

# *A Tentative Approach to Better Chinese Culture Cultivation for International Students Based on Cultural Multi-dimensionality*

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**Abstract:** Chinese culture has attracted more attention from all over the world with the rapid economic development of China. Culture has attributes of multi-dimensions such as unconsciousness, history, experience and creativity. Based on the multi-dimensional attributes, this paper discusses the specific ways to promote Chinese cultural education for international students as follows: the improvement of course contents through integration of traditional culture and contemporary civilization, the enhancement of convergence management policy, the integration of cultural experience and construction process, and the combination of inheritance and creation in the education process. With the English-instructed course of Chinese Culture as a case, it probes into the main problems faced by curriculum teaching, and comes up with the corresponding solutions toward effects of the teaching reform. It hopes its findings can have some valuable implications for the teaching reform of relevant Chinese culture courses.

## 1. Introduction

Culture recorded series of important and continued reactions of human kind on historical changes of society and political lives [1]. According to Eagleton (2000), culture has meaning from artistic works representing thoughts to comprehension of living style and custom [2]. It is recognized to be the basic power to determine the potential and competitiveness of a country, and conversely, the enhancement of competitiveness of the country will also promote the influence of its culture.

With the development of Chinese economy and the improvement of overall national competitiveness, Chinese culture becomes increasingly popular as a part of world culture, serving not only as an absorber but a disseminator. The route of cultural dissemination is recognized to experience changes from official ways of diplomatic activities to unofficial ways of folk communication. In terms of the latter way, international students are thought to be one of the most important intermediary agents. In Tang Dynasty, a large number of Japanese serving as envoys

were sent to China for cultural exchange, which promoted the further dissemination of Chinese culture in Japan. In the first half of the 20th century, the cross-cultural exchanges between China and the West was also carried on by Chinese students studying abroad due to their profound knowledge of Chinese and Western studies and cultural awareness [3]. In recent years, the volume of foreign students coming to China has grown rapidly, the scale of which exceeded 400,000 in 2019. Most of overseas students will encounter Oberg's cultural shock in the initial stage of enrollment, because they are faced with conflicts of values and changes in their living habits [4]. This objectively provides an inherent need for international students to learn Chinese culture. Therefore, how to effectively carry out Chinese cultural cultivation is both a pivotal task for the international student education and a valuable mission of promoting world cultural exchanges.

Culture is the soul of a nation, while cultural confidence is a more fundamental, profound and lasting power. Hitherto, there are numerous literature paying attention to "cultural confidence", exploring the theoretical evidence, practical basis and approaches of enhancing cultural confidence, aiming at self-improvement or coping with culture shock from abroad. Liu (2016) points out that cultural confidence functions as the psychological support in dealing with the heterogeneous cultural conflicts and integration over the world [5]. Meanwhile, these previous studies acknowledge that "cultural confidence" needs the opening-up instead of enclosure. Qu (2016) argues that Chinese culture must go outside and makes contributions to world cultures [6]. Concerning how to strengthen cultural confidence in cultural exchanges and interactions and introduce Chinese culture to the whole world, Shi (2017) puts up specific methods to new cultural communication approaches, and suggests both traditional and modern media to improve Chinese culture's communication effects [7]. Wang (1993) argues that culture is a kind of soft power, whose core lies in its dissemination [8].

According to the teaching plans, international students in China need to take courses such as "Comprehensive Chinese" and "China Overview". These courses will naturally help international students to understand and familiarize themselves with Chinese culture. However, culture has multi-dimensional characteristics such as unconsciousness, history, experience, and creativity, which determine that the education of Chinese culture is not as simple as offering a few courses, but should be a systematic project.

Based on the inherent attributes of culture, this paper explores the attributes of the four dimensions of culture, and analyzes routes to improve Chinese cultural education for international students. Finally, taking the course of Chinese Culture as a case, it discusses the existing problems in teaching and comes up with the strategy of teaching reform with focus on its implementation effects.

## **2. Intrinsic Attributes of Culture**

### **2.1. The Unconsciousness of Culture**

Unconsciousness lies in the deep part of human consciousness. From Freud's Individual Unconsciousness to Jung's Collective Unconsciousness, and then from Lacan's Theory of the Other to Fromm's Social Unconsciousness Theory, the unconsciousness rules human behavior at different levels [9]. From the Freud's view of human's instinct derivative unconsciousness, Jung argues that the collective unconsciousness comes from spiritual inheritance during human evolution. The collective unconsciousness derives from the collective experiences instead of individual experience, and once it is formed, it will influence the behaviors of later generations deeply. During the process, language is recognized by the Theory of the other to be the essence of unconsciousness.

Further, it is universally acknowledged that culture has a high degree of unconsciousness which is connected closely with collective consciousness and social consciousness. The culture in the form

of value, custom and belief always hides behind unconsciousness. There is no denying that language bears lots of information of culture. And people under such culture have been accustomed to it so that they may be unaware of its existence, even though they are enormously influenced by it. Therefore, when it comes to Chinese cultural education, international students need to be put in the overall context of the Chinese language and collective activities. At present, many colleges and universities have not yet adopted the same management approach for Chinese and international students alike. The social circles of international students, known as sub-cultural circles are relatively isolated from counterparts of Chinese students. Due to the lack of daily communication with Chinese students, it finds that international students not only are slow in the improvement of Chinese language ability, but also lack the sense of identity with Chinese culture, which imply that the teaching reform of international students are of urgency.

## **2.2. The Historicity of Culture**

The connotation of culture is extremely diverse and profound. The collective and social unconsciousness of culture also define the historical feature of culture. China has five thousand years of shining civilization history and traditional culture. They are not only the knowledge of personal morality and accomplishment, but also reflect wisdom in national governance. As for cultural teaching, traditional culture is undoubtedly an important part of courses, because it represents a view of life, values of harmony between mankind and society, and has lasting vitality. But looking further, culture has historical attributes. Under different historical stages, there are significant differences in economic and social structures. The evolving economic and social structures make culture change simultaneously. In the past thousands of years, the evolution of China's economic and social structures is generally slow, giving Chinese culture enough time to adjust systematically and thus it becomes an important part of world civilization. However, in the short period of 40 years since China's reform and opening up, contemporary China has achieved remarkable and rapid development in the fields of economy, politics, ecology, etc., and at the same time, its culture has also formed dazzling excellence. The historical process progresses at such a fast speed that the new culture and civilization are to some extent unparalleled to be extracted timely and precisely, i.e. the summary and refinement of outstanding civilization achievements are relatively lagging behind.

## **2.3. Cultural Experience**

Culture has rational characteristics and is often a collection of a series of symbols, which exist in the form of knowledge. This type of knowledge can be easily coded and spreaded, so cultural learning can be completed in the way of lectures given by teachers in a classroom. However, culture is extremely complicated, and the codified knowledge cannot fully fulfil the entire cultural communication. Conversely, cultures have obvious non-coded intuition characteristics, so the dissemination needs to be completed through experiences. This characteristic brings multiple demands. The first is the need of face-to-face communication. The emotional expression, behavior and habits of interpersonal interaction need to be realized in the face-to-face interaction. The second is the need of repeated experience. Cultural perception is a repeated experience process, through which a stable cultural memory can be formed. The third is to guide and direct demands. In cultural exchanges and repeated experiences, cultural learners may not be able to fully understand the essence of culture. They need to be fully guided and directed by teachers to complete the process of cultural recognition, so as to achieve the goal of complete cognition and understanding of culture.

## 2.4. Cultural Creativity

The perceptual culture is an attribute hidden in the national group, which evolves with economic and social changes and has no creativity in itself. But as a rational culture expressed by abstract symbols, the formation and development of culture are in a creative process. As a form and carrier of cultural expression, cultural products naturally have creative attributes. Whether rational culture or cultural product, the embodied creativity requires a pioneering and innovative spirit in the process of cultural inheritance and development. It is not advisable to insist on the immutability of traditional culture. What should be insisted is to treat traditional culture in a critical and inherited manner. The inheritance of Chinese culture is by no means simply to restore the ancient ways, nor to be blindly exclusive.

## 3. The Specific Path for the Promotion of Chinese Culture Education

### 3.1. Integration of Traditional Culture and Contemporary Civilization

At present, there are two main problems in the teaching of Chinese culture for international students in China. One is insufficiency of resources of teaching. Due to restrictions of faculties and expenditure, traditional cultural courses such as *Chinese Painting and Calligraphy*, *Chinese Etiquette and Music* have not been widely offered. So students' interests in learning Chinese culture cannot be satisfied. The other is that the attention paid to the contemporary civilization is relatively insufficient. The outstanding achievements of civilization derived from the development of contemporary China are not adequately summarized and extracted in time.

To solve these problems, the Chinese culture education can be approached from the following three aspects.

Firstly, more credits are required for Chinese culture education. More time should be allocated to the courses, for it will not only allow teachers to provide detailed explanations of Chinese stories, Chinese society and Chinese philosophy, but also make the audience have more access to experience Chinese culture. Secondly, the system of curriculum and teaching for international students is worth to be established, including a list of cultural courses with consistency and diversity. Meanwhile a group of excellent teachers with bilingual ability is supposed to be constructed. Thirdly, a group of high-quality online interactive courses should also be created. Online learning resources can integrate knowledge dissemination, cultural appreciation, and interactive experience. Students will have more options for learning in case of the establishment of mechanism for mutual identification of course credits between different colleges and universities.

Regarding contemporary civilization, teachers are required to summarize and refine the achievements in the fields of Chinese government governance, China's new rural construction, and China's modern business mode. Through continuously updating teaching contents, the knowledge system of contemporary civilization will be constructed. As for the solutions in the face of the paradox that the achievements of contemporary civilization have not yet been fully summarized and refined, students can be guided to learn through specific topic discussions, field investigations and other thematic courses to form a better understanding of contemporary China. These courses and thematic learning resources based on the close observation of contemporary civilization are vivid examples and experience. They belong to Chinese nation, and are also worthy of reference for the world.

### **3.2. Active Promotion of Convergence Management Policy**

In the early stage, international students were generally treated as a special group. Due to relatively separate living circles, they always lack sufficient opportunities to interact with Chinese students and have no access to be fully immersed in the atmosphere of Chinese culture. So they cannot acquire the unconsciousness feature of Chinese culture, let alone to understand and merge into it.

To solve these problems, taking into account objective differences, the overall realization of the education goal convergence, education process convergence and education mechanism convergence are needed. To achieve these goals, the measures such as sharing classes, participating in club activities and social events should be taken. These diverse activities could enhance the exchanges between international students and Chinese students, allowing them to deeply experience Chinese culture, understand Chinese culture, identify with Chinese culture, and achieve the goal of Chinese culture education in an unconscious way.

### **3.3. Full Integration of Cultural Experience and Construction Process**

Due to the limited class hours, current Chinese culture courses generally are knowledge-based, ignoring cultural experiences and constructive characteristics. The direct experiences provide students perceptions through sensory organs and enable them to generate projected memories in the form of pictures instead of abstract symbols. A series of Chinese cultural experience activities will then be more conducive for international students to understand Chinese culture, and then spread Chinese culture spontaneously.

The routes of such experience can be diversified, either by inviting experts in the cultural field to offer experiential special courses, such as tea performance and tea culture, or by organizing international students to go out of campus and participate in special Chinese culture trips, investigations or research activities. In short, through the organic combination of the cultural courses in the classroom and the cultural experience activities in the field trips, the level of international students' independent construction of Chinese culture can be improved from both cultural rationality and cultural sensuality.

### **3.4. Combination of Inheritance and Creation in the Education Process**

Guiding international students to absorb Chinese culture is not equal to simply letting them wear Hanfu (Traditional Chinese costume) or teaching them sing Peking Opera. Truly, traditional Chinese culture is naturally an important part of culture education. But it is not the whole story. The misunderstanding of taking traditional culture as the whole of Chinese culture may cause cognitive illusion, which in turn might lead to misunderstanding of China's current development. On the contrary, on the basis of cultural creation, new cultural contents and cultural forms should be initiated, which are closer to the contemporary Chinese civilization, and help to reduce barriers in the cross-cultural communication between China and foreign countries, as well as lower the cost of cultural dissemination. In this process, various strategies can be taken, such as organizing and carrying out a variety of cultural activities, and guiding international students to rationally reprocess and create Chinese culture based on their own cultural background through independent construction, so as to absorb and understand Chinese culture.

## **4. Teaching Reform of Chinese Culture Curriculum – A Case Study**

*Chinese Culture* is a very popular course for international students in China. This course showcases Chinese culture from many aspects such as Chinese philosophy, literature, language, history,

Chinese art, Chinese cuisine, and Chinese costumes. The content of the course includes both theoretical explanations and interesting stories. In the teaching of the course, we have taken corresponding reform measures based on the concept of constructivism to improve teaching quality.

#### 4.1. The Main Problems of the Course

There are two main problems in the teaching of *Chinese Culture*. The first is the contradiction between the inherent abstraction of culture and the concreteness of cultural communication. The inherent abstraction of culture has brought great difficulties for international students to understand. Only by transforming the abstract contents into the concrete practices can the international students truly understand and identify with Chinese culture. The second is the contradiction between the richness of cultural connotation and the lack of teaching hours. The insufficiency of course hours makes it difficult for teachers to complete teaching tasks and also makes it hard for students to attain the learning objectives.

#### 4.2. Strategies to Solve the Problem

(1) Telling stories in the teaching process for easy understanding. Interesting stories given by teachers can deal with cultural abstraction problems, enhance the fun of cultural explanations and the penetrating power of communication, and improve the quality of course teaching. In the classroom teaching, teachers start from explaining classic stories and then lead students to think immersively. After further interactive discussions on specific topics, teachers will give summaries by refining the corresponding cultural connotations and cultural knowledge points. In the extracurricular learning session, teachers will enrich reading story materials, interactive discussion questions for extracurricular reading references.

(2) Designing diverse scenes for cultural experience. Scene reproduction will be used to guide students to experience Chinese culture. For classroom teaching experiences, teachers design sitcoms to allow students to perform participatory role-playing and guide them to comprehend Chinese culture well. For extracurricular experiences, in conjunction with the campus' activities for international students, we will organize some extracurricular activities on traditional cultural themes to help students to build full understandings of Chinese culture, and we will also arrange field trips and exchange activities on contemporary Zhejiang topics. Teachers will provide supplementary explanations and guidance to help them to fully recognize contemporary Chinese civilization and contemporary culture. Moreover, the online virtual experience can not be ignored nowadays. Videos about traditional culture and contemporary civilization will be specially made for students to watch after class, which will bring about cloud travel experiences.

#### 4.3. Teaching Effect

In the teaching of *Chinese Culture*, according to the inherent attributes of the culture itself, corresponding teaching reforms have been adopted to make the course more interesting, so the class can get better by attracting more students to participate.

(1) Students are more motivated to learn Chinese culture. Teaching in the form of story-telling has greatly stimulated the curiosity of students. Compared with the relatively monotonous knowledge explanation, this kind of teaching method is more likely to arouse students' interest in learning. The rich and colorful experiential teaching allows students to be involved in the specific context of Chinese culture and participate more actively in the class and experience activities. When studying in China, their curiosity for contemporary China is often strong. In the teaching process,

the organic combination of traditional culture and the outstanding achievements of contemporary Chinese civilization is more attractive to students.

(2) Students have a better understanding of Chinese culture. Under the guidance of the teachers' story pedagogy and the multi-level experience, students are more likely to construct a cognition of Chinese culture and generate a sense of cultural identity, and gradually accept the thinking mode, value concept and world outlook under Chinese cultural background, which are effective in reducing the cross-cultural barriers for international students to live and study in China.

## 5. Conclusion

International students in China are an important medium for the spread of Chinese culture. This paper first analyzes the inherent attributes of culture and points out that culture has characteristics such as history, unconsciousness, experience, and creativity, which implies that Chinese culture education for international students in China should be a systematic project. Due to the history characteristic, it is necessary to improve course contents through integration of traditional culture and contemporary civilization; and from the perspective of unconsciousness, the enhancement of convergence management policy will help international students to understand Chinese culture better. The integration of cultural experience and construction, and the combination of inheritance and creation in the education process will also be of assistance to Chinese culture education. This paper also takes *Chinese Culture* as an example to discuss the main problems of curriculum teaching, proposing the corresponding solutions and summarizing the effects of teaching reforms. The paper makes some contributions to the improvements of Chinese culture education from theories and practice. It is hoped that it can supply some valuable implications for the teaching of relevant courses.

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