

I tutored four students for this year's COLT poetry recitation contest. Three of them won medals.

Alex and Sofia are my Chinese enrichment students from University of Hartford High School for Science and Engineering. Joe and Christine are not my regular students, but I agreed to tutor them for the contest.

Alex and Sofia from the University of Hartford High School represented University High and Champion Chinese International School. Christine and Joe from Renbrook School both represented the Renbrook School. Alex has won a Gold medal of High School beginning Chinese group. Sofia and Christine have individually won a Bronze medal for high school beginning Chinese group and high school native speaking intermediate group. Joe, a very bright and sweet tempered young man, forgot one line in the contest, and he did not win this time. However, to me, to him and to his family, he is a winner. He won because of his optimistic attitude and he won because of his determination to succeed next time. "I did not win, but I have been enjoying the whole thing. Thank you so much Mrs. Champion for giving me this chance to broaden my world. I want to lean Chinese, I want to learn it well. I promise that next time I will study my BoPoMo to solidify my foundation." Joe said to me cheerfully after the recitation.

I did not expect these wonderful results, but I do have confidence in my teaching methods. I know that once my students decide to learn the Chinese language they can succeed if they follow my program consistently and with seriousness of purpose.

I originally gave poems written in traditional characters noted only in the Romanized Hanyu Pinyin sounding symbols to my students at the beginning because I was not sure if they could memorize the phonetic Zhuyin/ BoPoMo sounding symbols that I was just beginning to teach them. I was worried that after hours of training them they would still not be able to conquer the phonic confusion between the Pinyin and English. Intonation and pronunciation issues were impossible to be corrected in just a few hours, actually in most cases, this takes months or years. I "begged" them to spend two hours listening to my CDs and reading my book so that we could continue to practice with fewer difficulties. Alex and Sofia did, and they were different kids when they returned to me. Joe had too much to do just then. He skipped the CDs and stuck with the Pinyin system. I told him that if he did not miss any lines and if he had a chance to sing the poem instead of reciting it, he would have a chance to win a medal. (People usually can get away with mistakes in tones and pronunciation when singing, and Joe has an incredible wonderful voice.)

Alex once asked me while I was tutoring him for the contest: "Mrs. Champion, I was wondering why you do this for me and for your other students? You did not get any pay! What is the benefit for you and for me?" "I have never thought about myself. The only thing that I care about is to help my students, especially the ones with a desire to succeed who then have a chance to explore Chinese and culture. I know that the knowledge that I give them will enrich their vision and spirit, and most of all, will open another door for their future plans. I did not expect any reward but hope to give all my students the best. You might not be able to see the results or even have an award right away; however, please trust me, just do your best and let me help you." He looked at me very sincerely. I smiled and continued "And, believe it or not, you and Sofia and my other students, you all, because of your success, good will and your American spirit, might one day be the saviors of my endangered language and five thousand years of culture of Chinese people."

“I, Sofia and all your students will write letters to Senator Lieberman and our governor. We want American students to have a chance to learn the “real” Chinese language and have a thorough understanding about Chinese culture. We not only want to communicate with people from mainland China, we need to communicate with Chinese people outside of mainland China. Chinese traditional script and Chinese culture are just too precious to be damaged or destroyed. We will help you to raise the awareness of American people. We need to go to radio and TV stations. We need to tell people that Chinese can be learned very easily and most of all very interestingly. Of course, only follow Mrs. Champion’s instruction!” He said it so sincerely and with seriousness and determination, and a very cute smile on his face. My eyes turned red and become speechless...!

We did not have the privilege to become a regular part of the curriculum. I only met with Alex and Sofia for about thirty minute a week (sometimes a month), and we probably had less than ten hours of class all together. However, because the way, the method and material that I use to approach teaching them the language, they have had a relatively easy, relaxing and wonderful time learning it.

My language is being Romanized and my precious thousands of years’ traditional Chinese characters are being simplified into illogical and abstract symbols. I try every thing to help my students easily, quickly, effectively and interestingly be exposed to my beloved traditional form of written language and culture, and hopeful, helping them understanding the Pinyin and simplified characters at the same time will keep my traditional script and culture alive.

I love my students, those sincere, enthusiastic, kind-hearted and hard-working young men and young ladies. Their determination to learn, to succeed and to help is the source of my inspiration, motivation and courage. They are the media that will lead American to a successful global communication. They are the hope of Chinese-the most fashionable yet the only survival ancient written language still commonly in use. They are the hope of the survival of Chinese culture, and, they are my Chinese language Champions!

Zhuyin/BoPoMo symbols are the most fundamental elements and the best short-cut to help our students learn Chinese pronunciation and both the traditional and the simplified written characters.

#### **About the author:**

Pei-Pei Champion is the creator of Champion Chinese© program and author of Champion Chinese Sounding Systems & Pronunciation (a.k.a. Champion BoPoMo & Hanyu Pinyin). She is the Chair and principal teacher of Champion Chinese International School, an enrichment Chinese language teacher at the Greater Hartford Classical Magnet School, and voluntary Chinese language instructor at several schools in Connecticut including University of Hartford High School of Science and Engineering, Renbrook School and West Hartford Continuing Education.

For more information about the Champion Chinese Program, Champion Chinese Language Institute and Pei-Pei Champion, please visit:

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Ms. Champion can be reached at: [peipeichampion@yahoo.com](mailto:peipeichampion@yahoo.com)