



Chinese Language Learning

Online Chinese teaching materials

Background

Whilst working for Oxford University Peter designed and developed a set of online learning tools for the Institute of Chinese Studies. These were developed as part of a 3 year programme to promote teaching Chinese as a foreign language.

Brief

To develop a website which would enable teaching materials to be grouped into lessons. These would include:

- Video materials, illustrating language concepts
- Quizzes to test knowledge and provide hints and tips on language use
- Animated Chinese characters, demonstrating character construction
- Audio playback of characters
- Interactive Quiz to test knowledge of character stroke order

Particularly important was the interactive character drawing elements of the application, as Western students find this part of learning the Chinese language most challenging.

Approach

It was important to deliver a solution that allowed non technical staff to develop and upload content without having to be concerned with any technical aspects of the website.

After agreeing the requirements with the Chinese institute, regular review meetings were held to assess prototypes and incorporate feedback. Project management, content developers and technical staff were all involved in review meetings. Support was provided after initial development to ensure content developers understood the Content Management system (CMS) and could give feedback about future enhancements.

Solutions

Key features of the application

- Three styles of exercise were developed: Multiple choice, Question and Answer and Character drawing exercise
- Content was managed in a bespoke content management system (CMS) written in CGI & Perl
- Chinese character animation was developed using a bespoke Java Applet, based on files accessed through the CMS
- Assessment was made of the suitability of (then) emerging vector based formats to display Chinese characters (SVG)

Outcomes

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The website successfully went live to support teaching of the Chinese Language both at Oxford and on the web. The application was further packaged on a DVD and distributed standalone to learning centres across the UK.