



Statement of the Fachverband Chinesisch e.V. (Association of Chinese Teachers in German Speaking Countries) on the new HSK Chinese Proficiency Test

The Fachverband welcomes the new HSK Chinese Proficiency Test that was published by the People's Republic of China (PRC) earlier this year, especially insofar as it certifies elementary knowledge of Chinese for beginners with a vocabulary of 150 to 300 lexical units on the basis of the *Hanyu Pinyin* transcription system. It thus serves as a valuable motivator for students of Chinese.

However, in the interests of a proper and realistic assessment of Chinese language proficiency, we at the Fachverband Chinesisch, after examining the documents, consider it our duty to categorically deny the linking between the new HSK levels, as set out in the official HSK documents, and those of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR):

At present, the vocabulary size required for level A1 in all foreign languages is about 500 lexical units, for A2 about 1,000, for level B1 about 2,000¹. The new HSK suggests that just one-third of this vocabulary size would be needed to achieve the same levels of proficiency.

The official data given by the Hanban envisage that level B2 (HSK 4) will be reached after just 2 years of learning with 2-4 hours of lessons per week (160-320 hours). These figures are out of the question, even for European languages. In this context we would like to refer once again to the resolution taken by the Fachverband in 2005, according to which we estimated that between 1,200 and 1,600 hours of instruction (+ private study time) are required to attain oral and written proficiency in Chinese that is comparable to level B2.

In order to achieve proficiency levels as defined by the CEFR for Chinese, considerably broader skills are needed than are stipulated by the new HSK. Based on our experience of teaching Chinese in schools and universities over many decades, we at the Fachverband Chinesisch make the case for a different correspondence between the CEFR and the levels of the new HSK:

¹ Note: "Lexical units" cannot be equated with "characters". The number of Chinese characters used, e.g., for 2,500 lexical units in the textbook *New Practical Chinese Reader* vols. 1-4 amounts to ca. 1,200.

Levels of the new HSK Size of vocabulary	CEFR levels assumed in HSK documents	Equivalent CEFR levels determined by Fachverband
New HSK level 1 150 lexical units (<i>Hanyu Pinyin</i> only)	(A1)	None
New HSK level 2 300 lexical units (<i>Hanyu Pinyin</i> only)	(A2)	A1.1. (without knowledge of written characters)
New HSK level 3 600 lexical units	(B1)	A1
New HSK level 4 1,200 lexical units	(B2)	A2
New HSK level 5 2,500 lexical units	(C1)	B1
New HSK level 6 Over 5,000 lexical units	(C2)	B2

The Fachverband Chinesisch considers that the CEFR standards for Chinese proficiency set by the HSK officials are counterproductive in the effort to develop an adequate appreciation in Europe of the depth and complexity of the Chinese language.

We are of one mind with our colleagues in China that in Germany and in Europe more and broader Chinese knowledge must be taught. This objective must be underpinned, however, by consistent scientific standards from foreign language acquisition research.

In the light of test results with the new HSK we recommend that the benchmarks of the Fachverband Chinesisch, as set out in the right-hand column of the table above, are adopted by all sides in the interests of a realistic assessment of Chinese language proficiency and for the development of course programmes and the implementation of Chinese teaching in schools.

Berlin/Germersheim, June 1, 2010
Executive board of Fachverband Chinesisch e.V.