteristics of the Chinese language, then and only then, he said, can we improve the effectiveness in teaching Chinese (Lü 2005).

Students in elementary Chinese classrooms in the US today are facing the same kinds of the linguistic challenges in the acquisition of tones and characters as the pioneer students did in the nineteenth century. According to Wen (1997, 2011), inadequate teaching at the beginning level results in a high attrition rate in language programs after beginning Chinese and as a result, very few students reach advanced proficiency. It is clear that the field still needs empirically sound methods to improve the teaching of the most basic and yet most challenging aspects of Chinese.

**Language Teacher Qualifications**

A successful language program needs qualified teachers who have a thorough understanding of the program goals in order to organize instructional activities and help students reach those goals. Prior to these two historic appointments, Americans could only study Chinese in China where they would hire local natives to be their informants in a quest to discover the sounds, words, and structures of the language. Although these informants were referred to as *siensang* (teachers), teaching Chinese was not yet a profession. Drew described how Mandarin Chinese would be studied in China with a *siensang*:

The student generally takes Wade’s books [*Yu-yen Tzu-ehr Chi* by Thomas Wade] as the basis; he lives in Peking; he engages a [native Chinese] teacher, who is his special tool for attaining the end. The teacher is at the student’s disposal all day and a part of the evening, if the student has the physical strength and the perseverance to work so hard. The teacher knows
not a word of the student’s mother tongue; and the student knows no Chinese. They sit down at the beginning of Wade: the teacher pronounces, the student tries to imitate him. At first, the learner’s vocal organs are not able to utter the novel sounds he hears, and his ear is unable to detect the famous distinctions of the ‘four tones.’ But day by day he acquires a little; and he will succeed at last . . . the laborious, humdrum, tiresome, repetitions . . . are absolutely essential.46

Hillier warned students in the proposed Harvard course that they should not expect the Chinese teacher to carry the same level of qualifications as their instructors in other foreign languages at Harvard because ‘I have never yet met a Chinese who was qualified to assume such a position. It must be remembered that he professes to teach his own language, the colloquial part of which he has acquired intuitively, with no knowledge of any other language whatever. He cannot therefore appreciate the difference between the construction, sounds, or other peculiarities of his own language and that of other countries, nor can he tell where to begin, never having had occasion to learn [emphasis original] a new tongue himself’.47 Hillier concluded that Harvard students needed to be autonomous learners (Du 2013). He wrote, ‘The pupil must therefore lead the tutor, who, for some time at least, is, or should be, a mere automaton in his hands’.48 Hillier was prescient in training students to become responsible for their own learning simply because teachers did not have the skills, methods, or strategies for helping learners overcome linguistic challenges specific to the Chinese language.

In the context of Yale, if Williams had taught his Chinese language course, he would have been teaching without Chinese teaching assistants, a less ideal instructional model than the one in China, where Western students could practice with native Chinese teachers and use Chinese regularly to meet the needs of everyday life. Nowhere within the correspondence regarding the settling of Williams’ appointment at Yale, is there any practical discussion about course design or instructional materials. The lack of discussion in these areas indicates that the university assumed that Williams, as a sinologist and arguably the top authority in the US on the Chinese language and civilization at the time, would instinctually know how to teach Chinese in the US. Such teaching in the US, however, would likely pose a different set of challenges for a non-native Chinese teacher due to the lack of linguistic environment whereby students could use the target language. In the nineteenth century it was not easy to find native Chinese teaching assistants; in fact, the teacher himself might gradually lose his own Chinese language fluency.

After more Westerners started mastering the Chinese language, the instructional model that evolved consisted of having a non-native acting as the master teacher who would design curriculum and learning goals for students, explain vocabulary and grammar usage, and answer students’ questions in the students’ native language, alongside Chinese teachers/tutors who would practice Chinese as much as possible with the students. This team-teaching arrangement where non-native (Williams) and native (Ko) speakers could work together would have been the ideal instructional model for Harvard’s Scheme, according to Robert Hart (1835–1911), the Inspector General of Chinese Imperial Customs and a highly influential Westerner in China.49 However, since Williams had been appointed at Yale, this arrangement was not an option. Yet Knight’s Scheme to hire a native speaker of Chinese was not a random decision. He argued that since the course was offered in the US, and not China, a native Chinese teacher could provide authentic models in Chinese to prepare students for interacting with Chinese when they arrive in China. Even though native teachers were not professionally trained, Knight saw the potential of Ko as a native teaching Chinese. He also believed that a native Chinese teacher with guidance on the best practices in language teaching could become a very effective teacher. Ko’s appointment thus
marked the beginning of, and the first attempt at, educating a native Chinese teacher to become a foreign-language teaching professional.

All this said, Hart also had concerns about hiring a native Chinese to teach at Harvard, because in his view, knowing how to speak Chinese does not automatically qualify a native Chinese to be a language teacher—even if the native teacher candidate is a scholar. Hart rightfully pointed out that the lack of qualifications of native teachers at that time had less to do with their scholarship than with their understanding of the profession as a language teacher. To Hart, a qualified candidate should have ‘an idea of what the foreigner wishes to learn, and . . . the patience and the method that will enable him to teach . . . [and] the dialect he can teach [should be] the dialect the individual student will desire to learn . . . ’50 Hart further noted that it is not a good idea to hire a Chinese literati to be a language teacher because no such person would tolerate ‘work involving the dreariest and most monotonous reiteration in the case of every individual pupil during several hours a day for several years!’51 Above all, Hart thought a candidate equipped with effective teaching methods was essential. He concluded that ‘I should on the whole expect better results from men studying in America under Dr. Williams without a Chinese assistant, than from their studying there under an unassisted and unsupervised Chinese: for with the Chinaman, it will be a meaningless scramble, while, with Dr. Williams, there would have been method and measure’.52 On the surface Hart’s comments on Chinese teachers may sound indelicate and biased; however, Hart was prescient in evaluating the Scheme from the learners’ language learning perspective. His underlying concerns about teacher qualifications as a profession in relation to the Scheme’s language learning environment and resources are still relevant today.

Goh (2017) argues that non-native teachers’ understanding of the native language paired with their comprehension of the learners’ culture can provide valuable insights in helping the field understand how Chinese is acquired. Increasing the field’s understanding of Chinese language acquisition was an effort made in hopes of bettering the design of effective teaching materials and methods from the perspective of second language learners while elucidating nuances between the native language and the target language. Their understanding of learners’ perspectives also led Liu and Fu (2018) in their qualitative study where they interviewed six non-native Chinese teachers to conclude that the field needs to cultivate more non-native teachers who serve as role models for learners. The two historic appointments nonetheless reveal the importance of establishing professionalism for both native and non-native teachers. It is true that native and non-native teachers bring different qualities to the table. A more crucial issue however, as eloquently demonstrated by Ko’s case, is that teachers, regardless of their background, should pursue ongoing professional development to cultivate their qualifications to become more effective and competent language teaching professionals. By pursuing ongoing professional development, teachers can better meet their students’ needs in the contemporary context of teaching and learning Chinese as a foreign language (McDonald 2011).

Conclusion: Design of 21st Century Language Program

We mentioned earlier that Yale’s course was offered in a graduate program which was designed to train students to become sinologists. Unlike the course at Yale, the Harvard course focused on applicability, especially for future professionals seeking work in China. Two elements distinguished it from the Yale course: (1) it linked language learning with career and proficiency goals as soon as students embarked on their language learning endeavor, and (2) solid domestic training in the language accompanied training toward an undergraduate degree in a chosen professional domain (Bettencourt 2012). Students would go abroad for more advanced language
study and work in their professional domain at the same time, much like the current Flagship programs in the United States.

Drew wrote in a letter to Eliot supporting Knight’s career-oriented language learning plan: ‘That inducements of a tangible and immediate nature should be found to tempt men to study Chinese—this is the vital breath which will make the same scheme live’. He explained that, ‘the pleasure [in the acquisition of Chinese] affords to keep any but a most exceptional human being up to the work for more than three months, unless he works for a definite object, with a definite appointment secured to him beforehand’. The insight from Drew’s comments is consistent with current motivation theories of second language learning (e.g. Chambers 1999; Dornyei 2005), namely that adult language learners will be more motivated and therefore more likely to sustain the tedious language learning process, if language study is connected to a purpose, and in particular a professional pursuit.

In establishing a new language program for college students, especially for a language that is not commonly known to potential learners, merely offering language courses is not enough to stimulate their initial interest nor will it sustain any sort of long-term motivation. Language programs must help students visualize a clear pathway with set goals at each learning stage. Students should be able to articulate for themselves the purpose for learning the language and justify their investment in time and effort as it relates to their overall college education. To this end, a college language program design that links language study to a real purpose maximizes the value of language programs (Leaver and Shekhtman 2002). Language study content that is connected with students’ professional domain choices (usually their majors) would better motivate students to make a commitment to study the language for four years in college and beyond (Wen 1997; Yang 2003).

Today’s college language programs also can gain insights from the design of Knight’s Scheme that combines domestic and abroad training where students receive three years of domestic training then go to China for language, culture, and work immersion. There is a wealth of research regarding the effects of study abroad when it comes to learning Chinese as a second language (Kubler 1997; Tseng 2006; Kim, Baker-Smemoe and Westover 2015; Kinginger, Wu and Lee 2018). In particular, two research findings concerning Flagship programs suggest that if language learners go abroad after they achieve intermediate-high level proficiency and stay abroad for an extended period of time (a semester or a year), there are greater outcomes in language and culture acquisition than if they had stayed in their home country (Davidson 2010). Study abroad designed for linguistic, academic, and cultural immersion is especially beneficial to the development of superior proficiency (Jing-Schmidt, Zhang and Chen 2016).

The Language Flagship initiative in the US has a similar design to Knight’s Scheme for American college students. Flagship training includes domestic and abroad components. Flagship domestic programs provide quality language instruction to help students reach advanced proficiency in the target language. This program design allows students to study the target language alongside other academic pursuits. Flagship students who meet the benchmarks may apply to study and work abroad for a full year in a Flagship Capstone program. At Capstone, students receive rigorous language training, culture immersion and internship work related to their professional domain, in the target language. The goal of Flagship is to achieve professional-level language proficiency, defined as Superior level based on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages proficiency scale, which is Level C for The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages.

Part of the original impetus for Knight to create the Harvard’s Scheme was to better serve American national interests in China because at the same time, learners benefit when they have a tangible purpose (be it an occupation, or simply one’s love for the language) that encourages
them to develop advanced language skills. In a sense, the program design of the short-lived Harvard educational scheme has come to fruition in The Language Flagship model. If today’s college language programs hope to attract, motivate, and promote the enormous potential of foreign language learning the adoption of this model is certainly worth consideration (Nugent and Slater 2016).

Thanks to the accumulation of research findings in applied linguistics, second language acquisition, cognitive psychology and neuroscience, paired with the development of technologies designed to facilitate language teaching and learning, many previously unimaginable teaching and learning resources are now available to us. However, the fundamental issues in teaching and learning Chinese that were of concern in the nineteenth century with regard to curricula, instruction and teacher qualifications are still relevant today. In addition to improving these aspects of Chinese language programs, due to the dwindling enrollment of Chinese language learners, it is now more important than ever to reflect on the goals and purposes of each program design while setting high the language learning standards which make Chinese programs competitive. Once the directions and standards are set, programs can better work out implementation plans and assess results to optimize teaching and learning.

Converging experiences of the nineteenth century Harvard educational scheme and the twenty-first century Flagship program indicate that language programs must link language study with students’ goals if they hope to use and live the language while studying abroad. In concrete terms, this requires a curriculum which addresses students’ learning needs in accordance with specific proficiency targets that need to be achieved at each stage. Having a plan to regularly assess students’ proficiency helps both teachers and students reach the most advanced learning targets. By describing the first blueprint of teaching Chinese as a foreign language to American college students in the nineteenth century, this chapter is intended to be instructive to our efforts in promoting US Chinese language programs that effectively prepare American college graduates for today’s interconnected world.

Notes


2 Born in Utica, New York, Mrs E.T. Throop Martin (Cornelia Williams Martin) was the wife of Enos Thompson Throop Martin (1808–1883), the governor of New York from 1830 to 1833. A philanthropist and strong supporter of missionary enterprise to China, Japan, India, and the Pacific Islands, Mrs Throop Martin donated the first set of movable font for Chinese characters to Williams for his printing needs.

3 Williams Papers: Letter from Gilman to Williams on April 30, 1873.

4 Ibid. Letter from Dana to Williams on September 5, 1875.

5 Ibid. Letter from Williams to Dana on February 29, 1876.

6 Ibid. Letter from Williams to Dana on March 15, 1876.

7 Ibid. Letter on February 2, 1876 from Hamilton Fish to Williams. While inquiring about the possibilities of the position at Yale, Williams worked on a backup plan to obtain a leave of absence from the State Department so if the professorship did not work out he could return to his post in China. The State Department response was negative. In a February 2, 1876 letter, US Secretary of State Hamilton Fish (1808–1893) stated that they could not grant Williams another leave and that they would appoint a new interpreter to replace him.

8 Henry Blodget (1825–1903) was a missionary in Peking and a good friend of Williams. (Williams spelled the last name as Blodgett.)

9 Williams Papers: Letter from Williams to Blodget on May 7, 1877.

10 Ibid. Letter from Dexter to Williams on June 30, 1877.

11 Ibid.
Throughout these years Williams continued to care about China affairs. He published *Chinese Immigration* in 1878 to make arguments against the Chinese Exclusion Act. Yale’s president and faculty thus wrote petitions to the Congress in protest of the Chinese Exclusion Act. Williams donated money and urged others to do so to help the Northern Chinese Famine that occurred during 1876–1879.

Charles Eliot (1834–1926) became Harvard’s president in 1869 and served for 40 years until 1909. At the time, Harvard was an all-men’s college and the focus of learning was classics and theology. Eliot wanted to expand its classical curriculum to an education that offered a variety of courses, including world languages, sciences, politics, and economics. He hired faculty worldwide and recruited the best young male students across the country. He also held high standards for entrance and graduation requirements and denounced the old recitation learning methods, focusing instead on performance-based instruction.


In the letter on March 12, 1869 to Mr Nye, Williams indicated that ‘We have not a single consul (except the one in Tientsin) who can speak an idiomatic sentence in Chinese, and our government has no idea of educating any, or of paying aught for bringing forward students of the language’. See Frederick Williams (1889: 377).

Ko Kun-hua Papers: Eliot to Knight on March 10, 1877.

Harvard President Annual Reports (1878–1879:46)

The Chinese title of this book is 华質英文. The book has several poems from Ko’s earlier poetry collection and eleven poems written after he came to the United States.


Almira Hayward ‘A Chinese Professor’ in *Our Continent* (October 1882: 464).

The books that Ko brought to Harvard to support the Chinese language course were the first collection of the Harvard-Yenching Library.


Li-yen Tzu-erh Chi, was written by Thomas Wade (1818–1895), published in 1867. It has a volume for studying colloquial Chinese (Beijing court dialect), referred to as *Colloquial Chinese*, and a volume entitled Wen-chien Tzu-erh Chi, for studying documents written by the officials of China. Thomas Wade was a famous British missionary, diplomat, and sinologist who became in 1888 the first Chinese professor at Cambridge University. Thomas Wade developed the Wade-Giles Romanization system with Herbert Giles, popular in the nineteenth century.

Ko Kun-hua Papers: Hillier to Knight, January 28, 1879.

Ibid.

*The Harvard Register* (1880:166).

For Americans to work in China in the nineteenth century, knowing what career path they were seeking before studying Chinese was important because it would determine the choice of the dialect (spoken language) they should learn. At that time, China did not have an official language and different dialects were spoken in treaty ports. Generally speaking, the Beijing dialect was useful for work at the consulate or the Imperial Customs Service; for merchants and missionaries, they should study the dialect of their residence.

51 Ko Kun-hua Papers: Letter from Hart to Knight, August 4, 1879.
52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
55 The Language Flagship (www.thelanguageflagship.org) is a program in National Security Education Program (NSEP) in the US. Currently there are 12 Chinese Flagship programs funded by NSEP.
56 Nowadays many college language programs only offer lower-level Chinese. If professional proficiency is required for using Chinese in the workplace, college Chinese language programs must design four-year curricula for their students to achieve superior-level proficiency before they graduate.

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