

Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language: Experiential Teaching, Cultural Communication, Cultural Identity, and Teaching Innovation

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Abstract: The steady advancement of international Chinese education has made the teaching of Chinese as a foreign language an important carrier for the external communication of Chinese culture. At this stage, college TCFL teaching generally focuses on language skill training while neglecting immersive cultural experience. The rigid teaching modes and fragmented cultural content prevent foreign learners from fully grasping the core connotation of Chinese culture and tend to form one-sided and stereotyped cultural perceptions. From the perspective of experiential teaching, this paper combines the characteristics of cross-cultural cognition and constructs an integrated in-class and out-of-class teaching model from three aspects: innovative classroom carriers, Chinese story narration, and extracurricular scenario immersion, so as to explore innovative paths for Chinese cultural communication in TCFL. The research verifies that immersive experiential teaching can break cross-cultural cognitive barriers and promote foreign learners' transformation from superficial cultural perception to in-depth value identification, providing practical references for the optimization of TCFL teaching and the international communication of Chinese culture.

Keywords: Teaching Chinese as a Foreign Language; Experiential teaching; Cultural communication; Cultural identity; Teaching innovation

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1. Enriching diversified classroom carriers to vitalize cultural teaching

1.1. Integrating multiple art carriers to diversify classroom cultural experience

Language and culture are mutually complementary and integrated. Language serves as the core carrier of cultural communication, while culture constitutes the spiritual connotation of language learning. Culture-free language teaching is merely mechanical skill training, which cannot improve students' comprehensive language competence or achieve the educational goals of cross-cultural communication and civilizational mutual learning. Given the limitations of the single teaching form and insufficient cultural infiltration in

traditional TCFL courses, lightweight and highly adaptive cultural carriers can be adopted to transform abstract cultural concepts into operable classroom practices, which conforms to Byram's core viewpoint on intercultural language teaching that language learning is inseparable from cultural embedding ^[1]. Foreign learners come from diverse cultural backgrounds with distinct learning levels, making unified theoretical teaching unable to meet the hierarchical teaching needs. Accordingly, teachers should integrate cultural resources with knowledge instruction, scenario creation, and practical experience based on teaching objectives and textbook themes, build an immersive classroom integrating language learning and cultural infiltration, reduce cross-cultural cognitive barriers, and improve teaching effectiveness, consistent with Piaget's cognitive construction learning theory emphasizing learners' experiential construction of knowledge ^[2].

In conventional teaching, teachers can introduce lightweight cultural elements such as calligraphy, traditional Chinese painting, paper-cutting, seal carving, traditional costumes, folk etiquette, and the 24 Solar Terms to establish a normalized teaching mode of "one culture per lesson and one experience per week." In character teaching, calligraphy appreciation and copying activities can be adopted to help students perceive the aesthetic charm of Chinese characters and understand the Chinese thinking and cultural context behind them. In daily communication teaching, Chinese etiquette norms regarding address, greeting, and hospitality can be explained with comparisons between Chinese and Western communication cultures, helping students avoid cross-cultural communication misunderstandings and develop inclusive and appropriate communication awareness. In life-themed teaching, teachers can elaborate on the origins, folk customs, and cultural implications of traditional festivals such as the Spring Festival, Dragon Boat Festival, and Mid-Autumn Festival with the aid of pictures, short videos, and hands-on experiences, enabling students to intuitively understand Chinese people's emphasis on family reunion, harmony, and kindness, and realize the mutual empowerment of language learning and cultural perception.

1.2. Exploring the value of auditory art to build cross-cultural empathy bridges

As a universal aesthetic medium transcending language and regions, musical art effectively eliminates cross-cultural cognitive barriers and builds emotional resonance. Free from language restrictions and highly infectious, auditory art allows learners with limited Chinese proficiency to perceive the artistic conception and connotation of Chinese culture, laying a foundation for in-depth cultural identity, which is in line with Knowles' adult experiential learning theory focusing on situational perceptual learning ^[3]. TCFL classrooms can integrate ancient and modern musical resources including traditional folk music, Peking Opera, Chinese-style music, and modern pop music to diversify cultural experience and break learners' one-sided understanding of Chinese art. Traditional folk music carried by guzheng, guqin, erhu, and pipa interprets traditional Chinese aesthetics and humanistic pursuit through landscape depiction and emotional expression. Teachers can select classic works such as *High Mountains and Flowing Water*, and *Spring River and Moonlit Night* to assist thematic teaching, guiding students to appreciate the Chinese concept of harmony between humanity and nature and a modest spiritual temperament. As a quintessence of Chinese culture, Peking Opera integrates singing, dancing, facial makeup, and traditional stories, condensing traditional ethics and folk culture. Appropriate selection of popular opera excerpts can help students perceive traditional artistic heritage and the traditional values of loyalty, bravery, benevolence, and righteousness.

Integrating traditional Chinese aesthetics with modern arrangement, contemporary Chinese-style pop music boasts cultural heritage and youthful aesthetic characteristics, which are easily accepted by foreign learners. Teachers can match musical materials with teaching themes to integrate aesthetic education with

language teaching. Through music appreciation, lyric reading, thematic discussion, and singing experience, students can accumulate vocabulary, exercise language sense, and improve oral competence in a relaxed atmosphere. Artistic edification enables learners to perceive the inheritance and innovation of Chinese culture, eliminating the dullness of language learning, deepening cross-cultural emotional resonance, and realizing the effect of assisting language teaching and cultivating aesthetic cognition, which verifies Littlewood's argument that diversified artistic input optimizes second language classroom cultural infiltration efficiency ^[4].

1.3. Focusing on teaching effectiveness to consolidate cultural cognition

The integrated application of painting and calligraphy, folk crafts, traditional opera, folk music, and modern Chinese-style music solves the problem of abstract and impractical traditional cultural teaching, transforming implicit cultural values into visible, audible, and operable experiences and improving teaching efficiency. The multi-dimensional experience mode adapts to foreign learners with different learning foundations, aesthetics, and cultural backgrounds, reduces cross-cultural cognitive thresholds, and anchors practical cultural teaching, echoing Genesee's research on immersive classroom teaching's role in lowering second language cultural learning barriers ^[5].

Immersive experiential teaching fundamentally reforms the cramming and practice-deficient traditional classroom, greatly stimulating students' initiative and exploration desire. In the process of practical operation, cultural appreciation, and teacher-student interaction, students shift from passive knowledge reception to active exploration, perceiving the vitality and inclusiveness of Chinese culture and breaking the constraints of fragmented online information and stereotypes. While consolidating their basic language skills, learners can establish an objective, three-dimensional, and positive cognition of Chinese culture, eliminate cross-cultural psychological estrangement, accumulate positive cultural experience, and lay a solid foundation for in-depth cultural understanding, value identity, and normalized cross-cultural communication.

2. Deepening multi-dimensional Chinese storytelling to promote in-depth cultural value identity

2.1. Constructing a hierarchical story system to enrich teaching connotation

Telling excellent Chinese stories is the core task of modern international Chinese education and Chinese cultural external communication. The profound traditional Chinese civilization accumulated over five thousand years provides rich historical resources for cultural communication, while the vigorous development and people's livelihood practices of contemporary China endow Chinese stories with distinctive temporal connotations. The TCFL classroom serves not only as a core platform for language skill training, but also as an important carrier for cross-cultural exchange, Chinese value transmission, and national image shaping. Language acquisition is essentially a process for learners to recognize, understand, and identify with China, as Martin and Nakayama pointed out that systematic narrative is an effective medium to realize deep cross-cultural value recognition ^[6]. Systematic and scenario-based integration of Chinese stories into teaching can transform cultural communication from superficial symbol display to in-depth value infiltration and improve the depth and temperature of cultural dissemination.

Teaching can construct a three-dimensional story system covering traditional culture, contemporary development, and people's livelihood from both historical and realistic perspectives. Combined with textbook themes, traditional cultural teaching can introduce ancient sages' ideas, traditional virtues, historical

allusions, and intangible cultural heritage, demonstrating the Chinese nation's spirit of self-improvement, virtue, and harmony. The interpretation of traditional concepts such as respecting teachers, mutual assistance, and inclusiveness helps learners grasp the core connotation of Chinese culture, get rid of fragmented and labeled cognition, and consolidate the foundation of traditional cultural understanding.

2.2. Focusing on a realistic narrative to shape a three-dimensional image of China

Compared with the historical heaviness of traditional culture, contemporary people's livelihood and development stories are more life-oriented and approachable, which can break foreign learners' stereotypes of China through micro and down-to-earth narratives. TCFL teaching should abandon empty and grand preaching and focus on subtle changes in people's lives, urban and rural development, scientific and technological benefits, and ecological governance to interpret contemporary China's development concepts with real cases, complying with Nunan's task-based language teaching idea of combining real-life cases with curriculum design ^[7].

Language training can be deeply integrated with story narration by matching realistic cases with textbook topics. In transportation-themed courses, the coverage of high-speed rail and smart transportation can illustrate China's infrastructure development benefiting people's livelihood; in ecological courses, urban wetland construction, desert greening, and river ecological restoration can demonstrate China's green development concept and ecological responsibility; in education courses, inclusive education and international school running can reflect China's emphasis on education and openness. Such life-oriented narratives make up for the deficiency of traditional culture teaching that overemphasizes history while ignoring modern development, helping learners recognize China's integration of traditional heritage and modern vitality and enrich cross-cultural cognitive dimensions.

2.3. Optimizing storytelling methods to deepen cross-cultural value resonance

High-quality story content requires scientific communication methods to achieve immersive educational effects. Chinese story teaching in TCFL should adhere to the principles of seeing the big from the small, integrating emotion and reason, and subtle influence, abandoning dogmatic and indoctrinating expressions, and carrying out cultural narration through equal communication and sincere sharing, consistent with Shan's cross-cultural equal dialogue communication theory ^[8]. Teaching activities such as situational dialogue, thematic sharing, group discussion, story retelling, and short writing can bind Chinese stories with the training of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, enabling students to think and express actively in language practice and achieve dual improvement in language ability and cultural cognition. Meanwhile, guiding students to conduct cultural comparisons based on their national conditions helps them respect the diversity of civilizations and abandon cultural prejudices in an inclusive communication atmosphere.

Systematic Chinese story teaching enables learners to break single cultural symbol cognition and grasp the context and spiritual core of Chinese civilization. The integrated narrative of tradition and modernity helps students understand the Chinese nation's cultural genes of friendship and win-win cooperation, promoting the transformation of their cultural cognition from superficial knowledge perception to in-depth emotional and value identity. This improves learners' cultural acceptance and adaptation in cross-cultural communication and realizes the educational goal of building language bonds and cultural connections.

3. Expanding extracurricular immersive scenarios to build a full-coverage cultural experience system

3.1. Relying on campus cultural platforms to create a normalized immersive atmosphere

Cultural identity is formed through long-term immersion. Limited classroom teaching fails to produce sustainable cultural edification and easily leads to cognitive disconnection between in-class experience and after-class forgetting. Foreign learners' positive cultural cognition and emotional preference mainly derive from real daily scenarios and social practice. Therefore, TCFL teaching should break the boundary between in-class and extracurricular teaching and build an integrated experiential system centered on classroom teaching, supported by extracurricular practice, relying on full-scenario immersion, and guaranteed by after-class review, so as to integrate cultural learning into daily life and realize the internalization of knowledge, experience, and emotion.

Colleges and universities can rely on campus cultural resources to carry out regular activities such as international cultural festivals, traditional culture weeks, intangible cultural heritage entering campuses, Chinese corners, and Sino-foreign cultural exchange meetings. Centering on traditional festivals, folk art, and classical literature, lightweight practical projects including calligraphy, traditional painting, tea art, folk handicrafts, Hanfu experience, and poetry recitation can be set up. The relaxed campus atmosphere allows students to participate, communicate, and practice independently, perceive the charm of Chinese culture immersively, and eliminate the strangeness and alienation of cross-cultural learning. Cultural cognition can be continuously deepened through subtle long-term influence.

3.2. Leveraging urban cultural resources to carry out on-site research teaching

To enrich cultural experience dimensions, colleges can make full use of urban public cultural resources to organize regular off-campus on-site research, promoting the upgrading of learners' cultural cognition from shallow book perception to in-depth on-site experience. Urban museums, intangible cultural heritage exhibition halls, historical blocks, cultural parks, and modern urban landmarks serve as vivid immersive cultural classrooms carrying regional context, folk customs, and contemporary development achievements. Teachers can design targeted research plans according to teaching progress and themes, leading students off campus to experience urban historical heritage and modern styles. Museum visits help students perceive the profundity of Chinese civilization through cultural relic appreciation and cultural tracing; tours of historical streets enable learners to experience traditional folk customs and civic humanity; visits to urban landmarks and science and innovation parks demonstrate the development vitality and innovation capacity of modern China. On-site research connects traditional culture with modern development, presents a vivid and three-dimensional image of China, and fundamentally eliminates stereotypes caused by fragmented online information.

3.3. Building cross-cultural interaction platforms to deepen daily emotional connection

Sustained real-life communication is the key to eliminating cultural barriers and deepening emotional identity. Colleges can build platforms for Sino-foreign students' paired learning, cultural exchange, and co-creation. Activities such as paired assistance, cultural salons, artistic performances, social practice, and folk culture mutual assistance create authentic Chinese output and cultural communication scenarios for foreign learners. In equal daily interactions, students can intuitively feel Chinese people's sincerity, kindness, and inclusiveness, and understand the cultural connotation of harmony, integrity, and mutual assistance. Cultural identity is thus rooted in real-life experience rather than abstract book concepts. Two-way cultural

mutual learning guides Sino-foreign students to respect cultural differences and diversity, establish equal and inclusive cross-cultural cognition, and continuously deepen emotional bonds and mutual trust between Chinese and foreign youth.

4. Conclusion

Against the backdrop of high-quality international Chinese education and in-depth global dissemination of Chinese culture, experiential teaching effectively addresses the superficial and fragmented drawbacks of traditional TCFL cultural teaching and has become a vital reform direction. As a core prerequisite for effective cross-cultural communication, experiential teaching narrows the psychological distance between foreign learners and Chinese culture, reduces cognitive prejudices, and enables subtle and profound cultural infiltration. Combining practical teaching conditions and cross-cultural cognitive rules, this paper constructs a holistic experiential teaching system covering classroom carrier innovation, Chinese story narration, and extracurricular scenario expansion, realizing the in-depth integration of language instruction and cultural communication. This system facilitates foreign learners' in-depth understanding of Chinese traditional heritage and contemporary development, fostering a stable and positive cultural identity. Future TCFL reforms should optimize experiential teaching modes based on differentiated learning needs, enrich cultural communication resources, and expand cross-cultural exchange channels. Such efforts can strengthen the attractiveness and influence of overseas Chinese cultural communication, advance equal dialogues and mutual learning between civilizations, and enable Chinese culture to integrate into the world with greater vitality and inclusiveness.

Disclosure statement

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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